

TREE CARE INDUSTRY

M A G A Z I N E

The Official Publication of the Tree Care Industry Association

Volume XXIX, Number 5 - May 2018

The Trend in
Chippers Is
“**BULKING UP**”

*What to Know When
Gearing Up for
Spray Season*



**WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT**
Special Focus

URBAN FORESTRY: Define It and They Will Come

An update on the Urban Forestry 2020 study of recruitment into the profession

By Susan D. Day

In 2014, a multi-university initiative was launched to examine student recruitment into higher-education programs for urban forestry. This initiative, Urban Forestry 2020 (UF2020), is now coming to a close. Student recruitment was the starting place for this study, but it turned out to be just one facet of a much larger picture eventually examined by the UF2020 research team.

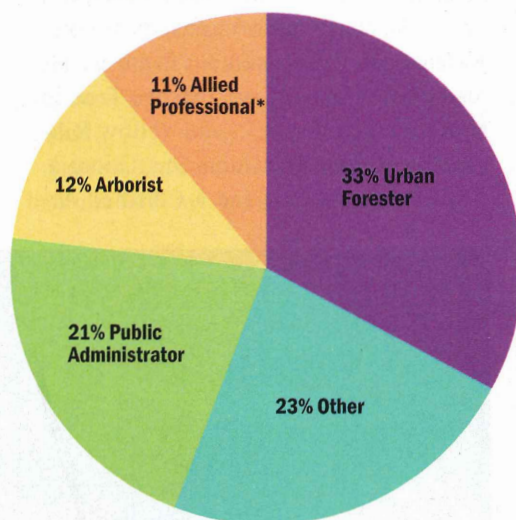
During the study, it became clear that the status and identity of the urban forestry profession itself – and its relation to both public perception and higher education – are essential to understanding how to best facilitate urban-forestry education and career development. To this end, a series of strategic recommendations being vetted by the UF2020 Steering Committee will be available on the website www.uf2020.frec.vt.edu, along with a series of data visualizations that are now available for download and public use.

Why should the state of the urban-forestry profession matter to those in the commercial tree care industry? An answer to that question appeared in a previous, more in-depth article about this study, “Looking at the Future of Careers in Urban Forestry,” in the May 2017 issue of *TCI Magazine*, and bears repeating here.

First, there are many professionals who shift career paths between commercial tree care and urban forestry. Second, commercial tree care companies often contract with municipalities, so changes in the profession can impact opportunities for both municipal employees as well as outside contractors and consultants. The best management and care for trees involves a broad community of people and professions – and the better the care for trees, the better for everyone.

What did UF2020 find?

The UF2020 team sought to inform strategic planning for the urban-forestry



* Such as civil engineer, landscape architect, and urban planner

The self-ascribed professional identity of individuals who manage urban trees and green spaces for local governments in the United States. Courtesy of UF2020.



profession and higher education. UF2020 focused on *urban forestry* as being distinct from *arboriculture*. In our study of urban forestry, conducted through survey research, document analysis and focus groups, certain trends became clear.

First, urban forestry continues to be a relatively unknown profession, and the scope and value of urban-forestry expertise is often misunderstood. This has repercussions for how urban-forestry jobs are advertised and filled and how higher education can link students to urban-forestry careers. In addition, although university students have extremely low awareness of urban forestry, students from a wide variety of backgrounds find it appealing once they learn more. This suggests that strategic action making these connections between the public, education and employment could result in profound changes in student recruitment.

Second, there are numerous misalignments of expertise within the profession. Some of these are subtle but can present bar-

riers to recruitment and movement within the profession. For example, within local governments, only 33 percent of those identified by their colleagues as responsible for managing urban trees self-identified as urban foresters, with an additional 12 percent identifying as arborists. The remainder describe their profession as public administration or one of many other disciplines ranging from engineering to planning. Urban-forest management is an interdisciplinary endeavor, but this creates challenges for writing position descriptions and advertising opportunities.

Many more challenges, including a lack of gender and racial and ethnic diversity among urban foresters, are highlighted in the data summaries available on the website. Although UF2020, funded by the U.S. Forest Service under advisement from the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council, has come to a close, the opportunity to strategically address these issues through cooperation across the profession and links between higher education and professional groups is just beginning. Strategic recommendations from UF2020 focus on four key areas:

- Shaping professional identity and public perception of urban forestry
- Building career networks for advancing, promoting and communicating expertise in urban forestry
- Linking the urban forestry profession with higher education
- Increasing student recruitment and awareness of urban forestry

As researchers and educators, we will continue to work with the UF2020 Steering Committee to establish a plan of action for strategic advancement in the profession of urban forestry.

Susan D. Day is an associate professor at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia, and project lead for the Urban Forestry 2020 initiative. For the full research team, visit the Urban Forestry 2020 website at www.uf2020.frec.vt.edu.

