



Development of the Nature Colab: Sustainable Design for Mixed-Use Spaces

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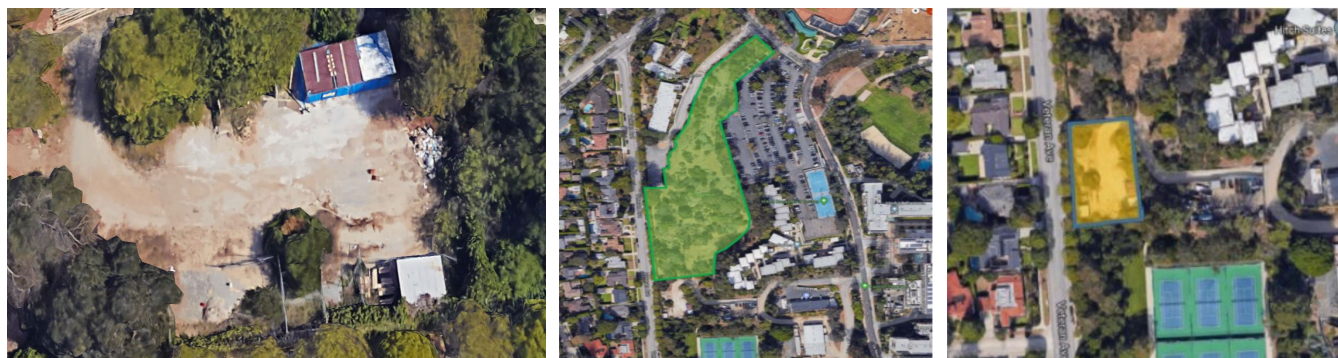


When one hikes up the hill dotted with oaks and sagebrush, it is easy to forget that the area that you are standing in is in fact corned between Veteran Boulevard, Sunset Boulevard, and some of the most highly populated dormitories in the US.

Our team is working to redesign a lot adjacent to Sage Hill, this hidden sanctuary, into a space that bridges the gap between nature, biodiversity, and the UCLA community. Our redesign will turn the concrete lot, colloquially known as 'the Boneyard' into a mixed use-space that encompasses sustainable design and increases responsible interaction with the space all the while supporting the integrity its native California habitat. In order to inform our design process, we decided to use a two pronged approach - contacting other universities' facilities with similar natural areas and conducting internal 'campus vision' surveys in order to gauge how the community imagines interacting with the mixed-use space in the future. The culmination of these efforts will include a final report that details our recommendations and our very own vision for the site that we would like to introduce as: UCLA's Nature CoLab.

The Sage Hill & Boneyard area is hidden in the northwest corner of UCLA behind Campus Housing. It is an underutilized sanctuary within an urban landscape. Walking through the long grasses and chaparral, with birds chirping above, provides an escape from one of the most densely populated cities in the country. At about 4 acres, [Sage Hill](#) makes up just 1% of the UCLA Campus. Despite its size, this parcel of land is home to about 50 Los Angeles native plant species, 30 resident or migratory bird species, 17 butterfly species, 7 mammal species, and several reptile and amphibian species. This space is of particular significance as Sage Hill is the last remaining plot of native California habitat in West Los Angeles south of Sunset Boulevard. This was not always so. During the 1900's much of the UCLA campus looked liked Sage Hill; but, as the century progressed, the California native habitat faced encroachment from agricultural, commercial and residential developments. For the past decades, Sage Hill has been used for educational purposes. Today it is used as an unofficial classroom by professors in departments such as Geography, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. The space is used for individual research projections as well. Urban ecology, avian biology, local plant and animal species, and soil chemistry are a few areas that have been explored. Sage Hill is also used by the Krieger Center -- a nearby childcare

facility -- “for preschool enrichment field trips.” With proper amenities and signage, the space can host more projects and cultivate an environment suitable for more academic research.



In the southwest corner of Sage resides the “Boneyard”. Due to the lack of infrastructure and the current design of the space, the space does not receive as much care. This space was once a work site used by Facilities Management and UCLA Housing as a storage space for large, heavy equipment and construction projects. In its current state, it is paved and divided in sections using chain-link fencing. Being so, this space offers the most opportunity for development as it is relatively flat and easily accessible.

It is our long term goal is to transform the “Boneyard” into a complementary mixed-use space for students, faculty and staff. This area is ideal for a mixed-use space that could serve several compatible purposes including, but not limited to, an outdoor classroom, nature sanctuary, and potentially a greenhouse operation. Our team developed a comprehensive survey to get a sense of the features the UCLA students, faculty, and staff are interested in seeing at the site. We limited our survey to only UCLA affiliates to get a more accurate sense of what should be implemented, and we targeted different groups of people to get a sample size that is inclusive of all populations at UCLA- from freshman students to graduating seniors. We found that a majority of survey participants wanted to see the space be utilized for the following purposes: outdoor and native habitat education space (75.3%), outdoor recreation i.e., wildlife viewing, birdwatching, plant identification (67.3%), a nature walk trail through the nature preserve (74%), and to simply be able to enjoy the aesthetics of the space and enjoy relaxation (70.7%). Based on these responses, we will begin working with architecture and environmental engineering students along with the Sage Hill Task Force committee to formulate and design plans for the Boneyard space transformation.

Our team has been presented with an amazing opportunity to ignite a spark that could sustain the longevity of a project this campus needs. Ultimately, our combined goal as a team and as an organization, is to enhance the campus and Sage Hill experience, while promoting and practicing sustainability. It is our hope that one day students, faculty, and other campus personnel will enjoy the fruits of our labor, and have for themselves a natural refuge within the urban landscape.

