

SUBCOMMITTEE No. 5 - EDUCATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

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REPORT OF SUBCOMMITTEE  
ON  
EDUCATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

By

P. H. Elwood, Chairman,

Educational Standards.

Looking toward the future and anticipating an adequate and stable nation-wide roadside program on a permanent basis, we should set up educational standards that will insure the continued growth and improvement in character of the work in every State of the Union.

It is realized fully that we cannot or should not attempt to standardize the personalities or stifle the individuality of the landscape architects or engineers engaged in roadside development work in the future. However, there are certain minimum educational requirements that must be established if the high purposes and objectives motivating the officials of the Bureau of Public Roads are to be achieved.

Perhaps the direct question is the best way to approach this problem. Let us consider a few obvious queries on the educational requirements for the planners and directors of the future roadsides of America.

What is the best professional training for this work? The very best and broadest possible foundation is essential. Problems in this special landscape field involve not only technique but also an understanding of the fundamentals of engineering, architecture, botany, ecology, horticulture, pathology, entomology, soils, crops, and simple hydraulics. Such knowledge is required for successful collaborative work with other technicians in the great highway building and maintenance program of the



country. The directors of this new field of work must be in a way natural diplomats and psychologists to deal successfully with an uninformed or misinformed public and technical staff. This is so important that often the more successful work is done by those lucky individuals endowed by nature with this priceless treasure, the ability to work happily and successfully with others, even though of quite different backgrounds and trained in opposite schools of thought.

After generations railroad cross sections in highway design and wanton waste of forests, soil and other natural resources, it is too much to expect immediate success for any progressive movement. It would be dangerous to change directions and practices too abruptly. So let us be patient and not too easily discouraged with the results being obtained by many untrained and ill-prepared men who are no doubt doing the very best with their limited resources.

Following up our statement concerning the need for a broad training in the various fundamental subjects, this should be accompanied or climaxed by a thorough professional college degree course in landscape architecture. This will require from 4 to 6 years of collegiate training. In this field of endeavor for trained landscape practitioners, in selecting elective courses greater emphasis probably should be placed on the fundamental or basic sciences and engineering rather than social science, literature and art.

Some of our friends from time to time have advocated a special four-year college curriculum for highway landscape architects to be offered at several of the leading schools of landscape architecture. With this the Committee thoroughly disapproves. Highway landscape architecture or engineering is simply one type or phase of the broad professional practices of the landscape architect. We should encourage more uniformity in the titles of the men in charge of this important work.

#### Consulting Services Suggested.

In many States where important scenic highways, freeways, and parkways are to be developed, the advice and service of a landscape architect widely experienced in such problems should be obtained, the better to coordinate the work of other government agencies. Through this coordination the field men themselves would be greatly benefitted, their own point of view broadened, and their educational equipment strengthened.

#### Where can such preparation be obtained?

There are nine member schools in the Association of Professional Schools of Landscape Architecture in this country and about as many more offering degrees in landscape architecture or, as it was formerly called, landscape gardening. Some of these last mentioned schools offer excellent preparation from an horticultural and engineering standpoint. Graduates from these institutions are very adaptable to this work and fit at once into harmonious relationships with their technical associates. However,



for original design, collaboration and direction, the more thorough professional training should be encouraged. At best, the present output of all these schools is woefully inadequate to supply this demand in addition to the many calls from the other great governmental planning agencies during recent years. This demand may not be so great in the future. That depends somewhat on the quality of work accomplished and the soundness of the plans prepared. The sudden call and the inadequate supply of professionally trained men for the inauguration of this work on a nation-wide scale has made it necessary to employ men with little or no special training or experience. Some of these men are laboring under the delusion that they have such training due to an utterly dishonest and unfair attitude on the part of many institutions offering superficial appreciation and elementary introductory courses under high sounding titles which lure the student.

This sort of educational hypocrisy must be stopped if high standards of highway collaborative planning is to be accomplished. Well-trained engineering and construction men soon detect the sham and lose respect for the whole program. Appalling mistakes are made and the public in turn becomes lukewarm or actually antagonistic.

The members of this subcommittee feel therefore that the future success of the roadside development work depends to a great extent on the educational background and qualifications of the men employed to plan, direct, and carry out the work. It is not our function to lay down any special curriculum, but to point toward better and more thoroughly trained men from acceptable schools.

In this connection we wish to suggest further study of the schools by this Committee and the establishment of much more rigid educational requirements before men are employed by the various States as landscape architects or engineers. The permanence of this great forward step in highway design depends on firm and perhaps in some cases drastic action, and a strict maintenance of higher and higher standards of educational requirements.

As for the educational improvement of the able though sometimes inadequately trained men actively engaged in roadside work, this question offers tremendous possibilities and suggests many different answers. Of course, there will be as many suggested procedures as there are individuals, since background, training and experience, as well as personal tastes and abilities, all differ.

#### Self Analysis: First Step in Self Training.

Each and every man should subject himself to a severe analysis. An intelligent man is his own best critic. For this the individual should be advised by a more experienced and well-trained successful practitioner. This preliminary process might be called a sort of technical or professional clinic.



### Reading and Study Most Valuable.

A system or course of selected readings from the material prepared and presented by this Committee would be the next step. This list should include those basic fundamentals which are lacking, or the technical work of engineering, agriculture, landscape architecture or architecture of which the individual himself feels the greatest need.

### Travel and Observation.

Travel and observation of actual and reputable work elsewhere will be found most valuable. Every highway commission should make such project study possible for all its chief landscape engineers and assistants.

The third step might be attendance at one of the proposed short courses or regional schools. The order or sequence of these last items may be reversed.

Another step, when possible, would be a leave of absence for a year (more or less) for special study at one of the best schools to round out the special training or fill in gaps in background work in collaborative subjects.

Keep stepping and in step all the time by availing oneself of every opportunity for self improvement by observation, contacts, lectures, conferences and study. Each State group might organize their own reading and conference study groups when federal inspectors or professionals from neighboring States might assist.

### Extension of Inspection Service.

It has been suggested by some that the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads should very soon and very widely extend its inspection service. Furthermore, a much more rigid set of requirements should now be established. After all, the best and only way to raise standards is to raise them by higher requirements for acceptance of projects. Let us not shut our eyes to this immediate need. The good work and high standards of the majority must not be jeopardized by the gross shortcomings of a few.

### Good Work Best Public Educator.

This brings us to the problem of public relations. As above stated, high quality work accomplished is the very best means of educating the public to the value of our work. However, new work often is not as conclusive as a demonstration of the ultimate good to be accomplished or the many beneficial results involved. Much of this is hidden from view and needs interpretation and explanation by those who know. Therefore, a series of illustrated articles or pamphlets for wide distribution and circulation should be prepared by the designer in charge of each State. These newsstories should be used by the Sunday press, giving State-wide and national distribution. Many popular and technical magazines value such articles and would, we believe, publish many more if furnished the material.