campus framework analysis
Campus Form Analysis

Framework plans focus on one aspect of the campus master plan at a time, so that each system can be evaluated on its own. Both inadequacies and opportunities for improvement of each system can be recognized through this process of disaggregation and analysis.

The maps shown in this analysis section are reproductions from the 1997 Master Plan. Most graphic information is still valid, however some areas may be slightly out of date.

Historical Development

With enabling legislation in 1939, Boise Junior College moved from a downtown block to the former municipal airport. This site was close to downtown yet comparably open and large (more than 100 acres). Prominent businesses and civic leaders utilized a general obligation bond approved by the taxpayers and a grant from the federal Works Progress Administration to build the first significant campus building. Called the Administrative Building (Administration Building today), it housed all classrooms, the library, laboratories, offices and a fairly large room for the student union. This building, in collegiate gothic style, was located at the end of a formal entry drive facing the Boise River, Campus Lane. This formal organization would influence the form of the campus and arrangement of buildings over the next three decades. In the early years an airplane hanger surviving from the airport was used for the gymnasium.

The Science Building and Assembly Building, added over the next few years began to define the first quad. Driscoll and Morrison residence halls were also constructed, although separate from the academic core. A gymnasm and wooden football stadium were constructed in the east sector of campus, near Broadway. The large field west of the Science Building remained undeveloped. By the early 1960s, the Liberal Arts Building and Library were built, extending the formality of the original quad. As with many of the earlier facilities, these buildings were constructed with local assistance, either public or private. A formal fountain and pool were constructed with the Library as a gathering place on the east edge of the quad. Several pathways were added to provide circulation between buildings.

By the mid-1960s, the institution had gained four-year status and enrollment continued to grow. The Business Building was developed along with a major addition to the Library, now enclosing the original quad, all but eclipsing views of the river, park and foothills. A formal walk system was now fully developed in the original quad, but remained incomplete in the peripheral areas of campus. The new Student Union Building was added in the late 1960s at the corner of University Drive and Lincoln Avenue, well separated from the academic core and independent from it in its orientation. At this time, the original entry drive from Campus Lane was eliminated although it was still actively used for vehicular access and parking. This is the point in the evolution of the campus at which surface parking lots began to become a noticeable feature of the campus environment. Not only were the lots south of the Administration Building and next to the Library and Liberal Arts Building becoming significant, but also a very large lot at the east end of campus, built for the new concrete football stadium, became a dominant feature.

Jefferson’s University of Virginia plan was a milestone of American campus design. American campuses embraced Beaux Arts principles of formal open space axes in the late 19th century. Boise Junior College was founded in 1932 at St. Margaret's Hall at First and Idaho Streets. The Science Building was added in an “L” shape, suggesting the edges of a future quadrangle.
By the 1970s, the east sector of campus was beginning to be developed with additional buildings for vocational training instruction. These filled the space ringed by Bronco Lane and hid the original, formal axis of the Gymnasium from University Drive. The arrangement of buildings respected the original geometry, which was, however, totally unrelated to that of the central campus.

As enrollment, classes and degrees continued to expand in the 1970s and 1980s, so did campus facilities. The Education-Science/Nursing Building and Morrison Center for the Performing Arts were added. Both of these were sited and oriented independent of the geometry of the original campus core, related to it only by proximity. By now the Boise River Greenbelt was a civic amenity of great local pride, and this seemed to influence the siting and orientation of these two new substantial buildings. Another factor was that the Morrison Center was to be a city cultural facility shared with the university, so it had an intentional orientation toward the river and downtown Boise. The effect of this was a row of buildings that sat independent from one another and the rest of the campus, not organized by shared open space. As the demand for these buildings has grown, the remaining open space to the south has been usurped entirely by surface parking.

By the late 1980s, and early 1990s Boise State University took its first steps in growing beyond the original airport grounds enclosed by Capitol Boulevard, University Drive, Campus Lane and Broadway Avenue. The Health Sciences-Riverside and Raptor Research Center were developed in former ITT buildings west of Capitol Boulevard, along Royal Boulevard. The College of Applied Technology Building was constructed on the south side of University Drive, facing the College of Applied Technology center. The original residential blocks between University Drive and Beacon Street have been purchased incrementally by Boise State University on an as-available basis and are used for student housing, temporary office space or surface parking. Now that university ownership has been consolidated between Lincoln Avenue and Denver Avenue, the land can be planned as a part of the campus.

The district west of Capitol Boulevard is in a state of transition from light industrial to institutional and support residential uses. In fact, it has positive qualities for central city residential use; proximity to downtown employment, Boise State University, Julia Davis Park and is well served by vehicular, transit, bicycle and pedestrian circulation. This growing residential use is compatible with satellite campus uses. Development is limited on parts of the area which lie within the 100-year flood zone.

By the 1970s, the central quadrangle was well defined by buildings and pathways, and parking lots claimed more and more land.
Adjacent Uses Analysis

The Boise State University campus occupies a special place in the greater central city area of Boise. It is arguably within walking distance of the central business district but is separated by Julia Davis Park and has developed its own institutional character that is quite distinct from the rest of downtown.

University Neighborhood, which abuts Boise State University on the south, has a beneficial relationship with the university: the university provides many of the amenities that make this neighborhood a good place to live, as well as providing demand for housing and other neighborhood services. The blocks between Lincoln Avenue, Denver Avenue, University Drive and Beacon Street have been a source of friction between Boise State University and its neighbors. Uncertainty for both residents and the university have been superseded by a long range vision for this area as a carefully planned expansion of the campus.

The Health Sciences-Riverside expansion of Boise State University across Capitol Boulevard had the effect of spreading the campus beyond between-class walking distances and of exposing students to the hazards of crossing Capitol Boulevard. These academic uses should move into the central campus. However, new housing in the district across Capitol Boulevard would benefit from proximity to Downtown, the river, Ann Morrison Park and Boise State University.

Commercial uses along Broadway serve both the university and the greater community and will continue to evolve as both Boise and Boise State University grow.

The greatest potential conflicts between the university and its neighbors are parking, traffic and displacement of housing. If the university can consolidate parking, promote pedestrian circulation and transit use and expand housing within walking distance, it will maintain a mutually healthy relationship with its neighbors. Collaboration with the City on a downtown circulator and with Valley Regional Transit on public bus services will benefit Boise State University and neighbors alike.

Commercial properties diminish the presence of Boise State University on Capitol Boulevard.

University Square provides a potential market for other pedestrian-oriented uses along University Drive.

Health Sciences-Riverside exists somewhat autonomously from the remainder of campus.
Campus Uses Analysis

The primary academic core is well developed around the original campus quad. A second academic nucleus is emerging around the College of Engineering. A third but different core is the athletic group occupying the northeast campus.

The existing College of Applied Technology buildings form a small cluster but are confined by other unrelated, surrounding uses. The industrial program requirements for vocational training buildings and yards separate this area on its perimeter. There are compelling reasons for the relocation of these facilities off-campus.

The Student Union Building has been peripheral to the primary academic core but is now centered among the four groups, and has been reinforced by the Student Recreation Center. Food services are lacking at the west end of campus. Student services, other than those in the Student Union Building, are somewhat scattered.

Campus housing is well disposed around the campus; however, the John Barnes Towers are remote and disconnected from other residential uses and from food service and other activities at the Student Union.

The Morrison Center for the Performing Arts is midway between the campus core and Boise's cultural district.

Student housing reinforces a traditional collegial strength of learning and living on-campus.
CAMPUS FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS

Building Orientation Analysis

Orientation of buildings, or the way in which they present their public face and front doors, was clear and consistent in the original academic core. As the perimeter of the original quadrangle was built out, the intended orientation toward the river and the foothills was lost. University Drive replaced Campus Lane as the primary access street, and the whole campus became ambiguous in its orientation. The original Administration Building found its backside embarrassingly presented to the public, while new buildings were oriented according to the particulars of the sites they occupied. Most of Boise State University’s buildings along the river seem to have an undecided or cautious relationship with the river. Although upper floors have windows looking out on this beautiful environment, there are mostly inconspicuous entrances, reserved parking lots, randomly placed trash dumpsters and very little in the way of gathering places along the Boise River Greenbelt edge. Collectively, buildings tend to form a row along the river and lack a relationship to each other.

The Student Union is an important landmark at the corner of University Drive and Lincoln Avenue. It occupies a location between two unrelated campus geometries: that of the original quadrangle, and that established by the gymnasium and Bronco Circle. The Student Union Building and the intramural fields make this difficult transition with some grace, yet dislocation of circulation systems between the parts of the campus that they separate is all too evident. Despite the gregarious nature of its programs, the building is quite introverted, with little hint of its many activities from University Drive.

Public entrances to the stadium are surprisingly inconspicuous for the numbers of people who use them. Clearly marked pedestrian routes across the stadium parking lots leading to stadium entrances are also lacking. In fact, the needs of those on foot seem to have been abandoned east of the Taco Bell Arena. Orientation is wholly dominated by the stadium and by surface parking lots.

The College of Applied Technology buildings are inconsistently oriented. Some of the original buildings face University Drive while others have obscure entrances. The vehicular storage and work yards awkwardly face recreational buildings to the north. Bronco Circle and the vestiges of the gymnasium approach axis remain the principal influences on building orientation.

The river side of buildings along Campus Lane has in places been separated as a service alley. The Morrison Center has a formal entrance facing the river yet most users enter from the parking lot.
For a stranger to Boise, the campus is remarkably difficult to identify. Street directions might get one to the right vicinity, but evidence of Boise State University’s presence on Capitol Boulevard is minimal. At the east end of the campus, the stadium gives a gigantic clue – but finding a destination on campus presents another set of uncertainties.

In the approach from Capitol Boulevard via University Drive, the campus image is diminished by overhead commercial signage, scattered surface parking, sparse landscaping and a lack of campus identity. The existing campus identity sign does not compensate for the lack of substantial university buildings facing the boulevard.

The intersection of Capitol Boulevard and University Drive is excessively wide, although the addition of housing and retail on the south side of University Drive makes it more hospitable. For those who park west of Capitol Boulevard, the street presents a formidable barrier. An additional pedestrian crossing of Capitol between University Drive and the Boise River is needed now.

The sense of campus environment at Broadway and University Drive is diminished by commercial signage on the west side of the street and a lack of appropriate landscaping in the Stadium parking lot. Once on University Drive, clear information to visitor or general student parking is not obvious. University Drive itself has a character more consistent with an urban arterial than a landscaped entry to the campus.

Boise Avenue and Beacon Street via Lincoln Avenue is a pleasant entry to Boise State University but unclear in direction and way-finding.

For transit users arriving at campus, transit stops, shelters and amenities such as route and schedule information are inadequate.

The east gateway to Boise State University from Broadway fails to provide an inviting campus setting.

The Administration Building has no welcoming entrance facing University Drive and most arriving visitors.

Only larger buildings to the right hint of Boise State University’s presence on Capitol Boulevard to those arriving from the south and the airport.
CAMPUS FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS

Open Space Analysis

The quality of the greenspace system at Boise State University varies widely from one area to another. The original quadrangle is well defined by the buildings which enclose it yet it is not physically and visually well connected to the Boise River Greenbelt. The campus lacks good spaces for passive recreation. The best examples are the Student Union Building dining terrace and the Business Building front terrace. The intramural field adjacent to the Student Union is an important organizing element between adjacent uses as well as a precious resource for general recreation. The west end of campus is dominated by parking lots and lacks an organizing open space and pedestrian system. Orientation of buildings to the greenbelt is inconsistent. The College of Applied Technology is physically disconnected from the main campus and lacks a relationship to structured open space and pedestrian systems.

One of the most important yet underutilized spaces on campus is the river edge. By earlier legal agreement, Boise State University owns the land along the river to its north property line (the 6,500 CFS water line of the Boise River). As part of this agreement, the City of Boise is granted a 70-foot access easement measured from the 6,500 CFS water line south for the purposes of maintaining public utilities in Campus Lane and to provide public greenbelt access (pedestrian and bicycle). Virtually all of the existing paved area of Campus Lane falls within this easement. The design for Campus Lane between the Morrison Center and the pedestrian bridge is much improved for pedestrians and bicyclists. That quality needs to be extended to Broadway Avenue. While it is valuable as an outlet for events traffic, its primary purpose is to provide an improved environment for pedestrians and bicyclists along Campus Lane between Capitol Boulevard and Broadway Avenue. The relationship between the campus and river has also been diminished by the dense ranks of cottonwood trees which have grown up along much of the bank. Though providing a welcome curtain of green, these trees also divorce the campus from views of the river itself, of Julia Davis Park, downtown and the foothills. Careful opening of views through this thicket at appropriate locations along Campus Lane without in any way diminishing the riparian environment should be discussed with responsible agencies.

The beauty of the river edge needs to be made a part of the campus.

Open space is a fundamental part of the campus environment and an organizing element for buildings.

A riverside easement ensures access for all via the Greenbelt.