

## **SECTION 5.0**

### **ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN GUIDELINES**

**NOTE:**

*The "Architectural Design Guidelines" outline the external architectural features and exterior building materials that shall be considered in a proposed architectural project at the University of Houston campus. Other related University of Houston documents include the Campus Master Plan ([http://www.uh.edu/af/docs/CFP/041015\\_presentation\\_UHMasterPlan.pdf](http://www.uh.edu/af/docs/CFP/041015_presentation_UHMasterPlan.pdf)) and the "Landscape Design Guidelines" (Section 6.0).*

#### **5.1 OVERVIEW**

##### **5.1.1 Preface**

The "Architectural Design Guidelines", together with the "Landscape Design Guidelines" and campus master plan (updated approximately every 5 years) outline the fundamental design criteria which sustain the existing cohesive attributes of the University of Houston ("UH") campus and provide a flexible framework for future in-fill and expansion projects. The Guidelines outline the materials and features which enhance both the "urban" and the "forest" images of the campus. The intent of the Guidelines is not to create visual uniformity at the UH campus but rather visual harmony. As tools for campus development, the intentions of these guidelines are:

- To identify the range of materials and features that are shared by the collection of buildings
- To limit or exclude materials and features which are visually disruptive to the recognition of cohesive campus places
- To encourage the invention of spaces and places which sustain a diversity of urban academic life styles and reinforce the cultural role of the UH within the Houston community

##### **5.1.2 Challenges**

In January 2011, the University of Houston was acknowledged as one of only Carnegie-designated Tier One research universities in Texas. To solidify its Tier One position, the University must continue to broaden its overall excellence and strengthen its performance and reputation for student success. This effort challenges the physical growth of the campus in several ways. First, the amount of classroom, office, auxiliary, and support space, and utility infrastructure must grow to accommodate a significantly larger student body while maintaining the campus' attractive open spaces and without losing its casual appeal. Secondly, the campus must transform from an almost exclusive commuter campus to a place where students live, learn, and socialize on campus as part of their educational lifestyle. New mixed-use development housing, integrating academic space, retail and entertainment, the arts, and social venues, must be constructed to cater to first-generation college students, working students, students with families, and students who tend to be older than most collegians.



### 5.1.3 Campus Context

Viewed as a whole, the UH campus is a clearly identifiable “place” within the Houston landscape. Recognized by its clusters of large, institutional buildings grouped within a park-like setting, the campus appears as a unique environment set between the surrounding residential landscape on the south and west and the freeway and industrial districts on the north and east. At its perimeter, the visual recognition of the campus is primarily a result of three conditions. First, the scale of the campus buildings, as a group, contrasts with the surrounding urban context. Second, the building clusters within the campus are predominantly finished with masonry, stone, or concrete in buff colors. Third, these buildings are sited in a contiguous park-like setting dotted by large open parking areas. These common attributes of scale, materials, and setting define the visual framework that forms the campus image at UH.

In addition to its overall institutional form, the campus is enhanced by the presence of architectural and landscape features that encourage and orient pedestrian movements. Throughout the campus, this collection of plazas, courtyards, sculptures, terraces, loggias, woods and lawns, etc., establishes an “urban forest” quality that is distinctive to the UH Campus. While these architectural and landscape features may sometimes be obscured or isolated, they are, nonetheless, significant visual attributes that define the campus as a “public urban university.”



A unique quality of the UH campus is the commitment to public art in the form of environmental sculpture. The extent and quality of sculpture integrated into the entire campus is a wonderful characteristic that must be embraced and continued in the development of the expanded campus. Whether found in large open areas at the visual terminus of a formal pedestrian way, along the side of a walkway among trees, or in buildings the public art enriches and enhances the campus experience.

## **5.2 APPEARANCE AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES**

### **5.2.1 Permanence**

One characteristic of an institution is a pervasive sense of permanence. This may be achieved through building materials, size and shape of buildings, quality of master planning, architectural design quality, and site and building maintenance. Metal buildings, for example, although appropriate for industrial settings and even as temporary facilities, do not fit on the UH campus. The economic investment traditionally assumed in a university demands enduring materials. Likewise, to acquire enduring materials requires adequate economic investment in the structure and the quality of design.

### **5.2.2 Color Palette**

A simple, consistent color palette can do more to provide a sense of visual unity across a campus than any other element. It is closely tied, of course, to the actual materials but a variety of materials and textures can be unified by sharing a common color. The basic color palette was set with the six buildings of the original campus plan. These buildings were constructed with what at the time were “regional materials” (i.e., Texas shell limestone and clay tile roofs). Other key colors were the soft gray of cast aluminum and the patina green or dark brown of weathered copper. As more contemporary structures are built, exterior finishes recall the palette of the historic early days of UH.

- Walls should be a light warm beige or buff.
- Pitched roofs should be terra cotta (brownish/orange) or copper patina green.
- Window framing should be a natural metal color chosen from a range from clear anodized to zinc gray.
- Glass shall be nominally clear—without mirror finish. FP&C will consider the use of tinted or fritted glass when necessary to meet the requirements of the energy code.

A related color theme is the strong greens of the landscaping that are a key to the overall “urban forest” appearance of the campus. The predominance of lighter colors or tones in the buildings contrasts nicely with the darker, richer colors and shadows of the landscape. Occasional accents of color in plants or sculpture are preferable to bright colors on the buildings.



**Original Color  
Palette**

The use of colors in the brickwork on the Music Building, albeit tasteful and in keeping with the palette, is perhaps the extreme limit for this campus. Similarly, the red tile on the Science Engineering and Research Classroom auditorium establishes the limit for accents, both in quantity and intensity of color,

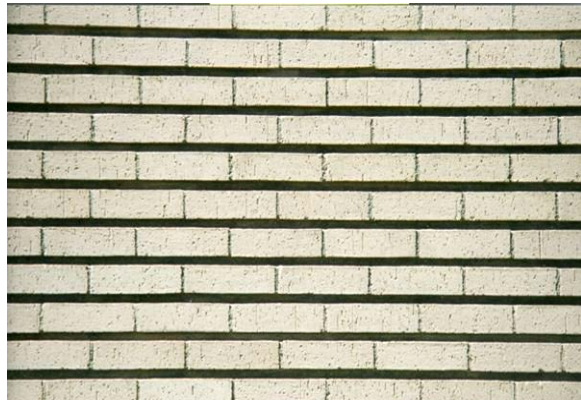
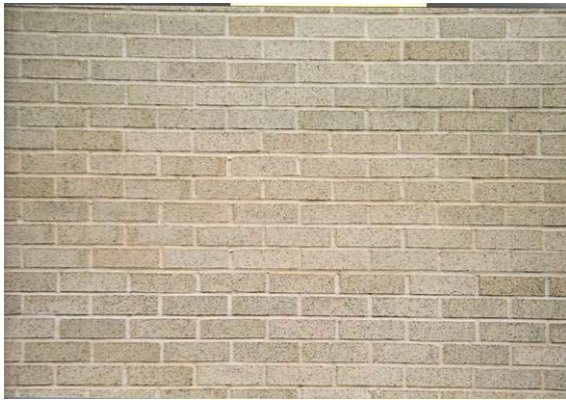
for this campus. On the other hand, the same buff brick has been used on many buildings but by varying the color of the mortar, or by blending with other brick shades, the overall tone of the walls is varied noticeably while remaining within the “family” concept. Recent construction has incorporated, in small areas, the use of red on an interior face of spandrel glass, which provides a bold and low-maintenance splash of color.



**Detail of materials in dormitory group**



**Brick colors in Moores' Music School**



**Variety of wall surfaces achieved through different mortar joints**

### **5.2.3 Massing and Scale**

The original UH campus core buildings were thinner in cross-section than contemporary buildings due to design constraints for natural ventilation versus air conditioning today. The older buildings have pitched roofs, at least over segments of the buildings, if not totally, whereas modern structures have broader footprints less suitable to pitched roofs. The predominant massing of later buildings is based on geometric proportioning with flat roofs and parapets and using modulation of surfaces and fenestration or interplay of simple geometric shapes to establish variations in the façades and to express plan features.

- New buildings should respond to the predominant massing and strategy of the surrounding buildings.
- In all cases, designs should contribute to the human scale and proportions of a pedestrian-oriented campus.
- The creation and definition of open spaces is a key strategy for the UH campus. New buildings should be designed to enhance and frame public spaces, malls, and courtyards.
- Buildings must be designed as part of the campus as a whole and as part of the local precinct—the local system of open spaces and linkages. They will not be standalone icons set apart in a field.

### 5.2.4 Height

The campus is populated by low-rise (2-3 story) to medium-rise (7-10 story) buildings, with the only exception being the 18 story Moody Towers residence halls. This is appropriate to the “urban forest” setting and the perceived density of the historic center of the campus. The university does not attempt to meet the strict LEED criteria of a minimum 60,000 GSF of development per acre, but is steadily improving its density. All new buildings will be a minimum of 4 stories tall, and parking lots will be replaced by parking structures in order to use land more efficiently. As a general rule however, buildings should remain at or below the 75-foot height that is used in building codes as the threshold for application of high-rise building safety requirements.

### 5.2.5 “Monumental” or “Fabric”

The primary focus of these guidelines is to enhance the notion of a “family of buildings,” i.e., that the collection of buildings, considering all variations of style, size, function, and age, should share a common visual vocabulary and appear related without stifling architectural innovation. In general, each individual building should first establish its identity within the greater whole of the campus fabric and then present its individual identity. Visually speaking, all new buildings should contribute as supporting members of the campus image and as components of the network of public spaces. Unique “object” buildings, which in their architectural expression or form are aberrant from the campus norm, will not be allowed.

However, there is a place for, indeed, a need for the occasional “monumental” building to give focus or visual delight within an area of the campus. “Monumental” buildings are those which occupy prominent positions, such as at the end of a quadrangle (E. Cullen), or a major axis (Architecture), or a corner of the campus (Center for Public Broadcasting). The massing and architectural details of these buildings should belong to the campus family but may be more dramatic in keeping with their function and location. “Fabric” buildings, in contrast, are visually subordinate, require less detailing, and whose massing can be simpler. However, these buildings should still be fine and handsome in appearance.

### 5.2.6 Loggias

Some of the harsh aspects of the Gulf Coast region are the semi-tropical climatic conditions of hot sun, heavy downpours, and high humidity. The architecture of the original core campus buildings and many of the later modernist buildings does not include covered walkways, either freestanding or as part of the building. However, some of the buildings do include this element, which is a fine feature for protecting pedestrians from this climate. Well-lit walkways are a security enhancement at night as well. Loggias are recommended for all new facilities and for retrofit studies as well. Eventually, large areas of the campus could be linked with a series of colonnades tied to loggias or similar features. Therefore, buildings are encouraged to provide recognizable features such as loggias or overhangs or porches, which support pedestrian movements across campus.



**Existing Loggias at Agnes Arnold Hall, PG Hoffman, Science Engineering Classroom**

### 5.2.7 Entrances

A feature of older structures is the clarity of where the entrances are. Whether a symmetrically balanced façade or an asymmetrical design, the entrances were obvious, either through prominent appendages or dramatic recesses and overhangs. Many of the modern buildings on campus subordinate the entrance within the geometry and massing to the degree of its being difficult to locate. Architects are encouraged to seek ways to provide visual clues to the entrances. Entrances should be prominently defined as part of the architectural statement of the façade.



**Examples of Well-Defined Entrances**

### 5.2.8 Special Details

Architects are encouraged to include special elements of interest or delight in the exterior façades. The following are a few ideas:

- Dedication plaques and cornerstones, common on older buildings around campus, are also required on new construction and significant renovation. Refer to Section 10: Wayfinding for dedication plaque requirements.

- Building identification, whether inscribed in stone lintels or lettering applied to the façade, is crucial to orientation and should be considered early in the design process. Wayfinding is greatly enhanced when buildings (and entrances) are clearly identified in this manner. This also contributes to the sense of permanence mentioned elsewhere. However, being able to change the name for a later donor or changed function should be considered as well.
- With the expansion of evening courses and late building usage, concepts of “nocturnal architecture” bear consideration. This means functional as well as dramatic lighting, and the incorporation of CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) security practices.
- Inclusion of art, whether freestanding sculpture or murals or integrated into building elements, etc., is encouraged and may be required by some building programs.
- In the creation of outdoor spaces surrounding or formed by buildings, opportunities for use as alternative classrooms and “living rooms” should be considered.