



photo: Matt Hirji

[Rachel Singer](#); Gateway Staff;

Nov. 30, 2011

A rock garden landscape for student learning on campus

The University of Alberta's earth and atmospheric sciences department is in the middle of installing the second phase of the new geosciences rock garden located outside Biological Sciences.

"The concept of the geosciences garden is to teach students within our faculty some of the skills and get them comfortable with some of the experiences in the campus environment before we send them off to field school," said John Waldron, an EAS professor and part of the team who has helped design and implement the rock garden.

The project was initially launched in 2008 with the support of a science faculty fund, allowing 15 rocks to be installed as part of the first phase.

The department later received a second grant from a teaching and learning fund, which has allowed them to move forward with project's second phase.

This phase will extend the rock garden from Tory Lecture to the Faculty Club with 40 additional rocks, and will be arranged in a way similar to the way that a real landscape would tell a story, according to Waldron.

"The geosciences rock garden represents a traverse across the Canadian cordillera and across the sedimentary basin that occupies Alberta and Saskatchewan onto the Canadian Shield," Waldron explained.

"We will have samples of rocks that are quite representative from B.C. across to the Canadian Shield."

Some of the variety of rocks featured in the garden include sedimentary rocks, limestone, granitoid rocks and metamorphic rocks.

Waldron said the largest rock weighs about 16 tons, while the smallest one weighs a couple hundred pounds. Some rocks are also millions of years old, including a group of rocks from the Triassic period that are 200 million years old.

Part of the phase two installations will also include a rock of magnetite buried at a secret location on campus. Magnetite is an iron ore that is very magnetic, and it will be used by geophysics classes in order to teach them how to search for magnetic rocks.

Although the rock garden will mainly be used by EAS students, Waldron hopes it will also be used and enjoyed by the rest of the community.

"The primary focus is the support of our own students, but we also have the rest of the community in mind as well," Waldron said. "We hope that members of the public, students in other classes, and school teachers with their classes will come to learn."

Phase two of the geosciences rock garden is expected to be completed this summer.