

Youth not that environmentally engaged, study shows

May 6 2011, By Bev Betkowski



Lindsie Fairfield, left, and Scott Wilson recently conducted a study that shows young people aren't necessarily leading guardians of the environment.

(PhysOrg.com) -- They're socially engaged and represent the next generation. But young people aren't necessarily leading guardians of the environment, a University of Alberta study shows.

A random survey of 350 [students](#) done on the U of A campus revealed a 10 per cent lower level of participation in environmentally friendly activities than the general public. As well, 70 per cent of the students felt it was too costly to live a more sustainable lifestyle, and 45 per cent felt it took too much time. A further 16 per cent consider their environmental impact a low priority.

Though a values scale showed that 76 per cent of the students surveyed felt strongly about preserving the [environment](#), they didn't appear to be acting on that conviction.

“Even though students exhibit high values in environmental concern, they still don't exhibit the environmentally sustainable behavior that would be predicted by those values,” said Scott Wilson, one of the researchers who conducted the study for a fourth-year undergraduate project in the Department of Rural Economy.

While similar studies don't appear to have been done at other post-secondary institutions, the researchers hypothesize that “this kind of result would likely come up across most universities,” Wilson noted.

Though the majority of students surveyed cited budget constraints or other factors—such as not having a say in household decisions—for not taking measures such as purchasing organic food, they did show high rates of participation in some ways, such as civic involvement (attending public rallies, volunteering) and using public transit or riding bicycles. However, they didn't have a high rate of participation in other low-cost, environmentally friendly measures such as reducing water or mending and reusing clothing.

“There is more that students or any young person on budget can do to be environmentally responsible,” Wilson said. “U of A students and likely other students in general are aware and do have pro-environmental behaviours. But many have a self-reported gap between what they would like to do and what they feel they can do.”

The study recommends that issues of cost, knowledge and time for students be addressed. For instance, on-campus education campaigns could be launched, focusing on how students can save money by being environmentally friendly. Other measures include developing tangible

greening campus projects and increasing basic environmental curriculum for all students, Wilson said.

“Instilling environmentally favourable habits at the university level now will encourage the maintenance and growth of these behaviors over a lifetime,” he added.

Provided by University of Alberta

Citation: Youth not that environmentally engaged, study shows (2011, May 6) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-05-youth-environmentally-engaged.html>

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