

Ashley N. Steffens

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[Steffens@uga.edu](mailto:Steffens@uga.edu) | [REDACTED]

Colorado State University, Department of Horticulture & Landscape Architecture  
Statement on Leadership Philosophy, Style, and Vision

My leadership philosophy is grounded in collaboration, transparency, shared governance, and a deep commitment to supporting the growth and well-being of faculty, staff, and students. I believe that strong academic leadership begins with listening, understanding the unique strengths, aspirations, and challenges of a department, and then working together to advance a shared vision rooted in trust, respect, and collective purpose and accountability. I view leadership as a way to facilitate and empower others and create the conditions in which people can thrive, ideas can flourish, and meaningful innovation can occur.

My leadership style reflects open communication, collective decision-making, and evidence-based planning that balances ambition with responsibility. I prioritize clarity in expectations, fairness in processes, and consistency in actions. I value a culture where diverse expertise is recognized and celebrated, where individuals feel heard and supported, and where collaborative work strengthens the department's overall impact. I also believe in accountability, both to institutional values and to one another, as a foundation for long-term health and success. Whether working with faculty on strategic hiring, supporting new research initiatives, or developing policies that shape the student experience, I strive to foster an environment where decisions are transparent, data-informed, and aligned with the department's mission.

Perhaps one of the best ways to describe my leadership is to provide an example. When I stepped into my current role in 2020 as the only Associate Dean, the College was emerging from a prolonged period of financial strain, having lost \$80,000–\$100,000 annually for nearly a decade. Once I gained a clear understanding of the budget model and its strong connection to course revenue management (CRM), I expanded our general education offerings and oversaw the development and approval of three additional courses, a new minor, and two new certificate programs. Because our faculty were already teaching at full capacity, I sought new instructional talent by reaching out to industry professionals, qualified alumni, and graduate teaching assistants. Although there was initial concern about maintaining instructional quality, these hires performed exceptionally well, diversified our teaching pool, and allowed us to grow our revenue responsibly.

The resulting budget stabilization and growth enabled the College to make long-deferred investments: hiring new staff positions, adding faculty and lecturers, and purchasing more than a million dollars' worth of equipment and furnishings. To ensure that new resources were allocated

equitably, transparently, and strategically, I worked with members of our College to develop an Equipment and Facilities Policy that formalized decision-making criteria for funding requests. I also partnered with our CFO to create clear, consistent programmatic spending guidelines based on historical patterns and demonstrated outcomes. These changes increased transparency, aligned spending with College priorities, and empowered program coordinators to plan more effectively.

My vision as Department Head for the Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture would start with listening and learning, from both the members of the HLA community but also the College level leadership, to start building collective strategies for departmental and programmatic successes. These strategies should closely align with Colorado State University's land-grant mission of access, service, and the creation and dissemination of knowledge that benefits the public. HLA is uniquely positioned at the intersection of scientific inquiry, design innovation, and community engagement. I envision the department as a model of interdisciplinary excellence that integrates horticultural science, landscape architecture, ecological stewardship, and community-based practice to address the pressing environmental and societal challenges facing Colorado and the broader region.

This vision includes strengthening the department's academic programs, supporting faculty research and creative work, expanding experiential learning opportunities, and deepening partnerships with industry, alumni, advisory councils, and community organizations. It also includes fostering innovation through collaborative research clusters, cross-disciplinary teaching initiatives, and external funding strategies that elevate the visibility and impact of both the horticulture and landscape architecture programs. As a land-grant institution, CSU has a responsibility to serve diverse communities across the state, and I see HLA playing a central role in outreach efforts that support sustainable agriculture, resilient landscapes, community design, and environmental health.

Naturally, there will need to be some time devoted to learning about the HLA community and developing common shared goals that strengthen the unit. Above all, my goal is to help cultivate a thriving, collaborative department that supports student success and statewide extension, advances meaningful scholarship, and demonstrates leadership in the fields of horticulture and landscape architecture. I am committed to guiding the department with integrity, creativity, and an unwavering dedication to excellence, ensuring that programs remain vibrant, relevant, and deeply connected to the needs of Colorado and the broader global community.