



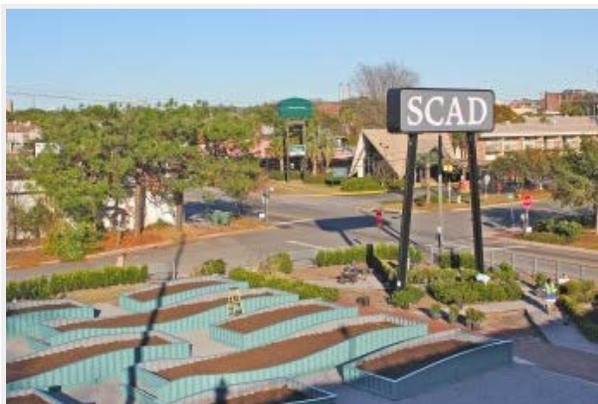
## School uses green thumb to benefit community

January 4, 2013 By [Danielle Austin](#)

When construction began in front of the Working Class Studio in mid-November, students were curious as to what new project the school had planned. Some thought it might be a skate park, others a mini-golf course. But as construction continued to develop it was clear what this empty lot was being turned into — a community garden.

While the idea of a community garden might seem a little random, this project has been in the works since June.

“During the early discussions with Bon Appétit Management Company, the idea came about to give students an opportunity to get involved and learn more about organic gardening and sustainable food production, while also creating opportunities to impact the local community,” said Martin Smith, SCAD’s Executive Director of Design and New Construction.



Workers plant bushes along the fence of the garden. Photo by Danielle Austin

Some students are concerned about how much these “opportunities” are costing the school. Michelle Towner, a second-year sequential art major from Overland Park, Kan. said, “I would rather see them potentially using the money for the reconstruction or fixing of dorm rooms, or to get more buses and workers to drive the buses.”

But Smith assures students that their tuition money was not wasted. “We have kept costs at the absolute minimum, without sacrificing the essential elements such as proper irrigation, site lighting for safety, and of course the best planting soil recommended by local organic farmers.”

Even the planting beds are made from shipping containers from the Port of Savannah.

Along with seasonal plantings of vegetables and herbs in the garden, the SCAD Fibers department has also expressed an interest in growing plants to be used for organic dyeing of fabrics.

“We are hoping that these kinds of creative opportunities continue to flourish and that students and faculty will find ways to incorporate their efforts at the garden into their work in classrooms,” said Smith.

The food harvested from the garden will be used by Bon Appétit for special “from the SCAD garden” dining events. Smith hopes that creative initiatives will also arise, such as cooking demonstrations.

While food harvested from the garden will primarily support the university and Bon Appétit’s sustainability initiatives, SCAD will also operate a community outreach program in collaboration with the Savannah Community Garden initiative.

“Local school children will be able to come to the garden to learn about healthy eating, sustainable farming, and even create art projects and plant their own seedlings with our SCAD volunteers as mentors,” said Smith.



While a garden of this caliber may be new to SCAD, Bon Appétit Management Company has had its fair share of experience. BAMCO has already collaborated with 32 other colleges to help start up and manage student gardens, and so far all have been successful. But starting and maintaining a garden is no easy task.

"The success required the hard work and dedication of student volunteers and the commitment of the college to create a positive experience," said Eric Davidson, the resident district manager of Bon Appétit Management Company.

The SCAD Physical Resources department, SERVE (the student-led community service group), and Bon Appétit Management Company will oversee the day-to-day activities of the garden. There will also be leadership and involvement opportunities for students, staff and faculty volunteers.

"I am very happy that SERVE is going to be part of helping out in the community garden," said the Student Director of SERVE, Monica Rodriguez. "We are planning at the beginning of the quarter to set our tasks with the garden."

While it's great that the school is allowing students to be involved in the harvesting of the garden, some students feel as though SCAD should have let them have more involvement with the initial planning, especially since the empty lot chosen for the garden also provided parking spaces for Eichberg, Bergen, Crites, the Working Class Studio and the Museum.

"I think it would have been a great idea to consult the students about helping with the design of the garden," said Evan Kuester a third-year architecture major from Washington, D.C. "We have classes in urban design and there is no better way to learn than designing an actual garden. They could have let the students design some sort of parking lot garden complex that met both the needs of the students, faculty and staff."

The Dean of Students, David Pugh, said that they did seek out the involvement of some students in the early planning stages. "We consulted with student leaders in Residence Life as well as SERVE to gather input and gauge interest."

However, the majority of the student body wasn't aware of the plans for a garden until the construction was already well on its way. And while most love the idea of the garden, the location seems to be a big concern for students.

The location in front of the Working Class Studio was chosen for two reasons: its proximity to the Hive and the fact that the city of Savannah identified it as an excellent pilot location for the Savannah Community Garden initiative.

While these are both good reasons, students feel that other important factors weren't taken into consideration.

"Anyone could walk by and set anything they wanted to into those planters at any time of the day, from rat poison to marijuana seeds," said Kuester. "I personally wouldn't eat anything that was grown on a street corner near a college campus, who knows what will end up in there."

Towner also has concerns. "I have seen some sketchy things around that area go on very late at night/morning. I would hate to think someone or something could disrupt all that hard work."

According to Smith, there is no need to worry about that happening. "There will be ample site lighting and a security guard nearby who will help us to ensure that no one steals or vandalizes the plants or produce from the garden at night."



A closer look at the garden beds.

Photo by Danielle Austin

Davidson adds, "Over the years, I have learned that you can take every precaution in preventing animals from digging in the garden or folks from stealing the fresh produce. But truly at the end of the day it comes down to honor."

After the first big planting event this spring, we will find out whether or not Savannah is filled with honorable people.

Anyone interested in volunteering with the garden through SERVE will be able to sign up through their [blog](#) as soon as all the details are worked out.

There will also be upcoming informational meetings for students and faculty. Those times and dates have yet to be announced.

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