



American University: A Leader in Sustainability

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Introduction

I’ve always been interested in Landscape Architecture, so when my friend told me about this experiential learning opportunity with American University’s Arboretum & Gardens, I knew this would be an amazing way to get hands-on experience with a top leading university in Sustainability.



Left: *Magnolia virginiana*, a native species that provides many ecosystem services (such as food for pollinators.)

Right: We flipped an undeveloped area of campus with lots of potential into a great study and hangout spot for students.

Far right: Two students and I weeding and tending to a rain garden, a stormwater management feature.

Activities:

I worked with the Facilities Management team and several other students maintaining AU’s incredible and extensive arboretum. We tended to the edible landscapes on campus, managed the stormwater management systems, and landscaped new areas on campus that would draw the students outside to spend their time and promote positive attitudes towards the environment.



Site Information:

American University
4400 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20016
Supervised by: Stephanie Destefano

The site mission: To be a leader of sustainability across the country with its zero waste, energy efficient, and environmentally-friendly campus in the heart of DC.

Goals of the site: Managing AU’s accredited arboretum by using environmentally responsible practices, planting native species, and incorporating stormwater management technology.

Impact:

One of my favorite days was when we planted fruiting trees (like apple and peach trees) along the edge of a student living area. This is an example of how we improved the campus through sustainable efforts that would benefit the community as a whole and create an urban oasis within the city that improved the local ecological systems.

Discussion:

I loved that I had the ability to work at another university and see what was successful on this campus that could also be applied at our campus. Similar to AU, UMD also has an incredible arboretum, but one thing that was very special about AU was the implementation of edible landscapes that could engage the student community, such as the edible fruit and vegetable right next to the dorms.

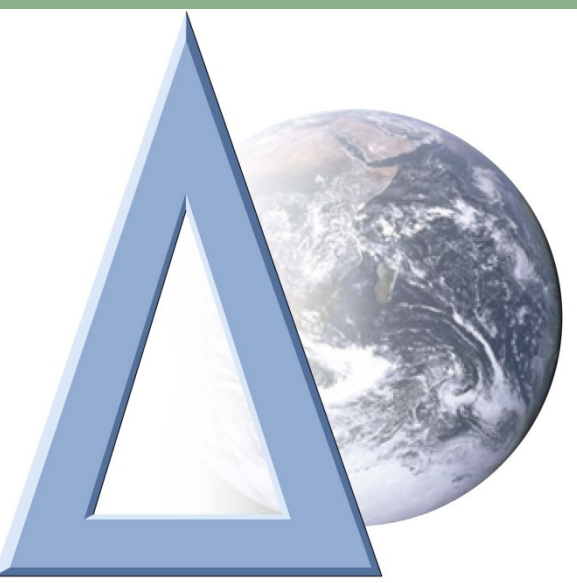
Future Work: This internship led me to start double majoring and take on Landscape Architecture in my academic pursuits. I found the way that AU uses landscape architecture to positively impact their community to be truly inspiring, using landscape both as a canvas and a platform to instill sustainable values. I am extremely happy to be studying something I am very passionate about, and I look forward to more hands-on experience in the future.

Issues Confronting Site:

An expected issue with having an accredited arboretum is the upkeep of maintaining so many specimens, which requires a consistent team. To maintain sustainable practices, all weeding and work had to be done by hand (instead of using weed killers and excess fertilizer.)



Above: *Callicarpa americana*, A native shrub to the southern U.S.



Acknowledgments:

I would like to thank Drs. Holtz & Merck for believing that their students can be something bigger than themselves, AU’s Facilities Management, and Stephanie Destefano for providing me an amazing opportunity that led me on a new and exciting academic path!