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Student Perceptions and Preferences of Walking Trails in the Sacred Heart University Area

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With high rates of inactivity among college students, creative efforts are needed to promote active living. **Purpose:** The purpose of the study was to understand undergraduate students' perceptions and preferences for local walking trails. The information collected will allow health professionals to promote local walking trails to students, which will hopefully increase students' physical activity. **Methods:** This cross-sectional study included an online questionnaire administered via SurveyMonkey®. Purposive sampling was used to recruit 453 undergraduate student respondents currently enrolled at Sacred Heart University (SHU). The questionnaire included 17 items about physical activity, trail use, preferences for trail characteristics, and demographic characteristics. All data was downloaded to an excel spreadsheet and loaded into SPSS for analysis. **Results:** Respondents most often reported 3 miles (37%) as the optimal trail length. Respondents' ideal distance to travel to get to the trail was 1 mile (45.9%). Respondents reported that transportation to the trail (80.9%) and maps identifying nearby trails (56.2%) would help them increase their trail use. When selecting trails to meet student's preferences, trails should contain the following criteria: no cost (98.8%), aesthetically pleasing (98.5%), well maintained (97.6%), low density of nearby cars (94.4%), elevation changes (91.4%), natural surface (69.5%), and viewpoints along the trail (10.4%).

Discussion: Based on the study findings, trail use among university students may be encouraged through the use of transportation to trails and trail maps that highlight the distance of trails and the trail route. Trails which will be promoted should be chosen based on student's trail preferences.