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INCORPORATING SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY INTO STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL FORESTRY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT: In 1991, the National Association of Professional Forestry Schools and Colleges (NAPFSC) and the Society of American Foresters (SAF) co-hosted a three-day Forest Resources Education Symposium, entitled “Forest Resources Management in the 21st Century: Will Forestry Education Meet the Challenge?” The objectives of the national symposium were to present major forces shaping the country’s management of forest resources, and then to discuss the adequacy of educational criteria in preparing tomorrow’s resource managers to excel under an expanding array of consumer and employer demands. As an outcome, the discussants developed a summary of specific challenges and solutions within five issue areas: The Future of Forestry, Future Educational Needs, Defining Appropriate Curricula, Student Characteristics, and Faculty Characteristics. Many existing problems were identified as a result of that process, as well as potentially useful strategies for corrective action.

The purpose of this project is to assess any changes in curriculum content or educational strategies (at both the undergraduate and graduate levels) that have resulted from the 1991 symposium, or in relation to subsequent new issues that have emerged within the forestry profession. Many of these new issues have been identified through processes such as the Pinchot Institute’s 1996 assessment, entitled *Evolving Toward Sustainable Forestry: Assessing Change in U.S. Forestry Organizations*. This assessment provided an overview of current efforts in each of the major sectors of the profession — forestry education, research, policy, and management — that reflect recent broad-based efforts to articulate public expectations for forests and forestry in the United States. Participants in the 1996 assessment focused not only on the near-term need to change the way some forests are being managed, but the longer-term need to provide the foresters of the future with the skills and expertise to practice sustainable forestry. Among the topics discussed were the changing demand for foresters in the marketplace, the need to incorporate sustainable forestry into curricula at more U.S. forestry schools, the need for continuing education to keep practicing foresters current with the science and techniques of sustainable forestry, and the need for incorporating these considerations in state licensing standards for professional foresters.

This project will consist of two major components:

- (1) establishing what a comprehensive curriculum in sustainable forestry might contain, based upon the changing needs of forestry employers who are broadening their approaches to forest resource management, becoming more responsive to environmental concerns in order to “maintain their social license to practice forestry;” and
- (2) ascertaining the extent to which professional forestry education programs at universities in the U.S. are providing this comprehensive approach through:
 - (a) a review of current course curricula with school administrators and faculty
 - (b) a survey of recent graduates, aimed at determining the extent to which they feel their institution has prepared them to practice forestry as it is expected of them today
 - (c) a survey of major employers of recent graduates, aimed at determining the extent to which they feel the institutions from which they have recruited or hired foresters have prepared graduates for practicing the kind of forestry that is expected of them.

The results of the study will provide valuable information to a number of different entities concerned with forestry education--forestry school faculty, prospective students, and prospective forestry employers, of course, but also the SAF in its function as the accrediting organization for forestry schools in the U.S., NAPFSC in its function as a forum for forestry school deans to address issues affecting professional forestry education across their respective institutions, and the Seventh American Forest

1998

University Education in Natural Resources

241

Congress Education Committee (a follow-up working group charged with reviewing forestry education in light of the “vision and principles” statements that emerged from the 1996 Forest Congress). These and other organizations will be involved in the conduct of this project, and in the dissemination of the results.

The responses are expected to appear first as extension courses or continuing adult education programs targeted to practicing professionals. Through the process of feedback and refinement, forestry educators themselves will get a better understanding of the specific knowledge needed and how it can best be taught. This is expected to facilitate the process by which new knowledge and approaches are incorporated into existing graduate and undergraduate courses, perhaps precipitating the creation of entirely new courses in forestry school curricula and the addition of new faculty with different areas of expertise than have traditionally been found on forestry school faculties.

To help with achieving the goals of this project, the Pinchot Institute for Conservation, in cooperation with the Sustainable Forestry Partnership at Oregon State University and Pennsylvania State University, will be hosting a 90-minute panel at the 2nd Biennial Conference on University Education in Natural Resources. The objectives of this panel will be: 1) to present and discuss the findings of the Pinchot Institute’s educational assessment to date; 2) to provide examples of individual university efforts to incorporate new knowledge and approaches into their programs as a way of addressing regional needs and issues; and 3) to engage the audience in a facilitated discussion of the issues surrounding the development of sustainable forestry education programs. The results of this discussion will be incorporated into the Pinchot Institute’s final project document, which will be released in late-1998.