

NATURE RX – IMPROVING HEALTH BY SPENDING TIME OUTSIDE

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1 ABSTRACT

Ever accelerating technological changes had the unfortunate effect of disconnecting us from the outdoors. In multiple studies, researchers have shown that people spend more time indoors looking at screens than they do outside and that our mental and physical health is suffering as a result (Louv, 2011; Williams, 2018). UC Davis is one of a number of universities attempting to address this nature deficit disorder through programs that fall under the umbrella of "Nature Rx."

This paper seeks to evaluate these programs and their attempts to embolden participants to push competing priorities aside and head outdoors. Goals included: 1) exposing students, staff, and faculty to the gardens, green spaces, and natural areas of UC Davis; 2) introducing them to community members that interact with nature through research or vocation; 3) identifying organizations that connect people to nature at UC Davis; and 4) providing information about the therapeutic benefits associated with spending time in nature.

A mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods was used to determine the programs' effectiveness. Data were compiled through pre and post class survey instruments, final evaluations, and written personal reflections. Survey data taken from a similar Nature Rx class at Cornell University were also integrated into the findings. Results indicate participants gained greater levels of comfort and familiarity with the campus and its community and developed a deeper awareness of the value of time spent in nature. These findings suggest that directed classes in nature therapy can positively impact the health of university communities.

1.1 Keywords

Nature Rx, Nature Deficit Disorder, Nature Prescription, Biophilia, Landscape Architecture Pedagogy