**Outdoor spaces, culture, student satisfaction and research excellence at UK universities**

*Section 1: Introduction/Business Problem*

Prospective students to universities in the UK are now able to access a wealth of quantitative information about the courses and universities they could study at. Websites such as Unistats.com, whatuni.com, and national government initiatives such as the Research Excelence Framework and Teaching Excellence Framework provide rich statistical measurements which allow comparison and benchmarking between a set of shortlisted university or even courses at the same university. Staff may also use these indicators as a measure of prestige – indeed, several UK university league tables have adopted many of the same indicators in forming the methodology used for their annual rankings.

While teaching and research reputation are clearly important contributors to the decision of staff and students to join a given university, they do not fully describe the experience of spending several years in one physical location. The metrics are *output-oriented* – for instance, student satisfaction at the very end of the course, the employability of graduates, the end-product outputs and impacts of academic research, and so on. They do not generally provide information about the day-to-day reality of living, working and studying in an environment which is often campus-based or in a region of the city which is now dominated by a monoculture of university buildings.

For students and staff who place high value on the concept of the ‘university of life’, where the experience and the environment is important as well as the acquisition of knowledge and application of knowledge into research, there is an information gap around ‘what it is like to be there’ – the physical environment, green spaces and parklands, gyms and sports provision, and opportunities to engage with cultural events and visits to galleries and museums. Most students will attend a handful of university open days once they’ve formed a shortlist, a list which will often be academically determined based on course content and predicted grades – but could we help provide ‘soft’ information on the 160 UK universities through the combination of geodata, student satisfaction and research excellence data, so that these shortlists can be informed by a broader set of criteria? Do satisfied students tend to be concentrated in certain types of environment? Is world-class research related to the facilities and locale of the university?