

# USU Landscape Design & Construction Students Shine at National Competition

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By Lynnette Harris | April 23, 2026



Utah State University students made an impressive showing at the 2026 National Collegiate Landscape Competition (NCLC), earning several high-ranking finishes against a very competitive national field. Competing against 726 students from 54 universities, USU's team brought home three third-place finishes and two additional competitors placed in the top 10 of their events—a remarkable achievement for a program participating in the event for just the second year.

USU's team includes students in the S.J. & Jessie E. Quinney College of Agriculture & Natural Resources Landscape Design and Construction Program, some at the university's Logan campus and some at USU Distance Education sites.



Hosted annually, NCLC is the largest collegiate landscaping competition in the country, bringing together students, faculty, and industry leaders for hands-on contests, professional development workshops, and networking opportunities in the landscape and horticulture industries.

### Student Award Highlights

USU students excelled across individual and team events:

- Scott Morley earned 3rd place in the Compact Excavator Competition. Notably, Morley and two others tied for the top score in executing the required tasks, so award rankings came down to completion time.
- Lydia Thurgood earned 3rd place in Exterior Landscape Design and placed 6th in the Sales Presentation Competition.
- Elyse Reilly earned 3rd place in Construction Cost Estimating.
- Scott Morley and Danielle Carlson placed 7th in Irrigation Troubleshooting, a team-based competition.

Other USU students in USU's Residential Landscape Design and Construction (RLDC) program who competed include Molli Murri, Lily Matsen, Theresa Lara, Sterling Brinkerhoff, and Sophia Christensen, who are at USU's Logan campus, and team members Anika Davis, Scott Morley, and Danielle Carlson are students in the distance education program.

Faculty members Lance Stott, Rachel Broadbent, and Pamela George helped students prepare for their events in the competition and accompanied them to the week-long event.



### A Launchpad for Professional Development

According to George, professional practice assistant professor in the RLDC program, competitions like NCLC play a vital role in preparing students for careers in the landscape industry.

“The number one reason NCLC is so valuable for students is professional development,” George said.

Preparation for NCLC requires students to commit weeks or even months of independent practice, often going far beyond classroom instruction. Students select competitions based on their interests and prior experience from coursework or internships, then deepen their technical skills through focused preparation. Many competitions are team-based, giving students valuable experience collaborating under pressure.

Beyond the contests themselves, students participate in hands-on workshops led by industry professionals, attend a national career fair, and connect directly with leading landscape companies. These connections often translate into internships, job offers, and long-term professional networks. In fact, during her competition, Thurgood was encouraged by industry judges to apply for a position with their company.

Students also toured Proven Winners nurseries, gaining behind-the-scenes exposure to large-scale operations and leaving with direct contacts for future employment or industry partnerships.

“As a faculty member, I enjoy connecting with other professors across the nation and finding out what’s working and what’s not working in their programs,” George added. “It helps me reevaluate what we’re doing and see how we can continue to improve our program.”

George and her fellow faculty mentors are enthusiastic about the team’s strong finishes across multiple events, increasing participation from both main campus and

distance education students, and the growing Residential Landscape Design and Construction program.

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