

Student Perceptions of Urban Forestry as a Career Path



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Purpose

To understand how students perceive urban forestry as a career path

Justification

- The world is looking to urban trees to solve critical problems by producing ecosystem services
- Urban trees need to be managed by specialized professionals to produce the most benefit possible
- The number of students studying urban forestry in college is inadequate to fill the future ranks of the urban forestry profession



Research Questions

1. Are students exposed to urban forestry as a career?
2. After watching a 3-minute video on urban forestry as a career path, what are student’s impressions?
3. How do demographics contribute to exposure to urban forestry?
4. What professional support mechanisms do students use to judge potential career paths?

Methods

- Survey of 1,050 students (average age 20.9) from 18 universities across the country
- Targeted students that have indicated some interest in natural resources or life sciences by administering survey to introductory classes in those disciplines
- Demographics of sample very similar to national averages of university students per US Dept. of Ed (age, race, gender, and socio-economic status)
- Students were asked about their perceptions of how processes and functions typical to a profession (professional support mechanisms) lend credibility to a profession
- Students were asked about their previous knowledge of urban forestry
- Students then watched a 3-minute video on urban forestry as a career
- Students were then asked about their new impression of urban forestry as a career

Question 1: Are students exposed to urban forestry as a career?

Previous Knowledge of Urban Forestry was POOR

- 9% had previous exposure to urban forestry as a career
- 5% knew ‘what it takes’ to be an urban forester
- 7% knew what urban forestry would be like as a career
- 14% knew what urban forestry is
- 7% could accurately describe urban forestry

Analysis: Before viewing the video, very few students strongly agreed they knew what urban forestry was at all and/or what it is like as a career

Intervention: Students watched 3-min video



Question 2: After the video, what were student impressions of urban forestry as a career?

Impression of Urban Forestry as a Career was FAIR

- 89% felt respect for what urban foresters do for our communities
- 74% thought it would be an interesting career path
- 68% felt it would be a rewarding career choice
- 51% would recommend this career to a loved one
- 24% might have pursued urban forestry as a career, had they known about it

Note: Significant correlation between previous knowledge and impression as a career (.340, p<.001)

Analysis: Impressions of urban forestry as a career were mild

Question 3: How do demographics contribute to exposure to urban forestry?

| More Exposure | Less Exposure |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Family Income \$0-100k | Family Income \$100k or greater |
| Urban or Rural setting growing up | Suburban setting growing up |
| Males Are Exposed to Urban Forestry Twice as Much as Females | |
| All Races Experienced Same Rate of Exposure | |

Analysis: Female students, suburban students, and the wealthiest students are being exposed the least

Question 4: What professional support mechanisms do students use to judge potential careers?

| Most Important (out of 18 questions) | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1 st | Passion and enthusiasm for the work |
| 2 nd | Meaningfulness of the work |
| 3 rd | Opportunities for new challenges |
| 4 th | The level of job satisfaction |
| 5 th | The type of work environment (always indoors, outdoors, or mixed) |
| 6 th | The profession has an active and helpful professional society |

Analysis: Students were more concerned with pursuing personal interests than achieving tangible rewards

Conclusions

- Urban forestry as a career boasts many of the most important things students consider in a profession
- However, many students don’t know urban forestry exists until they’ve already made a career decision
- We know which students are most likely to have prior exposure to urban forestry and which students we aren’t reaching early enough
- Previous exposure causes improved reaction to urban forestry as a career
- Exposing students to urban forestry before college should be a priority

Acknowledgments

This research is part of Urban Forestry 2020, a multi-agency research effort examining the profession of urban forestry itself. It is funded in part by a grant from the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council, USDA Forest Service. #UrbanForestry2020 or urbanforestry.frec.vt.edu/2020 or koherrin@vt.edu



About Keith O’Herrin

After many years working in municipal forestry, Keith is currently pursuing a Ph.D. – Urban Forestry at Virginia Tech advised by Drs. Day and Wiseman.