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EXAMINING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FORESTRY LEARNING AND STUDENT BACKGROUND

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ABSTRACT: Understanding how background characteristics of forestry students are related to forestry learning can help guide curriculum modifications to enhance learning potential. An increasing number of Southern Illinois University-Carbondale (SIUC) undergraduate forestry students are originating from small cities and larger urban areas. The purpose of this study is to characterize student background and outdoor experience as related to performance in aspects of the SIUC Forestry curriculum and student perspectives on forestry activities. A survey was conducted over two cohorts (n = 97) of Tree Identification Laboratory classes in 1999 and 2000 (a third cohort will be surveyed in Fall 2001). Demographic and experiential background variables were examined for relationships with student performance, learning preferences, and attitudes toward forestry-related terms. Ninety-eight percent of participating students were residents of Illinois. No student reported a parent employed in a natural resource management profession. Preliminary analysis indicates that while childhood residence was an unreliable predictor of course performance, both childhood residence and primary outdoor activity were related to attitude scores assigned to timber harvest. If outdoor experience is found to be positively related to performance, increased opportunity for field activities may be particularly important to the increasing number of students hailing from urban/suburban residences.