University of Minnesota Twin Cities Campus Arboretum: Sacred and Meaningful Places



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University Arboretum Final Report

Sara Belden, Leland Hatcher Drew Harmon, Jessica James, Jessica Stortenbecker

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Introduction

The University of Minnesota campus serves as a space for students, alumni, and many members of the public to experience greenspace in an urban setting. The question is, how do we allow more access to these greenspaces and engage people? The University of Minnesota Twin Cities Campus is engaged in a multi-step, five-year plan to develop the campus into an arboretum by highlighting existing plants and landscapes, and eventually enhancing the entire palette as prioritized by the entire University and adjacent community. The second phase of the process, which was carried out this year, focused on defining, locating and inventorying significant trees, special and significant plant communities, and sacred/special places. This report focuses on what a sacred and/or special place is to those in the community.

This project intends to reveal and extol current greenspaces, and one of the strongest components of this proposed arboretum is peoples' emotional connection to a space. There are many public stakeholders involved in regard to creating a campus-wide arboretum and it is imperative to include them in the planning process. In this report those stakeholders and their concerns will be addressed, and next steps will be provided to propel this project forward in the upcoming years. It is important that all members of the community have a chance to weigh in on what is a special or meaningful site to them.

Methods

Participants

Getting the survey to as many different groups of people was important as well as keeping the results as unbiased as possible. This led to seeking out community groups through Facebook.com. Several groups were approached to allow the surveyors to post the survey. Some examples of these groups included, but were not limited to, the following: Minnesota House Plants Group, Minnesota Naturalists Group, Como Neighborhood group, Marcy-Holmes group, University of Minnesota Class of 2020, and University of Minnesota Class of 2021. Certain on-campus clubs were asked to participate in the survey as well, such as the University of Minnesota Forestry Club, University of Minnesota Environmental Student Association, and the University of Minnesota Hammock Club.

The final total of surveys completed was 111, and from these completed surveys several categories of participants were identified. Participant categories included: University of Minnesota students, University of Minnesota faculty, University of Minnesota alumni, University of Minnesota staff/employees, local residents, and former University of Minnesota students. Note, University of Minnesota staff/employees most often defined a person or group of persons employed by the University of Minnesota, whereas faculty are a group of teachers/professors who impart education.

Materials

To create a survey that would allow all group members and participants fluid access to it, Google Forms was used. The survey was created and hosted by Google.com with the application of Google Forms. This application also allowed for the articulation of the data into a usable format.

Once the data was aggregated by Google it was then imported to Microsoft Excel for further analysis, categorization, as well as used to format data points and enter them into charts and graphs for ease of use.

Design

The survey was designed to gather the data the surveyors felt was prudent to understand who was participating and why. Some required data needed to be narrowed into specific categories while others did not. Open Ended questions were utilized for as many survey questions that were allowable. Participants were asked if they were homeowners, renters, or other. The selection of "other" prompted a write in response. Participants were asked about their location of residence in the surrounding metro area by checking off their neighborhood on a list of local neighborhoods. Included with this list was an-option for "outside of the immediate campus area." They were also asked about their length of time living in their selected area; options for this were provided in length of years as the following: 1-2, 2-5, 5-10, and 10 or more. Participants were asked about their relationship, if any, to the University of Minnesota or the surrounding metro area.

Two questions were asked with no prompt of options which allowed for the participants to write in what they wanted. These questions were as follows: "What is a special place on the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities campus to you? (If applicable)" and "What makes a place special to you?" These open-ended questions allowed for original and unique answers from the participants and gave the surveyors a more concise understanding of what special/meaningful places are in people's minds.

In addition to the online survey being sent to groups and clubs there was also a physical flyer option. This flyer allowed for offline or non-members of groups to participate. On the flyer was a brief description of the project and what the survey was for. There was also a QR scan code/symbol provided for ease of access to the survey. This allowed someone to use a smartphone to scan the QR code and be directed to the survey automatically. A web address was also provided below the QR code to allow for an alternative way to access the survey. It is important to mention that this flyer was not distributed due to the 2020 pandemic involving COVID-19. The surveyors are unsure if this flyer would have increased the number of participants.

The data that was collected was processed with Excel, questions were organized into columns and responses into rows. With the exception to data pertaining to residents' length of time in an area, data was collected as qualitative data due to the write in responses of participants.

Procedure

Several members of the study group joined local Facebook groups in order to share the survey. Once a member was accepted into the group they would post a link to the survey as well as a description of the survey that read as such: "The University of Minnesota Twin Cities is in the

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process of developing a Twin Cities Campus arboretum, which is essentially a curated collection of notable campus trees, plants, and landscapes to enhance both learning and recreation on campus. We are representatives of the Arboretum Development Team and are focusing on what makes a space special or sacred. Your input on what special means to you would be appreciated and will influence the overall design of the arboretum."

Campus clubs were approached to share the survey with their members as well. This was done either by Facebook.com group pages or through contact with a group officer. There were no additional instructions or interactions after the survey was shared. The data collected was submitted anonymously for further use.

Results

Leaving the survey open-ended resulted in a plethora of meaningful data, which in turn helped the surveyors produce the results of this survey. From identifying stakeholders to developing a list of criteria to designate sacred spaces in the future, the survey results guided the remainder of the report.

Stakeholders

Of all the respondents, roughly 53% are renters, whereas 44% are homeowners. Regarding length of residency, 43% reported living in the Twin Cities for 1-5 years, and 57% for 5+ years. This aligns well with the renters/homeowners figure, possibly indicating that a large number of the stakeholders are student renters who haven't lived in the area very long, and may not stay in the Twin Cities to see the completion of the arboretum. Regardless, their input is still valuable,

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as their sentiments are still valid and may very well be echoed by students to come through in the future. This gives the surveyors valuable insight into what students who frequently use campus view as a special place. The 53-57% of respondents who are homeowners and have lived in the area are also valuable stakeholders in the process, as decisions made in the development process of the arboretum will affect anything from how they recreate to their property values (Wolf, 2010).

The relationship of people who replied was overwhelmingly students (41%) or former students (34%), while business owners in the area and faculty each made up 4% of responses. The remaining 17% of respondents range from having no relation to the University of Minnesota, to having a husband who used to work at the University. This helps us conclude that our survey had a lot of student preferences in the responses, and that students and former students are major stakeholders in these plans. However, this also indicates that future surveys need to be done to gain more insight from people who are not students.

Criteria for Sacred Space Identification

At the beginning of the process, the surveyors identified four criteria to designate sacred spaces: memories, beauty, community, and safety. The survey responses indicated that the first three criteria are very prominent (memories, beauty, and community), however safety is not as significant as the team expected. In addition, four more criteria were found and although minor, can be used in determining a sacred space. The data can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Sacred space identification criteria. Four initial criteria were identified as indicators of sacred spaces, and four additional criteria were established based on write-ins from the survey responses.

Themes	Total Number	
		2001
Memories	30	29%
Beauty	29	28%
Commuity	20	19%
Safety	5	5%
New Themes?		
Feeling	4	4%
Education	4	4%
Welcoming/Unique	5	5%
Solitutde	4	4%

From this data, we concluded that the three major indicators of a sacred or special place were memories, beauty, and community. However, we also identified five minor criteria that can aid in designating a sacred place, which are safety, feeling, educational value, welcoming/unique, and solitude. This criterion will aid in nominating and selecting significant spaces going forward.

Mapping Results

Many respondents indicated specific places on campus as significant to them. To represent these places, a "Special/Significant Tree Map" was created using Google Maps. Utilizing a friendly interface allows viewers to click on a marker (shown as a pin on the map) to see which space it correlates to. The reason google maps was used instead of taking a more traditional approach using GIS, which is an advanced mapping program, is for a few reasons. First off, Google Maps is more accessible to the general public versus GIS and can be used directly from a smartphone or smart watch. In addition, this makes the map easier to update in the future; not just by adding

new spaces, but by adding new pictures to accompany the spaces. Google allows a simple method for adding as many pictures as one desires to the map. This helps the future up keeper of this map to easily add new photos of the space, keep up with changes to the surrounding landscape, or even showcase the space during different seasons.

Recommendations

Our first recommendation is to highlight some of the locations considered important for the arboretum. The Knoll, the Mall, the Lawn, and several others were prominent places mentioned in the survey results. They can be located using the Sacred Places map in the presentation. These places also follow the criteria that we identified as being the most important in the survey responses. Memory, beauty, and community were the highest criteria and all of the locations can be classified under those designators.

With our survey results the team has identified some next steps that will be important and will aid in the creation of the Twin Cities Campus Arboretum. A second survey should be sent out to increase response rates from local residents beyond students. Hopefully, this second survey would also increase the response rate from faculty and different departments throughout the University beyond CFANS. Along with the virtual survey the next step would include hanging up the flyers at local businesses with the QR code as described in the methods section.

Next, there are further action steps that the team recommends. It includes creating a public nomination system that would include the criteria we have developed throughout this project.

This nomination platform would be online to make it as accessible as possible. Second, "Yelp for Nature" would be a unique next step for visitors to see special places during different times of the year. The google map allows the user to submit photos with a date and a review, which would be an interactive piece for the visitors which is where the Yelp for Nature comes from. The idea is that users would be able to browse through photos and reviews in order to help them find a place to visit.

In conclusion, using these next steps will continue to gather data while also taking some direct actions that will improve the Twin Cities Campus Arboretum and overall participant engagement.

References

Wolf, K. (2010, June 25). Local Economics. Retrieved May 4, 2020, from http://depts.washington.edu/hhwb/Thm_Economics.html