The Mission of the Arnold Arboretum

The Arnold Arboretum is held in trust by Harvard University according to the terms of the Indenture of Trust of 1872. This legal document provided for the creation of the living collections as a practical demonstration of the variety of plants that could be grown in this climate. It also mandated the appointment of the Arnold Professor to manage the Arboretum and to teach the knowledge of trees and related topics.

Although there have been many significant changes in the fields of botany and horticulture and the Arnold Arboretum itself has fulfilled many different purposes during the past century, the basic premises of the Indenture still hold. It is most appropriate to reemphasize the traditional strengths of the Arnold Arboretum through a strong focus on botany and horticulture.

The mission of the Arnold Arboretum may be outlined as follows:

(1) to develop, curate, and maintain a well-documented collection of living woody plants from around the world that are hardy in the Boston area;

(2) to study these plants and their relatives and associates in nature through the maintenance of a herbarium and library and through directly related research in botany and horticulture;

(3) to provide instruction in botany, horticulture, dendrology, and other fields related to the living collections.

As part of the City of Boston's park system, the Arboretum's Jamaica Plain site functions as an outdoor museum open to the public. The highest priority of the Arboretum's administration is the proper curation and maintenance of these living collections. Proper curation includes acquisitions through field expeditions and exchanges with other institutions as well as cultivation and propagation of existing specimens to enhance and maintain the scientific and instructional value of the collections.

The second priority of the Arboretum, the study of its collections and their relatives and associates in nature, directly benefits the curation of the collections. The preserved collections and the library are indispensable tools for this research, and their curation and maintenance are therefore essential. All of the Arboretum's resources—the living collections, the preserved collections, and the library—are available for scholarly research. The director of the Arnold Arboretum is responsible for ensuring that adequate and up-to-date materials are available for present and future scholars to teach and to pursue research in the areas represented.

Educational programs are the Arboretum's third-highest priority. The Arnold Arboretum offers a variety of programs for public instruction in horticulture, botany, dendrology, and landscape gardening and, in addition, disseminates knowledge of plants through its publications. The director and Arboretum professional staff may also offer courses, as appropriate, within other academic programs of Harvard University.