

Campus green space more important for undergrads

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Students' perceptions of their overall experience on campus may be most strongly associated with their academic accomplishments, but research has also found a solid relationship between undergraduates' use of campus green spaces and their perceptions of quality of life. Are campus green spaces as important to graduate students as they are to undergrads? A new study investigating this question revealed some interesting insights.

The incidence of attrition among doctoral students has been estimated to be as high as 40% to 50%; one Canadian study found that graduate students had significantly higher stress levels, more thoughts of quitting school, and more [mental health problems](#) than did medical students. University administrators looking for innovative approaches to retaining students and increasing student satisfaction are now looking to research that suggests that interactions with nature result in increased self-esteem and reduced stress levels on [campus](#).

A team of researchers from Texas A&M and Texas State University used an online survey containing questions related to student use of campus green spaces, overall quality of life, and demographic data. The research indicated that, unlike undergrads, graduate students did not have a statistically significant relationship between "green user" scores and perception of quality of life scores. Undergraduates said they were primarily "high users" of campus green spaces, but graduate students were almost equally split between being "low", "medium", and "high users" of campus green spaces.

While researchers found no [relationship](#) between [graduate student](#) use of campus green spaces and perception of quality of life, graduate students still reported overall positive feelings about their university experiences and their personal lives. According to lead author A.L. McFarland; "It is interesting that the quality of life findings in this study do not support previous studies that found that graduate students had significantly higher stress levels and more frequent mental distress (compared with the national adult population). In fact, this study found the opposite—that graduate students were overall happy and had positive perceptions of their quality of life."

Why might graduate students report high perceptions of quality of life even though they reported lower use of campus green spaces? "It may be that graduate students have less time to spend in outdoor spaces, yet still meet their quality of life needs through other means such as academic achievements", noted the authors. The research team posited that factors other than green space use may contribute to graduate students' quality of life. For instance, people with intimate relationships have been found to be happier than individuals without these relationships, and almost half of graduate students surveyed were married. Graduate students may report higher perceptions of quality of life due to their relationships with a significant other.

The authors added that this study did not investigate graduate students' "green-use" outside of the university setting. Because many of the respondents were commuters with jobs and families, they may not actually spend much time on campus. They noted that further studies designed to investigate off-campus green-use may show that interaction with green space is indeed important for graduate students.

More information: The complete study and abstract are available on the ASHS HortTechnology electronic journal web site:
[horttech.ashspublications.org/ ... nt/abstract/20/1/186](http://horttech.ashspublications.org/...nt/abstract/20/1/186)

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