# **Student Perceptions of Urban Forestry as a Career Path** Keith O'Herrin<sup>1</sup>, Susan D. Day<sup>1,2</sup>, and P. Eric Wiseman<sup>1</sup>

# **VirginiaTech** Invent the Future

### 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-minuite video on urban forestry as a career
- Students were then asked about their new impression of urban forestry as a career

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### **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**



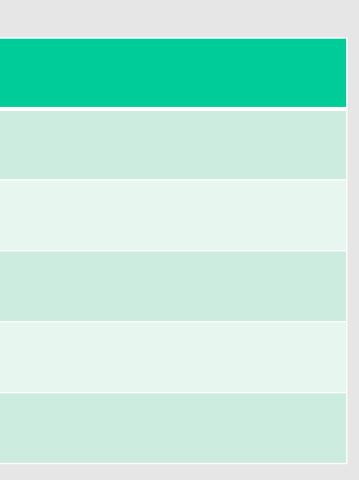
# **Question 2: After the video, what were student** impressions of urban forestry as a career?

#### **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 E |
|---------------------------------------|--------|
| Family Income \$0-100k                | Family |
| Urban or Rural setting growing up     | Suburb |
| Males Are Exposed to Urban Forestry T |        |
| All Races Experienced                 | Same R |

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 <sup>st</sup> | Passion and enthusiasm for the wo  |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Meaningfulness of the work         |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> | Opportunities for new challenges   |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> | The level of job satisfaction      |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> | The type of work environment (al   |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> | The profession has an active and h |

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

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#### **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.

#### **Exposure**

y Income \$100k or greater ban setting growing up Twice as Much as Females Rate of Exposure

lways indoors, outdoors, or mixed) helpful professional society

