



# Standing Our Ground: The Meaning of SAF Accreditation

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# History of SAF Accreditation

- Began in 1935
  - Focus on program quality
  - Programs rated to distinguish graduates who had knowledge to be eligible for SAF membership versus those who needed more on-the-job experience to qualify
- Defining “Forestry Education”
  - Ongoing challenge since the beginning
  - Journal of Forestry July 1935: Recreational Forestry = branch of forestry or separate profession



# SAF Definition of Forestry



- “The profession embracing the **science, art, and practice** of **creating, managing, using,** and **conserving forests and associated resources** for **human benefit and in a sustainable manner** to meet **desired goals, needs and values**”
  - **Urban Forestry**: “... art, science, and technology of managing trees and forest resources in and around urban community ecosystems for the physiological, sociological, economic, and aesthetic benefits trees provide society”
- “...broad field of forestry consists of those **biological, quantitative, managerial, and social sciences** that are applied to **forest management and conservation** including such specialized fields as **agro-forestry, urban forestry, industrial forestry, non-industrial forestry,** and **wilderness and recreation forestry.**”

# History of SAF Accreditation

- Defining “professional forestry education” an ongoing challenge still
  - What distinguishes a *forestry* program?
    - SAF definition of Forestry
  - What distinguishes a *professional* program?
    - Knowledge of parts PLUS the ability to fit the parts together to form a functioning (to the best of our knowledge) whole
      - Example – knowledge of parts of a clock, but also having the ability to put the parts together so the clock will tell the correct (to the best of our knowledge) time
- SAF Accreditation processes and standards are periodically reviewed and revised
  - Approximately every 10 years
  - Assure professional foresters continue to meet contemporary needs

# History of SAF Accreditation



- 1980's

Proliferation of highly diverse BS & MS degree options within Forestry Programs

- 1988: curriculum only accredited if it met a relatively rigid set of SAF standards for an education in forestry

- Late 1990's

Increasing demands on the profession and higher education institutions → need for higher degree of flexibility in accreditation standards

- 1998 - 2003

Task Force to evaluate SAF accreditation standards

- 2004 – 2005 Academic Year

New Standards implemented

# Educational Policy Review Committee

- Established by SAF Council in 2003
- Monitor all aspects of professional forestry education including SAF accreditation standards and procedures
- Make recommendations on such matters to the SAF Council
- 2004-2005 academic year – new standards
- 2007: Special Standards for Urban Forestry
- 2009: Current Task Force considering special standards for “terrestrial ecosystem management”

# Specialized Accreditation - Why Do It?

- Helps students meet professional licensing standards
- Helps bolster reputations, credibility, and attract more highly qualified faculty
  - protects investment in programs
- Helps ensure that basic standards of quality are being met despite diversity within curricula
- Assure quality improvement
- Accountability and self-responsibility

# SAF Accreditation – What is it?

- Non-governmental, peer-reviewed voluntary process
- Recognized by Council for Higher Education Accreditation
  - CHEA Goals: Advance academic quality, demonstrate accountability, encourage scrutiny and planning for change and for needed improvement
    - ✓ Continually evaluating the process
      - Is peer review the best way? So far, yes
  - SAF is up for review by CHEA this year – includes a request for change of scope to include forest technology accreditation



# SAF Accreditation – What is it?

- Usually a 10-year Accreditation Cycle
  - Substantive change reports
- Curricula are accredited, NOT institutions or degrees
- Separate standards for Forestry, Urban Forestry, Forestry Technology Programs
- Standards provide flexibility for institutions' and programs' rights and obligations for initiative, experimentation, and variation
  - ✓ *Outcome-based versus course- or credit-based*
  - ✓ *NOT one-size-fits-all*

# SAF Accreditation – What is it?

- **2-Year Technical Degree Curricula (AS)**
  - Have separate accreditation standards
  - Assessed by separate accreditation committee
  - 5 accredited and 8 conditionally accredited programs
- **Forestry 4-year Degree Curricula (BS)**
  - 49 Institutions have accredited curricula(um)
- **Graduate Degree Curricula (MS, MF, MNR)**
  - Intended only for graduate students who do not have a BS degree from an accredited undergraduate program – professional degree not research program

# SAF Accreditation – Urban Forestry

- **Urban Forestry Option**
  - Has been accredited curriculum under Forestry Standards for many years
  - Some outcomes related to wildland forestry difficult to apply to urban settings
- **New Specialized Urban Forestry Standards**
  - Virginia Tech only accredited curriculum
  - Number of other schools are considering it
  - Urban forestry option under Forestry Standards may be phased out
    - Educational Policy Review Committee will need to discuss

# SAF Accreditation - Objectives

- Improve overall quality of professional forestry education
  - Periodic program self-evaluation and peer review by qualified educators and practicing foresters
- Foster integrity and excellence
  - Development, use, and periodic review of Standards for Accreditation to assess the educational environment and effectiveness of forestry programs
- Assure students, employers, the general public, and other organizations and agencies that SAF accredited programs
  - Have educational objectives consistent with professional standards
  - Have the resources to accomplish those objectives
  - Are expected to continue to offer a quality forestry education

# SAF Accreditation Policy

- Recognizes no two institutions are alike
  - Each program is evaluated independently on its own individual merits
- Recognizes the need for diversity
  - Encourages rich learning environment composed of student, faculty and external constituents and representing both genders and a variety of ages, cultures, experiences, and viewpoints
- Relies on Regional Accrediting bodies for ensuring quality of the overall institution
  - Parent institutions in which the forestry program is housed must be accepted and accredited by its regional accrediting agency

# SAF Accreditation – Process

- **Extensive Self-Evaluation**

- Address standards, including assessment
- Documentation and evidence of quality

- **On-Site Visit by outside reviewers**

- Test veracity of the self study, look for areas of potential improvement
- Visiting Team:
  - (1) Chair: Forestry educator with academic administrative experience
  - (2) one member from nonacademic sector  
often a practitioner representative of an employment sector important to the graduates of the program being reviewed
  - (3) One member from the COA

- **Visiting Team Report**

# SAF Accreditation – Process

- SAF Committee on Accreditation
  - Assessment and recommendation based on self-evaluation report, analysis by visiting team, professional judgment
  - Decisions based on assessment of the total program and its environment for stimulating intellectual professional development and growth
- Responsibility to entire profession and higher education community to maintain a responsive accreditation program

# Current Standards

- **Standard I: Forestry Program Mission, Goals, and Objectives**
  - Forestry as an interdisciplinary profession
  - Needs of constituencies the program seeks to serve
  - Sensitivity to the role of professional foresters in meeting diverse and changing social, cultural, economic, and environmental needs and values
  - Professionalism and ethical behavior necessary to manage and use forest resources for the benefit of society
- **Standard II: Curriculum**
- **Standard III: Forestry Program Organization and Administration**
  - Includes program planning and outcomes assessment (critical to evaluation process)



# Current Standards

- **Standard IV: Faculty**
  - Academic and professional competency
- **Standard V: Students**
  - Recruitment, retention, advising
- **Standard VI: Parent Institution Support**
  - Funding and other support to allow the program to attract and retain highly qualified faculty, staff, and administrators
  - Resources critical to learning environment for professional foresters

# Standard II: Curriculum

- Describes outcomes-based competencies that reflect
  - Students have necessary background to function as forestry professionals
  - Appropriate and effective *assessment* tools
- Not based on courses, not based on credits
  - *Reasonable balance* across competency areas is expected
- Sequence of courses leading to a degree that prepares an individual for entry into the forestry profession
- Includes all courses and prerequisites that constitute the professional forestry degree

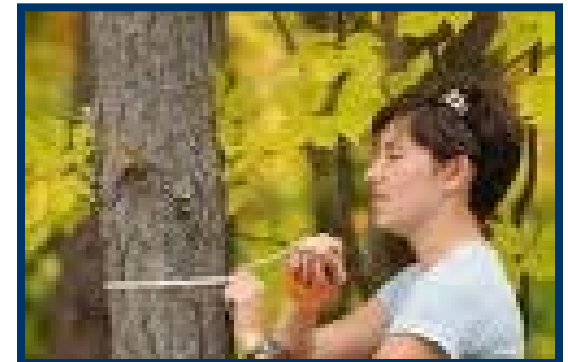
# Standard II: Curriculum

- **General Education**

- Often delivered by Arts and Sciences units
- Written and oral communication
- Biological, physical, chemical sciences
- Mathematics
- Social Sciences & Humanities
- Computer Literacy
  - Not in Gen. Ed. (1/1/2010)

- **Professional Education**

- Distance Education?



# Professional Education

- In-depth and integrated coverage
  - Forest Ecology and Biology
  - Measurement of Forest Resources
  - Management of Forest Resources
  - Forest Resource Policy, Economics & Administration
- Should foster analytical and critical reasoning skills
  - Systematic problem solving and decision-making



# Professional Education

- Awareness of historical and current issues and policies affecting resources management and conservation
- Should provide variety of educational experiences
  - Lectures, discussions, simulations, computer applications, individual and group projects, capstone/integrated type projects, laboratories and field experiences
    - ✓ Goal = enable students to apply scientific methodologies necessary to attain an array of beneficial forest products, services and conditions



# What Makes a Forester a Forester?

- Has biological and ecological knowledge of forested ecosystems
- Can design, collect, analyze forest ecosystem inventory data
- Can use their understanding of forest biology and ecology along with inventory analyses to develop and apply prescriptions appropriate to specific management objectives
- Can evaluate economic, environmental and social consequences of different management alternatives
- Can use the above information to develop management plans that
  - Are sustainable, with specific multiple objectives & constraints
  - Include market & non-market considerations
  - Include valuation of consumptive & non-consumptive forest products
  - Integrate technical, financial, human resources
  - Project future forest conditions

# Quality Assurance

- How does accreditation assure quality with a learning outcomes-based model?

Assessment!

Assessment!

Assessment!

- Real assessment is critical to the process
  - Currently the weakest part of most self evaluation documents

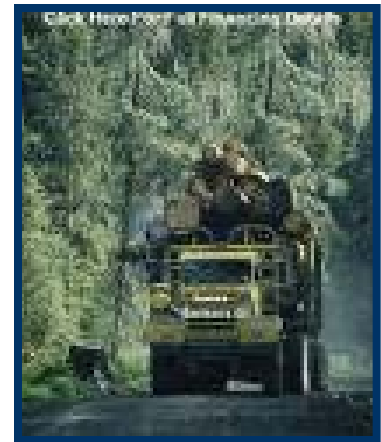


# SAF Accreditation: Inclusive or Exclusive?

- **Exclusive**
  - Focus is on forestry and urban forestry as a profession distinct from other professions
    - ✓ Interdisciplinary versus specialized training typical of forest “...ologists”
    - ✓ **Not** meant to accredit highly specialized or advanced training in narrower disciplines
- **Inclusive**
  - Diversity of ways institutions can meet accreditation standards
  - Focus is on **all** forest resources – not just timber

# What Is *Not* Accredited?

- Curricula that do not reflect interdisciplinary nature of forestry are generally **not** accredited
  - Specialized Curricula focused only in:
    - ✓ Development of Forest Policy
    - ✓ Timber Management
    - ✓ Wildland Fire Fighting
    - ✓ Geospatial Analysis
    - ✓ Soil and Water Conservation
    - ✓ Wildlife Biology
- It is expected that *all of the above topics* are reflected to some degree in an accredited curriculum



# What *Is* Accredited?

- Curricula that meet professional education standards can differ greatly in their focus:
  - GIS & Ecological management with less emphasis on timber extraction
  - Forest Industry Land Management
  - Management of Conservation/Trust Lands
  - Public (USFS, BLM, NPS) and State Lands Management
  - Management of Family Lands
  - Watershed Management



# Diversity of SAF Accredited Curricula Within BS Degree Programs

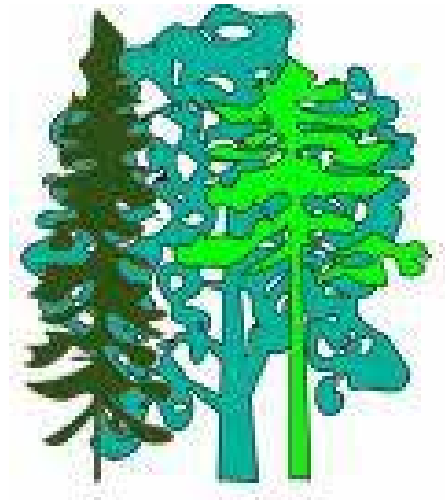
- Environmental Management
- Environmental Conservation
- Forestry
- Forest Biology
- Forest Ecosystem Management
- Forest Engineering
- Forest Fire Science
- Forest Hydrology
- Forest Science
- Forestry, Wildlife, and Forest Environmental Resources
- Forest Operations Science
- Forest Management
- Forest Resources Management
- Forest Resources Management and Ecological Restoration
- Industrial Forest Management
- Natural Resources Management
- Natural Resource Conservation
- Natural Resources Recreation
- Outdoor Recreation Resources Management
- Recreation, Parks and Tourism Resources
- Urban and Community Forestry
- Urban Forestry
- Watershed Management and Hydrology
- Wildlife Management
- Wildland and Fuels Management

# Conclusions

- Forestry is, by nature, a conservative profession
- The profession has changed and adapted over the years, and so has SAF accreditation
- But, SAF accreditation has, and should remain, a professional accreditation focused on forestry



# Questions?



# Discussion?

## References

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