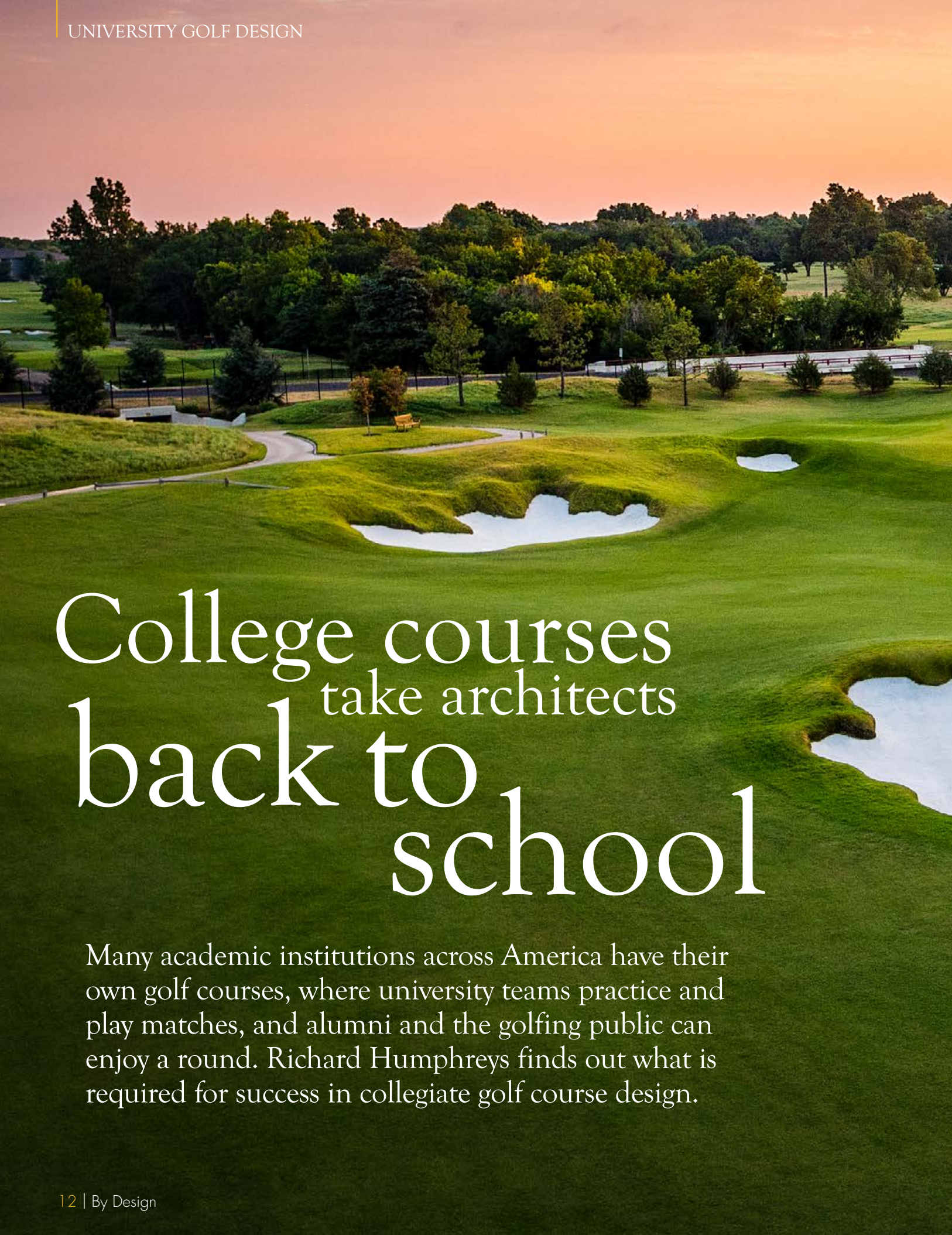


College courses take architects back to school

Many academic institutions across America have their own golf courses, where university teams practice and play matches, and alumni and the golfing public can enjoy a round. Richard Humphreys finds out what is required for success in collegiate golf course design.



Tripp Davis, ASGCA, renovated the Jimmie Austin course "to produce championship golf" for the University of Oklahoma

Photo: Branden Hart

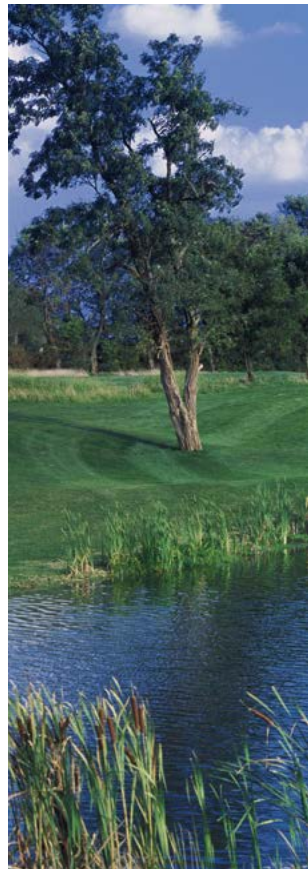
The 'Golden Age' of golf course design in the early decades of the twentieth century saw the creation of many of America's finest courses. It also saw the birth of university golf courses, with leading institutions like Princeton, Yale and Stanford investing in their own facilities for their golf teams and students, and as an attractive amenity for staff and alumni.

Springdale Golf Club in Princeton, New Jersey, may lay claim to being America's first university course. Formed in 1895 by a group of alumni, faculty and undergraduates, nine holes opened in 1902 and another nine followed in 1915, before a William Flynn redesign in 1927.

College golf courses soon began to emerge across the country. In 1921, Bob Rutherford and R.D. Pryde, professors at Penn State, laid out nine holes on campus, with Willie Park, Jr. arriving the following year to extend their work to a full eighteen. The renowned nine-hole Culver Academies



Photo: Love Golf Design



Scot Sherman, ASGCA, is currently working on a renovation of the Birdwood course at Boar's Head Resort, home of the University of Virginia golf teams

layout in Indiana was created by William Langford and Theodore Moreau in 1924. The Course at Yale in New Haven, Connecticut, a celebrated C.B. Macdonald creation with many of his famed template holes, opened in 1926. Wayne Stiles' Taconic Golf Club in Williamstown, Massachusetts, was originally built for Williams College students in 1928.

By the early 1930s—with George Thomas and Billy Bell completing their design at Stanford University in California and the opening of the University of Michigan's course in Ann Arbor, a collaboration between Perry Maxwell and Alister Mackenzie—golf was firmly on the college agenda.

Later, Robert Trent Jones, ASGCA, helped shape college golf, too. Jones will always be closely associated with Cornell, where as a student he designed a study program for his chosen profession as a golf course designer. He returned in the 1940s and 50s to create Cornell's golf course, but also designed courses for the University of Georgia, Colgate University and Duke University, the latter renovated by his son, ASGCA Past President Rees Jones, himself a former NCAA golfer at Yale.

> "We are trying hard to make golfers think. After all, isn't that the point of the college experience?

Many more of America's academic institutions have chosen to build courses on their campus, helping to attract students and generate revenue. The foundations for university design work can often be very sound. "Universities have lots of open land available to them, usually a fair amount of money to invest and see a golf course as an attractive amenity for alumni and students," says ASGCA Past President Michael Hurdzan.

But the bureaucratic nature of such institutions and often large number of decision-makers can make it difficult to understand and meet everyone's needs.

So, what makes a great college golf design? What do academic institutions want from their golf courses and what are the primary challenges that golf course architects face when designing a college course?

A stern test

One of the most frequently cited requirements for university golf courses is for them to be a stern test, to challenge and improve every aspect of a college golfer's skills. Some of the most successful NCAA golf teams have notoriously difficult home courses—the 2018 NCAA golf champions Oklahoma State play at Karsten Creek in Stillwater, designed



Photo: University Club of Kentucky

The brief for Drew Rogers, ASGCA, at The University Club of Kentucky was to provide "stronger strategic presence and length"

by Tom Fazio, ASGCA, and the 2012 champions University of Texas, whose team included Jordan Spieth, play on a 7,400-yard hill country course in Austin designed by Roy Bechtol and Randy Russell, ASGCA.

"When it comes to building a golf course played by today's college team members, their athletic and mental abilities cannot be ignored," says Scot Sherman, ASGCA, project architect for Love Golf Design. "Both men and women at college level are more capable than ever in all areas of the game."

Sherman is overseeing a comprehensive renovation of the Birdwood course at the Boar's Head Resort near Charlottesville, which is home to the University of Virginia's golf teams and is expected to reopen in spring 2020.

"On the new golf course, we have certainly considered all players, but have paid closer attention to how the course might be set up for high level play when needed. We are trying hard to make golfers think. After all, isn't that the point of the college experience?"

ASGCA Past President Steve Smyers is working on a new course at Indiana University (see box), which has already been given a USGA course rating of 80. "It is, very much so, a strong test of golf," says Smyers, who studied data of how elite golfers plot their way around a course to inform his design. "To further test the golfer's ability to create and identify the ideal shot for the occasion, several different situations were created around putting surfaces," he says.

Tripp Davis, ASGCA, approached work on the at the

CASE STUDY

Indiana University



Photo: Steve Smyers Golf Course Architects

Construction of Indiana University's new golf course, designed by ASGCA Past President Steve Smyers, is complete and growing in ahead of a spring 2020 opening.

Smyers' brief was to design a course that could host high-caliber championships, require golfers to execute a variety of shots, would preserve and enhance the environment, and would be economically sustainable.

"From a golf architect's perspective, I was very fortunate," says Smyers. "I was given almost total freedom to create whatever I thought best for the property and project.

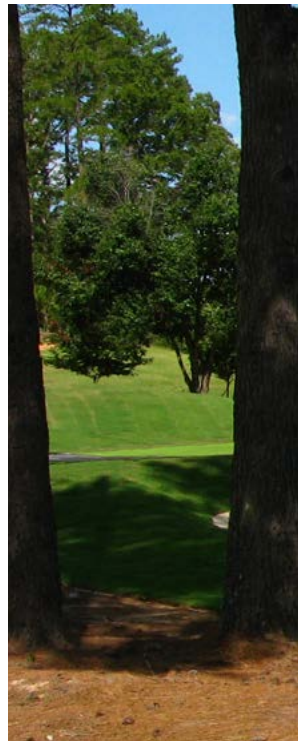
"The course was routed to take advantage of the topography and diverse landscape settings. The strategy and shotmaking of the course emanate from the movement of the land and the journey around the property from landscape room to landscape room provides variety in the settings of the golf holes.

"The bunkering throughout the course has varying depths and shapes, while slopes within the bunkers vary. All of this requires different skills and creativity in shotmaking.

"There is tremendous variety built into the length of the course demanding use of all 14 clubs even for the longest of hitters. The course is planned with multiple landing areas on each hole so that the golf holes can be set up with greatly varying length from one day to the next. This will require not only high-level execution but proper planning before each hole is played."



Photo: Mike Gogel



Mike Gogel, ASGCA, recently completed The Jayhawk Club (above), where University of Kansas golf teams are based. The course at Ole Miss Golf Club (right), which is home to the University of Mississippi golf teams, was renovated by Nathan Crace, ASGCA

Jimmie Austin Golf Club at the University of Oklahoma with a tournament mindset. "Our approach was like when we are asked to produce championship golf, rather than being focused on playability for the average to higher handicap player. Ultimately, the objective became, and still is, to do whatever is necessary to make OU the best university golf facility in the country."

Drew Rogers, ASGCA, oversaw a renovation of the Big Blue course at the University Club of Kentucky, home to both the men's and women's golf teams. And while he says that his approach was not all that different from any other renovation endeavors, part of the brief was to "enhance the design to have a stronger strategic presence and length to challenge collegiate players."

Best practice

In addition to a challenging golf course, universities are increasingly recognising that outstanding practice facilities are a way to give their teams a competitive advantage.

At the University of Virginia, Sherman and the Love Golf Design team have made use of some unused land adjacent to the old layout for the creation of a new putting course, short course and practice areas. "A university the size of UVA attracts many people throughout the year who vacation, study, explore, collaborate and compete," says Sherman. "Therefore, those involved in the golf planning process recognized it was valuable to provide golf venues for all."

A year after he renovated their Jimmie Austin Golf Club, Davis returned to the University of Oklahoma to create the four-hole 'Ransom' course. Davis says that one of the objectives for his work was to create the most well-rounded practice facilities for the golf teams. "The golf teams have their own indoor building, range tee hitting north, short game area and four-hole practice course."

> "The everday golfer had to be able to maneuver around the course and have an enjoyable time doing so

Another institution that has made a considerable effort to improve its practice offerings is Florida State University, where Nicklaus Design has comprehensively redesigned and renovated the Don Veller Seminole golf course (see box). The course will reopen soon with extensive new practice facilities. "For the golf teams and its supporters, we have created a 12-hole par-three course that is designed so that it can be played in a multiple of ways," says Chris Cochran, ASGCA, of Nicklaus Design. "Not only is it fun to play, but it has so much variety that it will be fantastic short game practice for everyone, including golf summer camp for juniors."

Mike Gogel, ASGCA, has just completed a renovation which has become The Jayhawk Club, used by the University of Kansas golf teams. "A new team building was constructed, which houses both teams' locker rooms, both coach's offices, lounge rooms, indoor putting and chipping green, indoor trackman simulator, club repair and seven bays," says Gogel. There is also a short game practice area with three greens and fairways, greenside and



Photo: Nathan Grace

fairway bunkers, and a 10,000 square foot putting green.

The University of Kentucky returned to Rogers to work with golf coaches and players to redesign practice facilities. "That encounter led us to look for ways to enhance and further develop the practice area utilized specifically by the golf teams," says Rogers. The plans include the creation of more recovery options around the pitching greens, more diverse grass choices from which the teams can prepare for, and the visual enhancement of fairway targets.

Public play

Most college golf courses must also be appealing to the general public. While his work at Indiana University has focused on testing the high-level collegiate player, Smyers also designed the course with playability for all golfers in mind. "The major contributors to the project comprised many of the university's alumni," says Smyers. "It was emphasized that they and their guests—the everyday golfer—had to be able to maneuver around the course and have an enjoyable time doing so."

Similarly, at the University of Oklahoma, Davis has made the course at Jimmie Austin Golf Club

CASE STUDY

Florida State University



Photo: Courtesy of Florida State University

Florida State University's Don Veller Seminole course will reopen in late 2019 following an $8 million renovation overseen by Nicklaus Design. The course is essentially brand new, with the former layout rerouted to generate land for the university, with only the eighteenth left from the original routing.

"Our brief was to create a world-class golf facility that would attract the best junior players in the world to attend FSU and a course capable of hosting any major tournament," says Nicklaus Design's senior design associate Chris Cochran, ASGCA (pictured above right with the Nicklaus and FSU team). "The course is aimed at being fun to play for the alumni and students, and it has been designed to be easily maintainable while reducing the overall footprint of the golf course by 40 acres in order to create space for a future highway expansion and commercial development.

"The golf course has over 50 feet of elevation change on it – which is a lot in Florida. The property is lined with 100-year-old live oaks and giant, stately pine trees. We were able to keep over 99 percent of these.

"The course is turning out great. There is over 3,000 yards difference between forward and back tees."

more playable for golfers. "We did add a good bit of width to enhance the strategic options and all but three greens allow for a running approach," says Davis.

At Ole Miss Golf Club, the home course for the University of Mississippi teams, Nathan Crace, ASGCA, took a similar approach: "The task was to modernize the course to current standards and make the course more playable for a wider range of clientele," he says. "The course serves students, but also an increasingly larger number of non-students including a growing number of retirees in the area."

Collaboration challenge

While every golf course project requires architects to work in tandem with their clients, university projects can involve more stakeholders, each bringing their own agenda and opinion to the table.

"What can be different versus a course with a single owner or a member renovation committee is meetings where a dozen decision-makers are sitting around a conference table and making sure everyone is on the same page and is being heard," says Crace. "That can be time-consuming, but it's worth the effort when you see the finished product."

"As it comes to the budget on this project we have worked closely with many representatives of the university, the general contractor we technically work for, and the golf course contractor, which is more people than what we typically work with," says Cochran, of his experiences at FSU. "But the relationship with everyone on this project has been great."

Alma mater honor

For some ASGCA members, one of the most gratifying aspects of university golf design has been the opportunity to return to their alma mater.

"It is an honor to have one's alma mater reach out," says Rogers, who studied at the University of Kentucky. "I'm proud to give back and to remain involved at a school which has also given so much to me. My returns to Lexington always feel welcoming and familiar and hopefully always will. It is also especially pleasing to see the golf teams do well, knowing that we've had this interaction and that they utilize facilities that we've very purposely developed together."

"Designing a course that carries the Jayhawk name was very exciting for me personally," says Gogel. "We grew up Jayhawks, even living in Lawrence as young kids. Most of my immediate and extended family graduated from KU so to design a course and practice facilities that will be used to help build a college program and develop potential future professional golfers and top tier amateurs and know I have a very small part in that... I am not certain I'll ever have a more personal attachment to a project."

"I have loved working at my alma mater, and I am actually enjoying it more and more," says Davis, a graduate of the University of Oklahoma, member of the 1989 National Championship golf team and NCAA-All American selection. "I was a little hesitant at first to be as strong-willed as I might be normally, when necessary. While we are still doing things to make it better, I am at a point I can enjoy it now."

> "I'm not certain I'll ever have a more personal attachment to a project

And for some architects, the tables have been turned. "I did take a lot of ribbing from friends because I graduated from Mississippi State," says Crace, of his work at in-state rival Ole Miss (he has done work at MSU's course too). "My friends from Mississippi State would kid me about working for 'the other school' and my friends who were Ole Miss fans would kid me about 'finally seeing the light' and helping them recruit for the golf teams with a new course. It's all good-natured fun!"

Design graduates

Other ASGCA members to successfully complete design projects for universities include:

ASGCA Past President Jeffrey Blume redesigned the Campus course at Texas A&M University, as well as designed the Goodman Family Aggie Golf Complex practice facility.



Photo: Jeffrey D. Blume Ltd

Thomas E. Clark, ASGCA, returned to his alma mater Penn State University in 1992 for a project that saw 14 holes added for their 36-hole golf complex. He later improved practice facilities for the golf teams.

As part of his work with Fazio Design, **ASGCA Past President Tom Marzolf** has helped to create golf facilities at the Georgia Institute of Technology, Oklahoma State University and The University of North Carolina.

Kevin Ramsey, ASGCA, of Golfplan designed the John and Diane Watson Short Game Training Center at El Macero Country Club, which is used by the golf teams at UC Davis.



Photo: Golfplan

Andy Staples, ASGCA, has recently finished working with Marquette University and The University Club of Milwaukee on an innovative short game range and four-hole short course.