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# PGMS Offers Landscape Management Accreditation

By Thomas C. Shaner, CAE

“Curb appeal” has always been one of the top reasons why a potential student’s parents select one higher education institution over another. The grounds and landscape operations of a school are obviously instrumental in this regard.

Now institutions of higher learning, as well as other facilities, have a valuable tool to help enhance their “first impression” through an evaluation of their campus’ grounds operations when measured by a series of best practices.

Developed over a two-and-a-half year period (including on-site evaluation testing), by the Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS), a strategic partner of APPA, the new **Landscape Management and Operations Accreditation** program is a dynamic evaluation tool that can be utilized by facilities and having a landscape services or grounds component. Through peer expertise, the program evaluates strategic grounds management principles and practices that produce and guide the delivery of properties to an attractive, healthy, sustainable, and high-quality state. Only in its early stages, the accreditation program is already being favorably received and utilized.

It has four levels of accreditation and is designed to not only recognize excellence but to provide a means by which facilities can measure growth and improvements in meeting the goals of best practices. PGMS accreditations are awarded based on a 200-point evaluation system and on a four-star recognition system.

Rating System	Evaluation Points Required
1 Star	114-127 points
2 Stars	128-141 points
3 Stars	142-165 points
4 Stars	166+ points

If appropriate, once an applicant has undergone an evaluation and the results have been provided, the applicant will be given opportunities, including at time of re-accreditation, to address specific best practices and possibly gain additional stars.

## EARLY ADOPTERS, EARLY ACHIEVERS

Since its launch in July 2014, the program has already awarded several institutions with accreditation recognition.

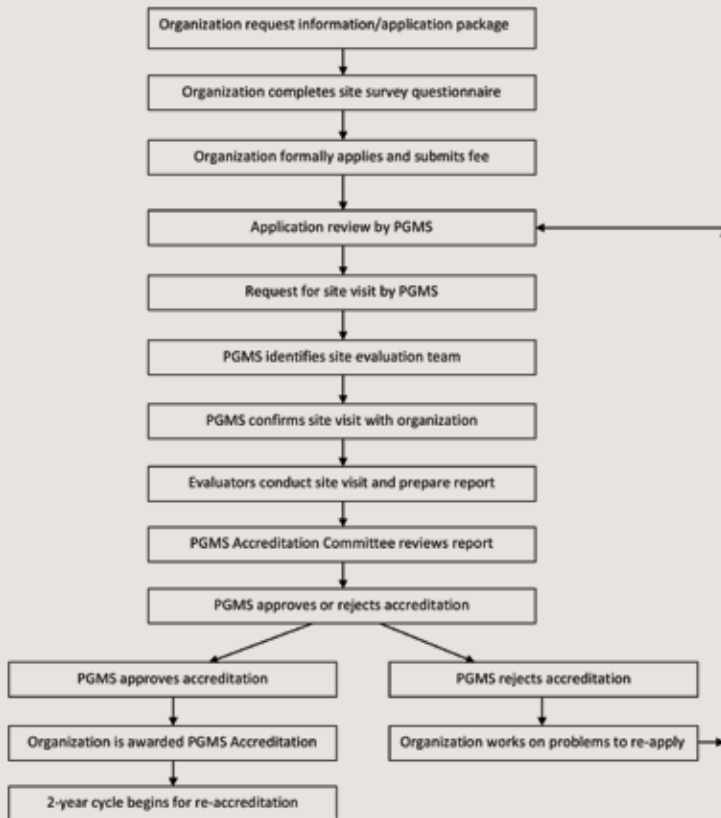
The **University of Delaware** (appropriate as the “First State”)—a beta-test site for the PGMS program—was the first to be awarded a 2-Star Accreditation; The **University of California-Davis** received at the same time the first 4-Star Accreditation. Also recognized thus far are the **College of Wooster** with a 2-star Accreditation, and the **Georgia Institute of Technology** with a 3-Star Accreditation. Several other institutions are already in the process of setting site evaluations.

“Applying to be evaluated in the PGMS Landscape Management & Operations Accreditation was one of the best decisions we have ever



Left page: Georgia Tech. Above, from left: Tyson Mantor and Cary Avery, University of California Davis, Joseph Jackson, PGMS accreditation facilitator, and Mike Loftus, University of Delaware.

## PGMS Grounds Accreditation Program Flowchart



From left: PGMS Accreditation site evaluators John Burns, University of Texas Austin, and Ron Hostick, California Polytechnic Institute, are briefed by Cary Davis during the two-day evaluation visit of the University of California Davis.

communication, values ecosystem services, manages resources within natural limitations, evaluates existing natural resources to preserve and conserve, establishes environmental policies and evaluation processes, and implements environmentally sustainable initiatives.

As part of the *Economic Performance* review, evaluators hone in on the applicant's use of renewable and sustainable resources, elimination or reduction of the use of resources that are difficult or impossible to renew, improved grounds management performance through policies and programs, the investigation and use of advanced and emerging technologies, the conducting of life-cycle assessments and costing, and the contingency plans that reflect budget reductions.

*Social Responsibility* is the third broad category of review, and here, PGMS accreditation evaluators look to see that ecosystems are safe, healthy, and productive; natural processes and human activities coexist; stakeholders are involved to define and link long-term maintenance strategies; new resources and technologies that enhance the user's quality of life and the environment are being found and utilized; routine assessment of training and development needs are performed; and workforce environment is responsive to employee's health, safety, and welfare needs.

The PGMS Landscape Management and Operations Accreditation verifies and recognizes an environmental management systems approach applied to a grounds management template. It is PGMS's belief that to meet current demanding environmental challenges and expectations, grounds and landscape operational functions should integrate effectively with sound management strategies.

This accreditation offers the roadmap for this process and provides organizations with the following benefits:

1. Utilizes a systematic and objective assessment of an organization's grounds management component by a nationally recognized independent entity;

made," says Cary Avery, Certified Grounds Manager (CGM), associate director for grounds & landscape services for the University of California-Davis. "Collectively the management team, staff, and administration all participated in the evaluation process. We were able to walk away with a wealth of knowledge for industry best practices in contemporary grounds management strategies that focused on environmental stewardship, economic performance, and social responsibility."

To provide a high level of expertise for its program, PGMS has retained the services of Joseph B. Jackson, a CGM and the former facilities director at Duke University, as its landscape management and operations accreditation facilitator. We have additionally initiated training of site evaluators who must be proven grounds professionals, preferably CGMs. Part of Jackson's role is to be available to assist applicants in preparing for and, most important, becoming successful in the accreditation process.

### ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS

"Receiving the accreditation requires responding to 38 best practices derived from 18 key principles on effective grounds management categories," Jackson points out. The key principles are outlined in three broad areas of review.

In the *Environmental Stewardship* category, PGMS looks at how the grounds operations provides leadership and effective



College of Wooster.

2. Increases the organization's ability to realize the highest return on its grounds investment;
3. Provides a means of evaluating the grounds program against industry standards and best practices to improve performance;
4. Evaluates the grounds program relative to established benchmarks for grounds excellence and environmental awareness;
5. Ensures that the grounds component within the organization is properly set up to best implement existing and new stewardship and sustainability initiatives;
6. Reinforces grounds management focus on productivity and effectiveness through critical evaluation of programs and services;
7. Integrates activities that exhibit a proactive approach to ensuring the success of grounds related projects;
8. Demonstrates that the organization is dedicated to the continuous improvement of grounds management practices and successful in translating good management to good grounds;
9. Promotes predictability and consistency in achieving grounds management obligations;
10. Obtains stakeholder feedback and participation in meeting

- grounds component goals and objectives; and
11. Generates information for grounds adaptation measures that align with the organizations capacity to meet maintenance requirements.

#### **CHALLENGING PERCEPTIONS**

In addition to an onsite visual inspection of the applicant campus and discussion with chief grounds personnel, PGMS evaluators challenge grounds crew on their perception of the operations as well as various stakeholders including students and faculty.

Offers UC-Davis' Avery, "I would strongly recommend the accreditation to anyone who is serious about looking at (Best Practices) and how you can improve your programs, and what your strengths are."

Beau Mastrine, CGM, director of grounds at the College of Wooster, agrees. "The PGMS Landscape Management and Operations Accreditation has helped us identify areas of improvement. It has also reassured our board of trustees and administration that the Grounds Department is continually thriving to make sustainable operating decisions now and in the future."

Getting started in the accreditation process is easy.



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An interested applicant simply requests and completes an application and a site survey questionnaire and submits back to PGMS. There is no obligation on the part of the applicant until an agreement has been reached with PGMS.

Applications are reviewed by the PGMS Accreditation Committee, which then initiates the scheduling of a site visit by a team of PGMS evaluators who will conduct the evaluation and prepare a report. The report is then reviewed by the Accreditation Committee for needed clarifications. The committee approves or denies accreditation and provides a detailed report of its findings. Applicants need to do a fair amount of prep work prior to the evaluation team showing up on site, and a guideline of the types of questions and materials that will be required is provided by PGMS in advance.

“The Evaluation Report given to the Accreditation candidate institution details the peer review finding, the assessment process, and rating level,” explains Jackson. “This document serves

as a continuous improvement tool for the grounds organization.”


A goal of the accreditation program is to be attractive and feasible for all grounds organizations represented by the PGMS membership and other professionals responsible for large campus (educational, corporate, and/or athletic) landscape services or overall grounds operations. Cost calculations include all necessary travel expenses needed to send a team of professional evaluators to the evaluation site, as well as general administration/professional support. Fees will range from \$7,500–\$20,000 depending on the size and complexity of the grounds operation being evaluated.

According to Jackson, “The accreditation process and subsequent follow-up measures combine to exemplify a commitment to continuous improvement. The PGMS Landscape Management and Operations Accreditation is initially awarded for three years. An accredited facility must then seek to be reaccredited through a mandatory update report provided by the organization that verifies the continuing conformance to best practices and the adherence to the principles of the accreditation.”

With peer evaluations and other assessments and procedures,

this program goes much deeper than what some might call a “beautification recognition.” During our testing stage, it was rewarding to watch as evaluation marks were tabulated and to see how final result differed from the first impression of a campus’ maintenance.

In a time of tight budgets and high competition for students, a first impression and exciting curb appeal can make a difference. Knowing that a campus’ grounds and landscape operations are running at a level of excellence is worth the investment necessary to challenge oneself in the PGMS Landscape Management and Operations Accreditation process.

For more information on the PGMS Accreditation program or to secure an application, visit [www.pgms.org](http://www.pgms.org) or contact [pgms@assnhqtrs.com](mailto:pgms@assnhqtrs.com). 

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