

Architectural Heritage, Character and Design

The University of Alabama is proud of its architectural heritage and seeks to maintain this heritage in all of its buildings. Designers who do work on the University of Alabama's campus need to be aware of this heritage because their building will become part of the fabric of the campus. This section briefly describes the University of Alabama's architectural history to aid designers in their design process.

The campus pre-dates the Civil War. Initially designed by William Nichols in 1828, the campus plan was based on an "academic village" design concept, modeled after the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia. The main Quadrangle, call "the Quad", is the "campus center" which has been preserved to maintain this concept. The era of Nichols design is known as the "Antebellum Campus" phase (1828-1865). Four buildings still remain and serve as wonderful examples of this period: Gorgas House, President's mansion, Old Observatory (Maxwell Hall), and The Guard House. These buildings survived a fire set by Union soldiers who sought to destroy the campus.

Following the Civil War, the Board of Trustees, with the influence of a renowned architect, Andrew Jackson Davis, adopted a plan similar to the Virginia Military Institute's campus plan. This development began the "Victorian Campus" phase (1865-1906). The initial buildings consisted of a main building, Clark Hall, and three barracks-style buildings, Garland Hall, Manley Hall and Woods Hall, which were flanked around a courtyard. Today this area is known as "Woods Quad". Barnard hall and Tuomey Hall, located south of these buildings on the main Quadrangle, were also built during this phase. All of the buildings are richly detailed in English Gothic style.

At the turn of the century, "The Greater University Plan" was developed by Parsons and Company, a landscape design firm. This plan was proposed to guide the growth of the University of Alabama for the next 50 years. State Architect, Frank Lockwood, designed several of these buildings, which were part of the "yellow brick campus". These buildings are prominently located north of the main Quadrangle. After the yellow brick buildings were built, a decision was made to change to "red brick" as the material of choice, since the bricks could be obtained locally. The present buildings surrounding the main Quadrangle were built during this era. These structures display the classic architectural detailing that has shaped the University of Alabama's architectural image: classical columned porticos with deep recessed entries and articulated red brick exteriors with stone trim. The University seeks to preserve this historical image and character on all future buildings.

Designers selected by the University of Alabama will need to design their building(s) to uphold the University's historical character, while also "blending" with the surrounding buildings. The design of "signature buildings", i.e. buildings that "pay homage" to the designer, will not be accepted by the University. The requirements contained in the Campus Master Plan are to be followed by the Designer in order to maintain the design integrity of our campus.

The "building vocabulary" of materials the University has adopted is as follows: red brick exterior, stone or pre-cast concrete trim, stone or pre-cast concrete columned entries where appropriate, and fenestration of single hung operable windows with divided lites. Detailed correctly and proportioned ornamentation for cornices and exterior surfaces are encouraged where appropriate. Mechanical and electrical equipment items located around the building are to be screened architecturally to reduce the visual impact to the campus, while maintaining service access to the equipment. All utilities servicing the buildings are required to be underground for maintenance and aesthetic reason.

In closing, the University of Alabama seeks to achieve quality building design that enhances and compliments the historical character of its campus as its guiding building design principle. The challenge for the designers is to embody this principle into their building design.

(Note: The historical information incorporated in this section was gathered from Dr. Robert O. Mellown's book, The University of Alabama: A Guide to the Campus, published in 1988 by University of Alabama Press.)