Exploring the Aesthetic Benefits of Arbor Landscaping at Boston College

Researchers: Kjirsten Rhee & Risa Kuroda

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Tara Pisani Gareau

Boston College, Morrissey College of Arts & Sciences

Environmental Studies Program

Abstract
This research paper aims to generate awareness on the importance of urban forests and tree conservation especially with regard to aesthetic impact on urban populations. Urban forestry is defined as all trees on urban land, which includes a mixture of planted and naturally regenerated trees. Urban life is generally characterized as life in a city or town. The disconnect from nature that urban life causes can contribute to negative health effects and influence the decisions that people make regarding resource use. Urban forests provide important benefits including biodiversity conservation, ecosystem services, as well as psychological and social benefits for people. Additionally, urban forests increase the aesthetic value of an area. They have been shown to improve the psychological and physiological well-being of urban inhabitants. This project elucidates the established benefits of arbor aesthetics and raises awareness of the hidden benefits of the trees on Boston College’s Chestnut Hill campus. In doing so this project creates a walking tour of BC’s significant trees and provides suggestions towards turning BC into an Arbor-Day certified campus. With this project the authors hope to rekindle the vital connection with nature that community members surrounding urban campuses may be missing.

Background on Urban Forestry
Urban forestry is defined as all trees on urban land, which includes a mixture of planted and naturally regenerated trees (US Department of Agriculture, 2016). These areas are becoming more important as well as more threatened as the population in urban areas continues to rise (see fig. 4-1, table 2.1) (Wyse, et al., 2015). Unfortunately, tree cover has been declining due to both natural and anthropogenic factors (US Department of Agriculture, 2016). This is a problem because urban forests provide important benefits including biodiversity conservation, ecosystem services, as well as psychological and social benefits for people (Wyse, et al., 2015). About 85% of people live in urban areas which points to the importance of urban forestry and the great influence that it has on the day-to-day lives of Americans (US Department of Agriculture, 2016). Currently, urban tree cover in the United States is estimated to be about 35% (see fig. 4.5) (US Department of Agriculture, 2016). Fortunately, efforts have been made in some cities, such as New York, LA, and Baltimore to increase urban forestry (Wyse, et al., 2015). One study even found that most people are willing to pay for greenpace (Botzat, et al. 2016). This all points to the necessity of a formal walking tour of Boston College’s historic trees in order to promote urban forestry and all of the benefits associated with it.

Walking Tour of the Significant Trees on the Boston College Campus
Above: The route of our tour. The significant trees were chosen based on their aesthetic appeal with recommendation from and consultation with Gina Bellavia, Director of Landscape and Planning Services. All information regarding these trees in relation to BC was obtained through the Boston College tree database owned by the Department of Facilities Maintenance.

Below: Every recent sudden rendering of newly proposed buildings includes trees, whether or not these trees are actually planted. The importance of greenery’s aesthetic effects reach even to the conceptual architectural sphere.

Above: Linden Lane. Photo courtesy of John J. Burns Library. BC’s campus is an example of an urban forest.

Above: The tree types on our tour include: (from top left) Black Walnut, Butternut, Cedar of Lebanon, Dawn Redwood, (middle row, from left) Japanese Cedar, Japanese Flowering Cherry, and the Japanese Red Maple.

Above: The Japanese Flowering Cherry by Higgins Hall, 60 on the tour

Below: The link garden at the memorial garden intertwines the tree’s aesthetics with feelings of deep reflection and remembrance. Without the presence of the trees, the memorial garden would evolve a different, less serene, feeling.

Recommendations
- Further research on aesthetic impact of trees based upon specific types of trees and the specific benefits the effect.
- Comparison of the mental health of students on the Boston College campus versus another New England campus that does not put as much importance on landscaping aesthetics versus a truly urban campus.

Arbor Day Certification
- Work with the City of Newton, a “tree city,” to gain awareness (possibly through the media) of Boston College’s official Arbor Day Certification.
- Use the planting of the apple tree as an event for the certification.
- Work with already existing environmental clubs on campus to facilitate the creation of student ambassadors for the certification.

Tree Tour
- Creation of an app and/or website (possibly by Boston College students) that provides a version of the tree tour to wider access and allow people to take the tour without physically coming to campus. This would include professionally taken (possible drone) photographs for the best possible visual experience.
- Creation of a signage to be used when people upload photos of themselves taking the tree tour in order to increase social media presence and therefore promote the existence and spread awareness of the tour.
- Incorporate tree facts into existing campus tours.
- Boston College Admissions and Boston College Grounds work together to use the tree tour as a way to attract potential students while also maintaining campus tree cover and increasing worldwide presence of Boston College.
- Redoing the tree database of every tree on campus with a new tagging system that includes QR codes.

Key References

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