MY ADVISOR JOAN: ROOTED IN EMPIRICISM AND PUBLIC VALUE, EMPOWERING LIFELONG GROWTH

Lanfei Liu, 2017 MLA, Senior Partner of KingLead

Joan uniquely integrates design aesthetics with empirical research. She expands Landscape architecture beyond spatial design to address human well-being, community governance, and urban challenges. Joan's inclusive and forward-looking teaching philosophy values individual potential and encourages interdisciplinary exploration.

During my graduate studies, I joined her flagship research program — Cues to Care, working with database covering ten thousands of parcels in Detroit. To strengthen my empirical and analytical thinking, she encouraged me to take advanced statistics courses in the Department of Sociology and collaborate with researchers from the Institute of Social Research to complete my master's thesis. This rigorous academic training allowed me to move beyond conventional design thinking, build systematic thinking and quantitative skills that apply broadly across diverse professional disciplines. In 2016, with her full support and recommendation, I applied a second master's degree in information science and was selected for the highly competitive Dow Sustainable Fellowship.

What shaped my career most is Joan's sincere, down-to-earth research ethos. She has long conducted grounded research in Detroit's underserved communities, applying scientific methods to improve living environments and facilitate sustainable community development. Her philosophy has shaped my core values: long-term professional success prioritizes industry progress and public value over short-term gains. This principle has guided all my key career decisions over the past decade.
I am profoundly grateful for Joan's lasting guidance. The mindset, vision, and values she instilled in me remain the steady foundation for my ongoing development. With sincere appreciation and great respect, I congratulate Joan on her retirement.



Mowed turf grass bordering perennials acts as a "Cue to Care"



Photo with Pro-vice Chancellor of University of Cambridge Prof. Cardwell



Photo with Nobel Laureate Prof. Maskin near by the KingLead office

SEAS SCHOOL FOR ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY
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Design With Care: Joan Nassauer and the Importance of Ecological Design, Aesthetics and Management

The 2026 Whittemore Lecture in Landscape Architecture