XINYANG UNIVERSITY SOUTH BAY CAMPUS

Sasaki / City of Xinyang, Henan Province, China

The Xinyang University South Bay Campus gateway landscape transforms twenty acres of abandoned fishponds, invasive thickets, and construction debris into a site integrating education, ecology, and cultural identity. Completed in 2025, this gateway project anchors a 215-acre master plan by using the site's natural hydrology and topography as its organizing principle. Inspired by the region's agricultural legacy of rice paddies, cascading wetlands and a retention pond treat runoff through time-tested methods, marrying nature-based solutions with cultural reverence while providing biodiverse habitats and vibrant public spaces. This project offers a useful lens for examining how aesthetic experience shapes long-term stewardship when viewed through Joan Nassauer's concept of "cues to care."



The project's participatory design process further aligns with Nassauer's notion of cultural sustainability, the idea that interventions must reflect community norms to endure. By honoring regional agricultural heritage through terraced water features and adapting to local topography, the design embeds sustainability within cultural memory. As Nassauer has shown, care aesthetics operate in virtually all landscapes; when aligned with substantive environmental function, they become both an ethical choice and a pragmatic tactic. Reflecting on Nassauer's legacy, the Xinyang University campus landscape illustrates how aesthetic experiences of care can help transform degraded sites into beloved places that communities will embrace and sustain over time.





The campus design employs what may be described as "just enough" control, reassuring gestures that invite community acceptance of underlying ecological functions. The tiered wetland, while performing critical stormwater management functions, are rendered aesthetically accessible through familiar cues: crisp edges of terraced waterways, thoughtfully placed native plantings, and locally sourced stonework that echoes regional craftsmanship. A waist-high stone wall along the street maintains visual porosity while marking a cared-for boundary, and salvaged mature trees anchor the site in a sense of permanence. These elements signal intentional human presence without overwhelming the landscape's ecological integrity. The campus' open gateway, mirrored sculpture, and integrated trails create what Nassauer terms "orderly frames": reassuring aesthetic structures that invite community engagement while supporting invisible ecological functions below the surface.



Design With Care: Joan Nassauer and the Importance of Ecological Design, Aesthetics and Management

The 2026 Whittemore Lecture in Landscape Architecture