

Nature Rx at Cornell: Engaging Students in Nature
Atkinson Center Topical Lunch
April 5, 2016

Attendees: Jennifer Austin, Mike Bishop, Lauren Chambliss, David Cutter, Dave Dietrich, Frank DiSalvo, Shura Gat, Katherine McComas, Gen Meredith, Chris Miller, Marc Magnus-Sharpe, Don Rakow, Linda Rayor, Phil Robertson, Ethan Stephenson, Catherine Thrasher-Carroll, Wendy Wolford.

What are the major challenges with getting students involved in Nature Rx?

CHALLENGE: a perception by students that they don't have time available in their schedules to spend time in nature.

RESPONSE: being in nature doesn't need to take much time; nature is all around us, especially on a campus like Cornell. "Nature is outside every door."

CHALLENGE: students feel that faculty convey a message that they should be working all the time.

RESPONSE: We need to get a counter-message out there that time spent of nature is of value and benefit.

CHALLENGE: a fear of nature, especially among more urban students.

RESPONSE: COE gets to work with the Pre-Freshman Summer Program and offer these mostly urban students some positive experiences in nature. Engage the gorge stewards in positive nature messaging when they provide freshman tours of the gorges.

CHALLENGE: Safety- some students, especially women, might feel unsafe walking or hiking alone.

RESPONSE: Can explore established organizations such as sororities or student orgs as structures within which outdoor activities can flourish.

CHALLENGE: Lack of knowledge among students of natural resources on campus.

RESPONSE: CUinNature website can help students find the nearest nature and how to get there. The site has info about what different locations have to offer. There is also a list of groups that have nature as a focus such as Dilmun Farms and the Cornell Outing Club.

Ideas for connecting students with the outdoors

1. Engage faculty in efforts:

- Faculty can create assignments that require time spent outside. e.g., a 20 question assignment in which students have to write down what they're seeing outdoors.
- Can start a tradition where it is expected that on a beautiful fall or spring day, the faculty and instructors who can take their classes outside, do so. Decrease barriers by providing folding chairs, get donations for picnic tables by alumni, and set up an outdoor classroom or two that can be reserved.
- Have faculty post casual office hours/meetings in appealing outdoor locations.
- Access the 200 faculty who are connected to the Living/Learning community that's part of Residential Programs. They often turn to nature-based programs but could use resources in

how to do it. The perception is that this current cohort of students are more inclined to look for guides than to go out exploring on their own.

2. Publicize the benefits of spending time in nature:

- Promote existing research on the efficacy of the time in nature and publicize it to students so they are aware that this might actually “gain” them time, rather than losing it.
- Tap alumni athletes to talk about how spending time in nature helps them manage their lives.
- Expand the Gannett (Cornell Health) initiative to prescribe time in nature for students with psychological/mental health issues.
- We need to give more tips on how to be in nature. Perhaps this could be a feature on the website – e.g., exercises in using the Five Senses.
- Make better use of social media, such as Instagram and YikYak to post images, testimonials from students.

Other approaches:

- A culture shift is needed- we need to interrupt the dependence on technology.
- The University of Minnesota has a center for health and spirituality where they are researching the impact of nature on health.
- The new Master of Public Health program is planning on hold an annual Public Health Symposium each October. This year might be a great time to partner with Nature Rx.
- There are several events such as Insectapalooza and Judy’s Day that could support the effort further if we can get more students there.