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Students to restore Millrace site

Landscape students design improvements to beautify the waterway

By Tricia Schwennesen
Oregon Daily Emerald

A soggy blanket of autumn leaves blew across the wet pavement as students dashed to catch the black tarps covering the embankment before they flew into the water.

"We gotta really move to make this happen," Assistant Professor Stan Jones said to his landscape architecture students.

Despite dark skies and intermittent rain showers, students in the fourth-year landscape architecture studio continued to lay down basalt rocks and plant native Oregon vegetation on the banks of the Millrace, a campus waterway across Franklin Boulevard, on Wednesday.

This year, 15 landscape architecture students designed improvements to the waterway in front of the physical plant in a process called applied stream bank restoration. Changes included building a new viewing deck, planting native vegetation to attract native species of birds and rebuilding the embankment to prevent further erosion.

"The focus of the studio is for students to take on a project that they design, detail and then construct," Jones said.

The Millrace is about a two-mile stretch of water diverted from the Willamette River that used to power wheels on several mills in the early 1900s.

"It's hard to tell in construction how much you will get done because the weather is always a factor," said Peter Dixon, a landscape architecture major. "It's a cool opportunity, a cool project to be able to improve the University space."

The goal of the project was to stabilize the bank while increasing native vegetation and wildlife. Over the years, the Millrace has been subjected to pedestrians, a parking lot, an overpopulation of ducks and land erosion.

Jones said the vast number of ducks living in the Millrace is due to people feeding them human food, such as white bread.

"We want to help people understand why they shouldn't feed



Scott Barnett/Emerald

Stan Jones helps restore part of the Millrace across the street from the Onyx Bridge

the ducks what they feed the ducks," Jones said. "We are increasing the diversity of plant life and increasing the habitat for a variety of species."

Jones said the challenge for students is to find "a way to balance things that would and couldn't change with things that should be able to change - like the stream."

Red willow, rushes and dogwood will replace compressed clay, and the new vegetation should attract more species of native birds.

To encourage Osprey to dwell near the water, students will incorporate into their plans a nesting pole for the hawk-like bird, a native Oregon species that hunts in water. The students also designed a bio-swale, which will take rainwater run off from the parking lot and treat it, Jones said.

Students gleaned information from other courses about what types of materials to use and where to find them. For example, the new deck is being built out of recycled plastic lumber, a combination of recycled milk bottles and wood products.

"It doesn't rot as quickly. It lasts longer, and it takes advantage of recycled products," Jones said.

Students stressed the importance of using materials that don't hurt the environment.

Dixon said even the erosion control blankets, called geo-textiles, are a good protective layer for the soil.

"Those blankets are neat be-

cause they're totally organic and they hold the soil together," Dixon said.

Landscape architecture major Dryden Jenney said there are some drawbacks to the project.

"Some of the drawings didn't fit the site and we had to make adjustments," Jenney said. "Some materials weren't available, and we've made some compromises."

Jones said the studio helps students see the connection between the designs and what is actually built in the field, he said.

Jenney said the Millrace studio project has been one of the best experiences because she is a "hands-on learner."

"It's been really educational just making that connection," Jenney said. "Designing something has been so arbitrary, we've never really had our own site, and this time it's been so wonderful because the site was so close to our studio, and we could go measure things."

Jenney said the manual labor was fun and it was good to get her hands down in the dirt.

"Sometimes group projects can be very stressful, but this went very smooth," Jenney said.

Jones and his students said the \$30,000 project should be completed in the next couple of weeks.

"Aesthetically, it's just going to be a much nicer environment for people to come down and visit," Jones said.

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