

# KU's Weaver Courtyard: Increasing Access and Enhancing Experience



Weaver Courtyard is a sculpture garden built in the 1960s on The University of Kansas campus that was progressively underutilized due to overgrown vegetation and an outward appearance of inaccessibility. Situated at the heavily trafficked road intersection of 14th Street and Jayhawk Boulevard, the courtyard was mostly unnoticed by the campus community and had lost its luster as a result. A single hidden stairwell provided limited access to a space previously used for class meetings and events that included sculptures and a decommissioned fountain. In effort to reconnect this lost asset, **The Commons, an interdisciplinary center on campus, and the KU Architecture Department teamed up to design and implement a new vision for the courtyard that included a new accessible entryway.**



The Commons, in the adjacent Spooner Hall, brings scholars and learners together across disciplines, to better understand the global commons—the shared physical, biological, and cultural resources of the planet. Established in 2005 by three partner units: The Spencer Museum of Art, the Hall Center for the Humanities, and the Biodiversity Institute & Natural History Museum; The Commons serves the University as a catalyst for unconventional thinking, interdisciplinary inquiry, and unexpected discoveries across the sciences, arts, and humanities.

Coupled with this interdisciplinary thinking, KU Architecture has an internationally recognized design-build approach to architectural education, which includes a required junior year studio where students engage the community via experiential learning projects. Each studio has approximately 12-15 students and projects range from furniture to small structures. In the case of Weaver Courtyard, Commons Director Emily Ryan worked with Assistant Professor Keith Van de Riet to procure resources and identify collaborators leading up to the semester.

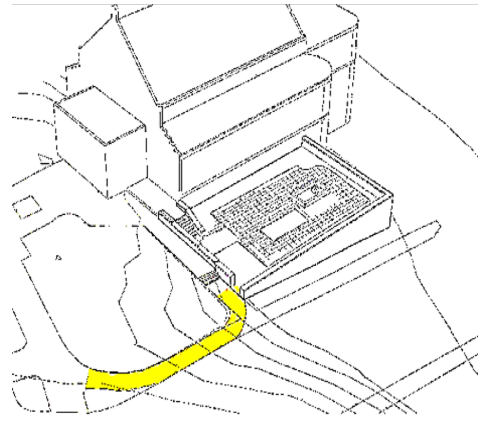
Upon arrival, students were tasked with documenting the existing courtyard and understanding its historical, tectonic, and social functions relative to campus. They



Existing Spooner Hall (1894) and the adjacent Weaver Courtyard (1960) prior to new entryway and courtyard enhancements.



went in-depth, studying the geological formation of limestone and sandstone used in the courtyard and adjacent Spooner Hall to better understand the context for complimenting the existing construction. They referenced historical and contemporary landscape designs on campus and in the Midwestern region, and these precedents guided the students as they developed schemes to blend native plants with sculptural and functional elements in the courtyard. Early in the process, it became evident that access to the courtyard was limited, and the students were keen to address the issue as part of an overall effort to better connect the courtyard with Jayhawk Boulevard and passersby. As a result, each scheme included a plan for ramp access that would enable wheelchair and walker to easily enter the courtyard.



**Draw, model, prototype, repeat:** students learned to cast concrete, carve stone, and develop professional drawings through iteration and collaboration. Formwork for the concrete retaining wall and stair was rehearsed with mock-ups to ensure a successful outcome. According to Van de Riet, “when we really got into it, I asked how many of them cast concrete or other materials before. Not one raised a hand. That’s why we require these studios.” Students worked with KU Environmental Scientist (Kansas Biological Survey, Environmental Studies Program, Department of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology) Kelly Kindscher, local stone mason and sculptor Karl Ramberg, and were inspired by visits from a courtyard neighbor that relied on a walker, as well as drawing inspiration from architectural campus tours from KU Professor Emeritus (French & Italian) Ted Johnson.



Demolition and excavation of existing sidewalk revealed thick bedrock requiring heavy machinery to remove. Students were immersed in the site work and learned firsthand of the challenges of construction. Final formwork and concrete pours were executed in winter conditions requiring cold weather concrete standards to be applied.

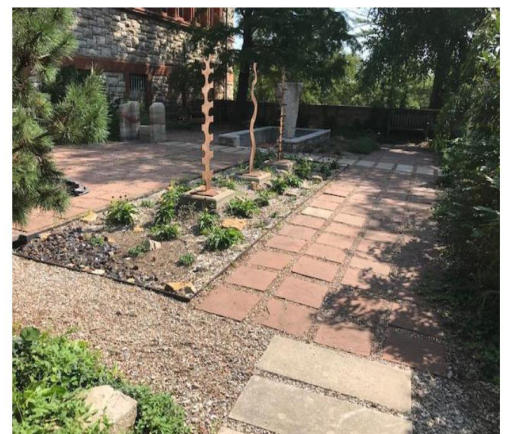
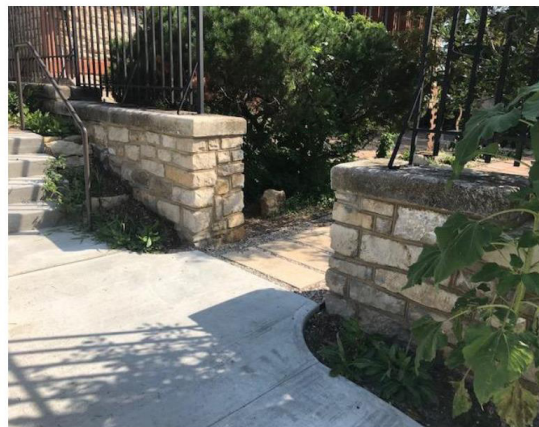




The Weaver Courtyard Transformation Project aimed to establish intersections between people, nature, and art. In this regard, the courtyard serves as a space for productive intersections, much like The Commons, in the adjacent Spooner Hall, as an interdisciplinary space for scholars and students. The comprehensive work included the new barrier-free concrete ramp and entrance, rainwater harvest and bioswale, native plantings, stone masonry, furniture, recycled materials and expressive sculptural installations to encourage contemplation on the relationships among people, nature and the built environment. As a model for integrating pedagogical and research objectives, the project intersected faculty inquiry with project-based learning in the community to contribute to KU's campus a diverse habitat space serving people and nature.



Final new entryway within context of Spooner Hall. The new sidewalk required matching 14th Street slope to a gradual leveling of surface to resolve the inclined roadway with the approach to Spooner Hall.



## Project Supporters and Collaborators

### The Commons Partners

- Saralyn Reece Hardy, Director of the Spencer Museum of Art
- Leonard Krishtalka, Director of the KU Biodiversity Institute and Natural History Museum
- Clarence Lang, Interim Director of the Hall Center for the Humanities
- Marta Caminero-Santangelo, Interim Director of the Hall Center for the Humanities
- Celka Straughn, Director of Academic Programs, Spencer Museum of Art
- Sarah Bishop, Associate Director, Hall Center for the Humanities
- Jorge Soberón, Senior Research Scientist, KU Biodiversity Inst. and Dept. of Ecology & Evolutionary Biology

- Dale Slusser, Annie Alexander, and Victoria Sickinge, KU Endowment Association
- Kelly Kindscher, Senior Scientist, Kansas Biological Survey and Professor, Environmental Studies Program
- Ted Johnson, Emeritus Professor, French and Francophone Studies
- Karl Ramberg, Ramberg Stoneworks, artist and stone mason
- Joey Orr, Andrew W. Mellon Curator for Research, Spencer Museum of Art
- Patrick Dooley, Professor, Design
- Linda Samson Talleur, Lecturer, Design
- Steve Scannell, Architect, KU Facilities, Planning, and Design
- Marion Paulette, Landscape Architect, KU Facilities, Planning, and Development
- Shawn Harding, KU Facilities, Planning, and Development
- Mike Jones and team, KU Landscaping
- KU Architecture Faculty and Craftshop Staff

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- The Historic Mount Oread Friends Association
- Celka Straughn; Weston Tanner; Kathy Porsch; Martha Hodgesmith; Catherine Goga; Brian Moss; Michael Burke; Keith Van de Riet; Susan Dickherber; Emily Ryan; Frank Hoffman and Sandra Sanders

### **KU Architecture Students - Spring 2018**

- Margaret Dickherber; Rui Ge; Gavin Goga; Andrew Leininger; Patrick Sawyer

### **KU Architecture Students - Fall 2018**

Alyssa Aragon; Grant Bechtel; Charles Devries; Gabrielle Duran; Samantha Eichhorn; Tanner Garrington; Lake Giron; Andrew Gonzalez; Danielle Kolker; Azra Krdzalic; Savannah Kruse; Mackenzie Laxton; Nadia Laytimi; Matthew Martinez; Lena Michalek; Kristen Phillips; Grace Reinsch; Victor Renteria

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