

Urban Forestry 2020: A Critical Look at the Profession

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Background • Question • Methods

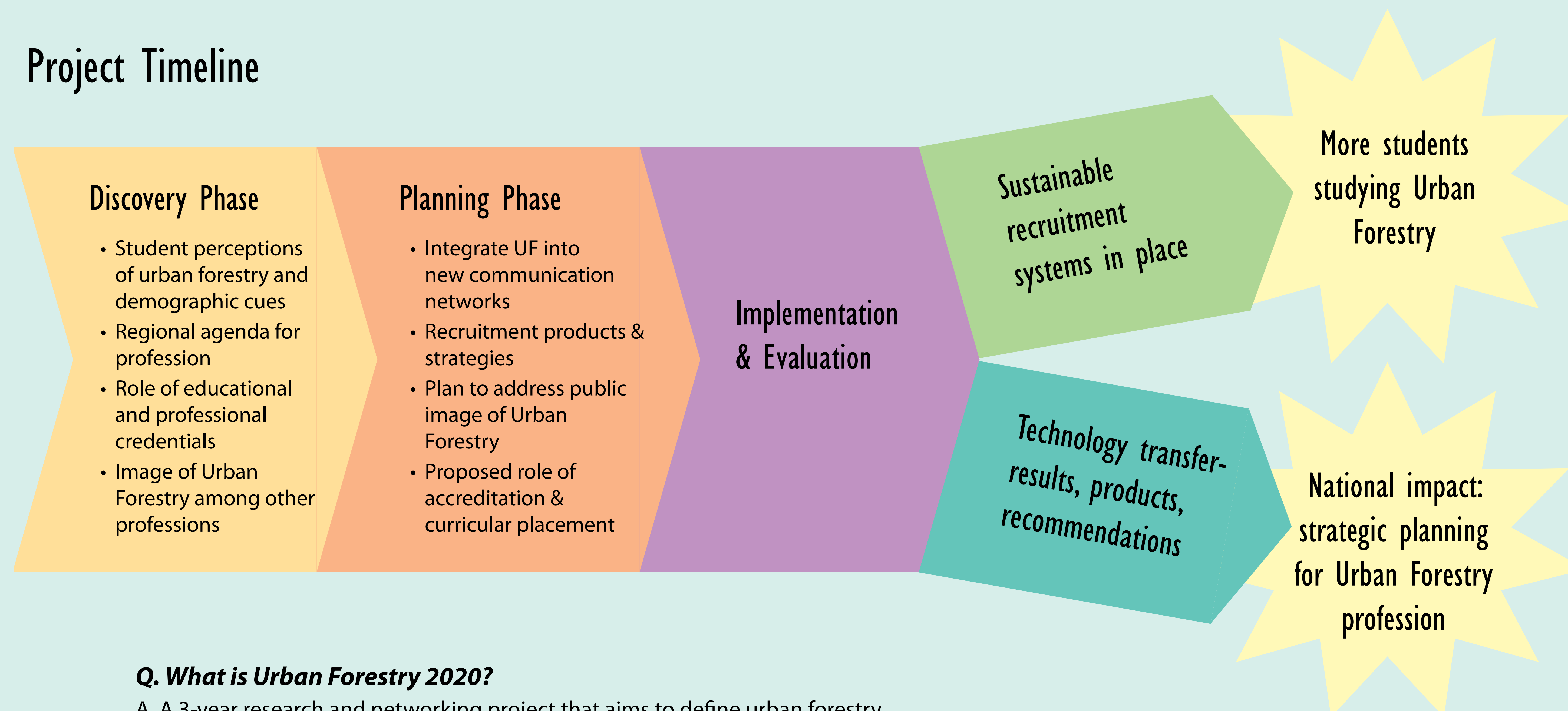
What is urban forestry? Who practices it and where? Urban trees are significant components of urban ecosystems and their management is increasingly linked with other aspects of green infrastructure management. Together the management of urban greenspaces has a significant influence on urban ecosystems. Policies and practices that direct urban forest and green infrastructure management may have far reaching consequences and ideally weave together complex disciplinary expertise from many forms of applied ecology. Yet many allied professions are engaged in urban ecosystem management and the practice of urban forestry in particular—planners, foresters, landscape architects, engineers, developers, nonprofits, landowners, and others. As society places increasing emphasis on managing urban

ecosystems for both environmental sustainability and human health, the roles of these professions and a host of new interdisciplinary careers (e.g., sustainability coordinators, directors of biodiversity) are in flux. We developed three linked schematics illustrating the relationship between expertise, practice, research, and responsibility which were then reviewed by a national interdisciplinary group representing many of these professions and stakeholders as part of Urban Forestry 2020, a project supported by the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council. We quantify and analyze the commonalities among urban ecology, urban forestry, and related disciplines in the context of urban management focused on ecosystem service provision.

Results • Conclusions

The body of knowledge considered to be encompassed by urban forestry is extremely broad and has considerable overlap with the discipline of urban ecology. However, overlap is also identified with planning, engineering, arboriculture, horticulture, landscape design, soil science, building construction, and other disciplines and professions. Overlaps among all of these are present in the body of knowledge, the educational and professional backgrounds of those who are effectively managing the urban forest and urban ecosystem, and the management scope of professionals. However, we found numerous misalignments amongst knowledge, educational and professional backgrounds, and who practices. Some of these misalignments are related to issues with scale in urban systems. For example, ecosystem processes may need to be monitored and managed at a large scale, while management decisions are made based on land ownership or regulatory authority. Other misalignments may be related to university curricula and graduate programs and their disciplinary traditions. We explore how these misalignments affect the professional development of urban foresters and related urban ecosystem managers as we approach a new frontier in urban ecosystem management.

Project Timeline



Where should we go from here? Defining the Urban Forestry profession

Urban Forestry is at a critical point in its development. Our urban forests are receiving more attention than ever thanks to accelerating interest in the benefits of urban forests and environmental management tools such as green infrastructure. In addition to the efforts of UF2020, professional organizations such as the International Society of Arboriculture and the Society of American Foresters are engaged in market research to understand the nature and needs of the profession. Professions advance and develop when a wide array of professional support systems are in place. Our goal in UF2020 is to understand the current status of the profession and where we should head from here. By working with discussion groups and our steering committee, we are starting to bring the urban forestry profession into sharper focus.

Q. What is Urban Forestry 2020?

A. A 3-year research and networking project that aims to define urban forestry profession, understand its relationship with allied professions, and make strategic recommendations to improve effectiveness in managing urban forest ecosystems.

Q. Who is involved in Urban Forestry 2020?

A. The project is run by a consortium of four universities (Virginia Tech, University of Maryland, West Virginia University, and Virginia State) and includes a national steering committee. UF2020 is supported in part by the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council (USDA Forest Service).

Q. What will the results of the project be?

A. A research-based assessment of how urban forestry is perceived as a profession by young people, employers, and allied professionals that will allow for analysis of the influence of demographics and professional support systems on these perceptions. Ultimately, the project will produce research-based recommendations for strategic planning.

Steering Committee Members

Sarah Anderson, Alliance for Community Trees	Jerri LaHaie, Society of Municipal Arborists
Pat Brewer, Bartlett Tree Experts	Julie Mawhorter, US Forest Service
Seth Brown, Water Environment Federation	James McGlone, VA Dept. of Forestry
Mark Buscaino, Casey Trees	Allan S. Mills, Virginia Commonwealth University
Keith Cline, Fairfax County, Virginia	Louise Murgia, Society of American Foresters
Robert Corletta, District Department of Transportation	David Myers, University of Maryland
Mike Galvin, SavATree Consulting Group	Steven F. Resh, Allegany College of Maryland
Jay Griles, Dominion Virginia Power	Paul Revell, VA Dept. of Forestry
Bob Hannah, WV Division of Forestry	David Rouse, American Planning Association
Jason Henning, The Davey Institute	Jim Schwab, American Planning Association
Brian Keilling, Dabney S. Lancaster Community College	Jim Skiera, International Society of Arboriculture
Steve Koehn, USDA Forest Service	Vincent Verweij, Arlington, Virginia

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