

The More Than Human World

The Importance of Natural History and its Presence on the CSB/SJU Campus

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Introduction

Natural history, the parent to all modern forms of natural sciences and psychology, has the potential to heighten community awareness of natural systems as well as the power of nature and place. This thesis defines natural history as “a practice of intentional, focused attentiveness and receptivity to the more than human world guided by honesty and accuracy.” Through this perspective, the practice of natural history serves as a foundation to connect our lives to the more than human world, contextualizing our lives with a sense of place, strengthening personal wellbeing and providing educational benefits. If these benefits are true, they will help bridge the gap between humans and nature through the willingness of humans to live sustainably, efficiently and effectively.

Methods

This thesis proposes that practicing natural history is a platform to bridge the disconnect between humans and nature. In order to support this claim, this thesis conducted:

- ◆ Interviews of faculty and staff on the CSB/SJU campus to gather local perspectives of natural history.
- ◆ A literature review of qualitative and quantitative studies researching how nature can impact a sense of place and wellbeing.
- ◆ A case study of natural history programming at Northland College through interviews of past and current professors at Northland College.
- ◆ A survey of students who participated in field-based courses at Northland College to determine the educational benefits of natural history classes.



The spring 2017 Wild Rockies Field Institute students in the Colorado Plateau, UT. This natural history, field-based semester program was the inspiration for this thesis.

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 And to Thomas Fleischner for sharing his guidance and passion about natural history.

“A practice of intentional, focused attentiveness and receptivity to the more than human world guided by honesty and accuracy.

~Thomas Fleischner

Benefits of Natural History

Sense of place

◆ The connections between humans and the natural world through the combination of two concepts: *place attachment* and *place meaning*.

~**Place attachment:** is the physical connection to the particulars of a place.

~**Place meaning:** is the emotional connection one feels to a place.

◆ **Findings:** Place based knowledge creates familiarity with the natural world. This familiarity allows for more care, more love and more epithetical actions towards the natural world.

Increased Wellbeing

- ◆ The state of being comfortable, healthy and happy.
- ◆ **Findings:** Quantitative studies, found through a literature review, have demonstrated that when participants were outside engaging with the natural world they were significantly happier and more connected to nature than when they were not.

Educational Benefits

◆ Educational benefits from natural history practice have potential to be translated to all areas of study, beyond the sciences.

These benefits include:

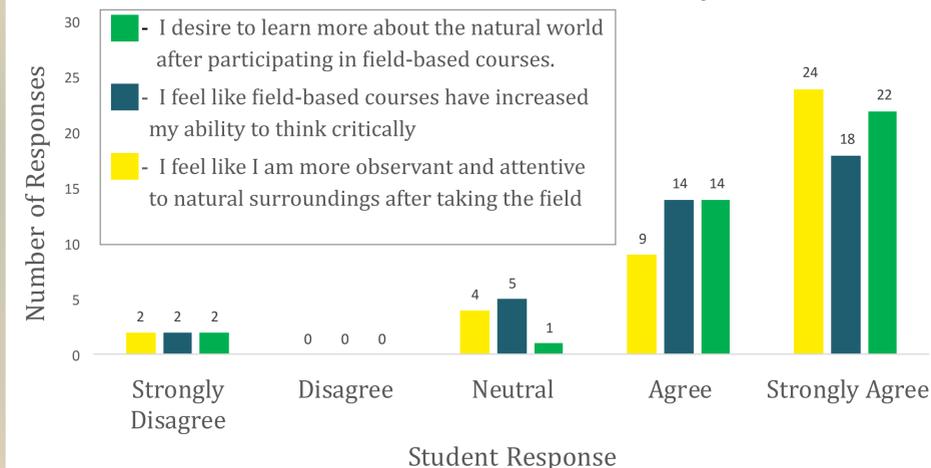
- 1)Enhanced wonder and curiosity
- 2)Increased knowledge and information of the natural world
- 3)Observational and critical thinking skills

◆ **Findings:** The educational benefits of natural history were analyzed by a survey which was sent out to students at Northland College.

Natural History at Northland College

Northland College is a higher education university which has witnessed the ebb and flow of natural history programming in their school’s curriculum over the past 30 years. A survey seeking the educational benefits of natural history programming was sent to the students at Northland College who participated in the college’s Superior Connections Program. The students responses discuss natural history, field-based courses has impacted them.

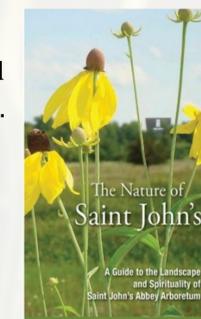
Survey Responses from Students at Northland College about Educational Benefits of Natural History Classes



The results of 39 student responses to a survey discussing their perspective on the educational benefits of natural history. These students are from Northland College and participated in the school’s *Superior Connections Program*, a field-based cohort program for first-years.

CSB/SJU Curriculum Proposal

The book, *The Nature of Saint Johns*, is a comprehensive field guide describing the natural history of the Abbey Arboretum. Each chapter of this book details out the plants and animals found near each trail in the Arboretum. Along with pictures and descriptions of each natural feature, the book also describes the land use history of the Arboretum.



This thesis proposes that CSB/SJU should incorporate natural history programming into the First-Year Experience classes. Each FYX class can read a chapter from the book *The Nature of Saint John's*, about a particular trail then hike into the Arboretum and identify the plants and animals they find on the trail using the book as a guide. The integration of this natural history programming would allow each first-year student to experience the Arboretum in their first year attending CSB/SJU and allow them to potentially foster a sense of place and wellbeing by opening up the door to the natural world surrounding their college.