

ALONSO NOBLE

Assistant Superintendent, Facilities Management

From the very beginning of my career at UC San Diego, I have benefited from the experience and knowledge of various co-workers, who either were more senior, in higher job classifications, or both. In January 1985, I was hired as a groundskeeper. In this role I interacted with irrigation specialists, equipment operators, tree trimmers, mechanics, lead groundskeepers, supervisors, and the grounds superintendent. These interactions were not merely social. They also involved cooperative work performance, learning opportunities, and new skill development.

During this period, upward mobility was rare because people stayed in their positions. In spite of this, I believed that it was a good investment to learn as much as I could from those who were willing to teach me, so that I could increase my value to the organization. By acquiring new skills, I thought I was preparing myself for that time when an opportunity to move to a different and higher position became available. Thus, a series of learning activities enabled me to reach my current role as facilities management assistant superintendent in which I am responsible for landscape maintenance in all Housing and Dining Services areas, the Early Childhood Education Center, and The Geisel University House. Also, I am concurrently responsible for campus waste management, tree trimming operations, and the Horticultural Integrated Pest Management Program.

I would like to highlight four opportunities that I feel are the most important:

**Acting Lead/"Crew Chief" Assignments.** I worked for lead groundskeeper Robert Jones who routinely assigned me to be an unofficial "crew chief" for various group projects. Through these assignments, Robert showed me that merely calling a number of employees to work together does not mean that one has a team. Additionally, I learned that leading a group without defined authority and responsibilities does not make one a work leader. Nevertheless I learned how to prioritize tasks, find co-workers with skills that matched the assignments, and how to "delegate" small details to others. Eventually I was reclassified as a lead groundskeeper, thanks to the previous mentoring and on-the-job assignments from Robert. Robert believed that giving me opportunities and providing support to acquire new skills was an investment worth making.

**Large Landscape Equipment Training.** While working as a groundskeeper, I was able to observe work in other campus locations and meet other Landscape Services staff. I constantly interacted with the equipment operators who mowed, swept and renovated the campus' large turf areas. Robert Jones, who by this time was assistant superintendent, was in charge of the equipment operators and still my supervisor. Large landscape equipment operation was a step up, and being supportive, Robert gave permission for me to train with the operators. I would be ready when an opening for an equipment operator arose.

**Professional Development.** Former Assistant Vice Chancellor John “Jack” Hug inspired me to consider attending the APPA (Association of Physical Plant Administrators) Institute. APPA administrators trained both incumbent and prospective leaders in all aspects of physical plant facilities administration. With AVC Hug’s endorsement, I attended two of the four Institutes required for graduation and certification. At the same time, my supervisor continued to link me with project managers to gain experience reading landscape drawings and blue prints. Lead Building Maintenance Worker Elva Gibson took me under her tutelage to teach me the ropes of landscape construction. By sharing theory, providing opportunities to practice, and critiquing my work, she helped me learn the skill set necessary for becoming senior grounds supervisor, another step up.

**Assistant Landscape Superintendent.** As senior grounds supervisor, I worked for Landscape Manager Chuck Morgan. Through his encouragement and example, I more vigorously pursued any available and applicable classroom training that Staff Education and Development offered towards my management and leadership career goals. Chuck not only supported this, but also encouraged others in similar positions to do the same. Landscape Architect Diana Biegner pushed me to learn more about landscape designs and functions. In many informal sessions, she tutored me in the elements of landscape design, especially in an academic setting. This led to my better understanding of and appreciation for the value of the open spaces.

By taking on more responsibilities, I was eventually reclassified to assistant landscape superintendent. When Chuck needed someone to run the campus Waste Management Program, he offered the position to me on a trial basis. I had little knowledge in this field, but Chuck had confidence in my ability and I accepted the additional responsibility. I also began a UC-wide waste management internship program and became a member of a working group that reported to the UC Office of the President. Many of these waste managers became my mentors and we interacted through correspondence, conferences and campus visits. That was 2005, and today, I still hold the concurrent positions of assistant landscape superintendent, campus waste manager and campus tree trimming supervisor.