

Forestry

Results of the 1999 accreditation review of the Bachelor of Science program in Forestry conducted by the Society of American Foresters (SAF). The SAF accredits the Forest Conservation option in the Forestry major. The major also offers options in Wildlife Habitat Management and Urban Forestry/Arboriculture. This review consisted of a self-study document prepared by the department in preparation for a four-day visit in April, 1999, by a three-person external review team. The review addressed eight standards: 1) program goals, objectives, and policies; 2) curriculum; 3) organization and administration; 4) faculty; 5) students; 6) parent institution support; 7) physical resources and facilities; and 8) research, extension, continuing education, and public service.

■ Strengths

The SAF visiting team found the Forestry program to be in compliance with all accreditation standards, and noted some particular strengths:

- The SAF team applauded the strategic planning efforts of the parent Department of Natural Resources Conservation (previously the Department of Forestry and Wildlife Management). The team noted both the quality and scope of the planning itself and the extent to which elements of the plan had been or were being implemented. The favorable reception the Department plan had received from the Dean and the Provost were also noted.
- In general, the willingness of the faculty and an “energetic and productive” department head to collaborate to “promote the new vision for the department” was seen as a notable strength.
- The introduction of innovative capstone courses at the upper level (one of the recommendations emerging from the strategic planning process) was praised for integrating the different aspects of the SAF-required curriculum, and for emphasizing interpersonal and problem-solving skills.
- The establishment of an Advisory Committee (also emerging from the planning process) was cited as evidence of the Department’s responsiveness to its many constituencies. The visiting team found that Advisory Committee members believe the department head and faculty are “genuine in their interest to listen to ... and act accordingly on ... advice and suggestions.”
- The team noted with satisfaction that “conflicts between teaching and research were not found,” and that “the faculty has a healthy respect for the synergism that can occur between research and teaching.” Similar praise was directed at the Department’s success in integrating professional and practical experience into the curriculum.
- The team noted the “strong administrative understanding of and commitment to the forestry program” on the part of the Dean, and specifically applauded the Dean’s leadership in shifting McIntire-Stennis funds away from base salaries in order to free up funds for research seed

money. This strategy was credited with driving much of the Department's success in increasing sponsored activity.

■ **Concerns**

While the SAF review was generally positive, several concerns were cited. First, the team noted the low representation of women and under-represented minorities among both faculty and students. The recent recruitment of a dual-career couple — resulting in the appointment of the program's only female tenure-track faculty member— was applauded, but greater efforts to “ensure recruitment and retention of minorities and under-represented groups” were called for. Similarly, the team found that “only 10% of students are female and there are very few minorities,” and recommended “adding a section in the strategic plan to address this area.”

Second, the team found that the Department's information on post-graduation activities of students was “very poor and incomplete,” and that “a better survey could prove helpful in determining future program direction.”

Finally, the team expressed strong concern over the state of the Department's physical facilities. The Department's home in Holdsworth Hall was found to be “barely adequate in size and badly in need of repair and maintenance. ... Classroom and laboratory facilities are badly worn and in need of major maintenance and rehabilitation. Some improvements have been made in recent years, but other chronic problems have become worse.” Specific deficiencies cited included leaking roofs and windows, inadequate electrical service, inadequate dry and wet lab space, and inadequate conference and seminar rooms. While the team commended the faculty and students for their “spirit and ingenuity in ‘making do’,” it also called for “continuous, serious rehabilitation” of Holdsworth and continued exploration of plans for a new building introduced in the Department's strategic plan.

■ **Recommendations and Future Action**

The College and campus administrations concur that it is appropriate to ask the Department to revisit its strategic planning to address recruiting and retention of women and under-represented minorities. The successful comprehensive planning already undertaken by the Department suggests that effective new strategies can be developed.

The SAF team's interest in developing better information on the post-graduation activities of students complements the campus's broader goals in building capacity for student outcomes assessment at the program level. The Office of Academic Planning and Assessment will work with the Department to assist in the development of appropriate learning outcomes and effective means of assessing success in achieving these outcomes.

The Review Team's concern with physical facilities parallels that of the campus administration, and lends urgency to ongoing efforts to develop a comprehensive response to the campus's mounting deferred maintenance, plant renewal, and new facilities needs.