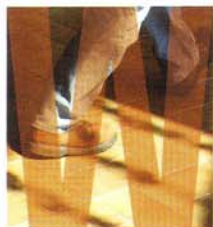


# A SENSE OF PLACE

By Gage Paine



When was the last time you walked through the Sombrilla at dusk? Have you ever traversed the Downtown Campus in the cool of the morning before anyone else was there? Being on campus by myself, or nearly so, is one of my favorite ways to experience UTSA.

Sounds a little odd, doesn't it? Especially when you know that my favorite time to leave the office is when classes are changing. The hundreds of people moving from place to place impart an energy that is infectious and revitalizing in the middle of a full workday. Being out and participating in the life of the campus is also a wonderful way to quite literally see why UTSA exists and to get a feel for the great work being done here by everyone connected to this university.

And yet, I still love to walk across campus when it is nearly deserted. It is one of the ways I develop a sense of place that connects me to our university.

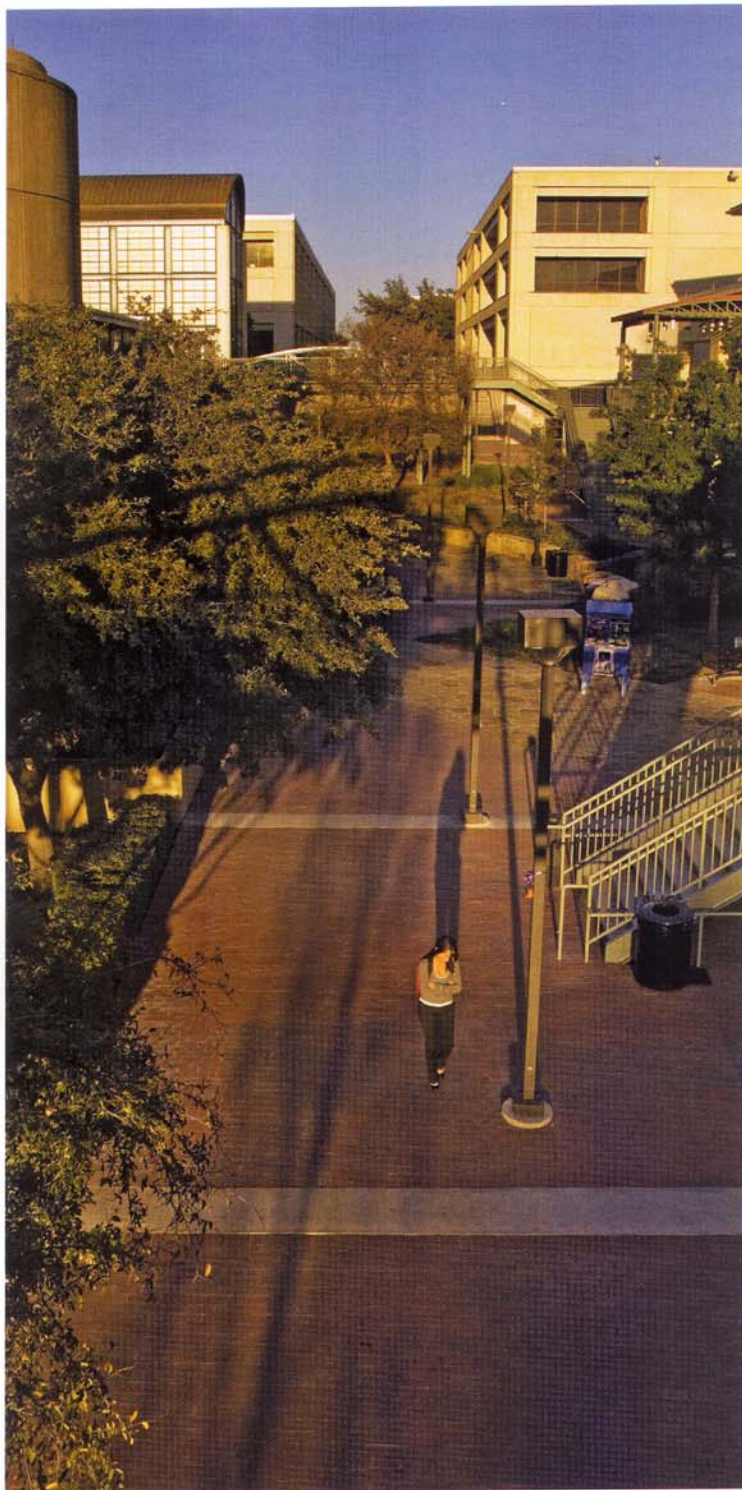
The phrase "sense of place" has different connotations to suit a variety of uses—architectural, environmental and psychological. The definition that most captures the way I'm using this phrase (offered by Yan Xu on the East St. Louis Action Research Project page for the University of Illinois) is this one: "A sense of place is a sense of the beauty and the wealth of phenomena that comprise a particular place."

I first experienced this sense of place on my undergraduate campus. On a dismal, drizzling Sunday afternoon I was tired—tired of studying, tired of the weather, tired of sharing a small residence hall room. In spite of the miserable weather, I pulled on a sweatshirt and went for a walk. I ignored my usual routes and went to an unfamiliar part of the campus. Before too long, I quit looking at my feet and started noticing the wonderful trees around me. Soon I realized that the architecture on this older part of campus was more ornate and much more interesting than most of the buildings I frequented. Thanks to the time of day and the messy weather, I was the only one there. By the time my hair was dripping and my shoes were soaked through, I was in a completely different frame of mind and, though I didn't realize it then, I had an entirely new sense of that place.

A solitary walk across campus became an irregular but important part of my undergraduate experience. Walking the campus at "off" times, I saw different parts of it—noticed nooks I wouldn't have seen on a busy day, stopped to read plaques on the walls. Thinking about it now, 30 years later, I still experience a sense of my place there.

One of the best things about being involved with a university is that every campus is a unique physical space with an incredible variety of ways to engage in a vibrant campus life that is always new and interesting. If you haven't been to UTSA in a while, I encourage you to take time for a visit. If you are an alumnus, look for your favorite spot on campus and see if it looks as you remembered it or if there is a new building there. Get a feel for UTSA as it is today. Come to a basketball game, a play, or a meeting or lecture. Find time to walk across campus when students are changing classes. Even if you are not an alumnus, or maybe especially if you are not, a campus visit is worthwhile. And, for everyone, if you really want to get a sense of the place and feel a connection to the UTSA of today, experience the campus at twilight or in the cool of the morning.

I promise you it will be worth the walk. Enjoy.



**Gage E. Paine** is vice president for student affairs. She writes a regular column for the student affairs newsletter, [www.utsa.edu/students/sanews](http://www.utsa.edu/students/sanews).