

## **ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE NATURAL RESOURCES PLANNING COMMITTEE**

The College administration is grateful to the planning committee for their efforts. The report clearly demonstrates that you have been thoughtful and creative in the development of recommendations and plans. Your process has been inclusive and highly appropriate for the complex and sometimes contentious charge you received.

Although we are unable to implement all of your recommendations and suggestions immediately and disagree with a few of them, there can be no disputing that your report is an important step forward. We believe there are sufficient points on which there is both consensus and feasibility that we can sustain and build upon the energy generated by your committee, and do so without delay.

I intend to schedule a closing discussion with your committee in the near future. And I then hope many of you will continue your efforts in support of our Natural Resource and Environmental Sciences Initiative.

### **Organizational Issues**

**Formation of a School:** The report, and presumably committee discussions, touched softly on this issue. However, the College administration believes that questions regarding reorganization of academic units should be addressed and resolved soon. That resolution should apply for at least the duration of our 6-year review and planning cycles. This organizational uncertainty has been sustained too long. In the case of Landscape Architecture, for example, this cloud has existed since Provost Nietzel's "Futures" committee.

The underlying reasons why the College has continued the "School of Natural Resources" discussion include:

- 1) To provide higher visibility to natural resources and environmental sciences (NRES) in the College.
- 2) To promote opportunities for research synergy among scientists in forestry, soil science, landscape architecture, entomology, economics, environmental engineering and others via more cohesive leadership, organization, planning and resource allocation.
- 3) To strengthen and stabilize undergraduate and graduate programs in NRES.
- 4) To provide all College faculty in NRES disciplines the opportunity to more fully participate in all aspects of the College mission, particularly including terminal degree level graduate education for Forestry and Landscape Architecture faculty, and extension/service for Landscape Architecture faculty.
- 5) To exploit opportunities for efficiency in management and administration. Small units are increasingly disadvantaged by the complexity of administrative requirements.

While some of the arguments against departmental reorganization can be dismissed as territoriality or thoughtless resistance to change, there are also many valid reasons to respect the current structure of academic units that, for the most part, are functioning very well. The College administration has never intended to force departmental reorganization on an unwilling faculty. We have supported and in some cases instigated the discussion of reorganization in NRES believing that the positives listed above were sufficient to justify serious consideration of structural change. Yet it appears at this time, and particularly in the absence of a clear recommendation from this committee, that the enthusiasm and consensus required to move forward has not materialized.

The five objectives listed above remain high priorities of the College. We hope that other elements of this response will demonstrate our commitment to these goals for the planning committee and NRES faculty throughout the College. We believe that substantial progress can be achieved without departmental reorganization. In our concluding meeting with this planning committee, and subsequent to conferring with the provost and with College chairs, we will suggest that further consideration of a School of Natural Resources be tabled indefinitely. We do not endorse the recommendation that we “conduct a SWOT analysis on the potential for a School of NRES” at this time.

**Formation of an Institute for NRES:** The College administration supports the goal of establishing a permanent organizational infrastructure for NRES expressed in Recommendation #4 of the report. In the absence of a more formal School-like structure, some form of interdepartmental infrastructure will be required to achieve our goals in NRES.

We agree that this infrastructure should include support for faculty time commitment, some staff capacity, developmental resources or seed funding, and an appropriate organization of interest/working groups to direct programming. We will specify some preliminary attempts to address these needs in this response.

However, the following factors argue for a more incremental response at this time, rather than commitment to an Institute immediately.

- 1) The provost has supported a major effort in ES planning subsequent to the formation of your planning committee. At this time, it remains uncertain how this university-level “Institute for the Environment” will function and be organized.
- 2) Budget circumstances have changed for the worse since this committee was formed and the university’s growth models have been scaled back at least for the immediate future.
- 3) Further planning and progressive, gradual implementation are likely to be helpful in advancing a largely voluntary culture of interdepartmental collaboration. Both faculty and college/department administrators may be more likely to invest in what is initially a less autonomous but more interdependent model.
- 4) Although flexibility is offered in the developmental stages, the creation of an Institute or Center does commit us to eventually proceeding through the complex bureaucracy of official university approval.

Comparisons to the College's Equine Initiative are useful. In both cases, planning committees proposed an Institute or Center-like structure. In both cases the College administration accepted the development of such a permanent, formal organizational structure as a goal, but proposes the less formal and more flexible concept of an "initiative" as the next step. In the case of the Equine Initiative this model has led to a very substantial allocation of resources, new faculty hiring, creation of a new undergrad degree, and a remarkable increase in visibility and impact. The College administration believes that, despite the budgetary downturn, comparable progress can be made with an NRES Initiative.

We propose to establish the Natural Resource and Environmental Sciences Initiative, beginning with the identification of a part-time Director and a Steering Committee. This organizational entity may continue to function as long as it serves the College's goals in NRES, or it may continue to develop plans for a formal Institute or Center to be pursued in future years.

**Using existing NRES organizational infrastructure:** The College currently administers the Tracy Farmer Center for the Environment, the Cooperative Extension Environmental and Natural Resource Issues Task Force (ENRI), the SB 271 program, the Precision Resource Management special grant, and a host of other NRES initiatives organized mostly at the department level. The success of any NRES Initiative will be dependent upon unifying these existing programs and developing synergies among them, not in duplicating their function.

At this time the College maintains administrative responsibility for TFCE, which was created, and is being sustained, as an interdisciplinary, umbrella organization for ES at UK. The College has offered to support a linkage of TFCE (and the associated endowment) and the developing "Institute for the Environment" structure if requested by the VP for Research. However, even if the TFCE were to change administrative homes, the College remains committed to the staff of TFCE and the programming they do. Several of the objectives in the planning draft are already being addressed, or could easily be addressed through the capacity we have created and funded in TFCE, particularly as related to communications and facilitation of interdepartmental programming.

We will consider the recommendation for staffing in support of NRES simultaneously with a comprehensive and unified administrative review of current staffing of ENRI, TFCE and other College-level investments. A plan for coordination of existing NRES staff and identification of staffing gaps critical for the success of the NRES Initiative will be drafted at the dean's level during the summer of 2008.

The TFCE staff has a proven record of web development. Ag Communications Services has exceptional expertise in web technology and design, and administrative discussions are progressing rapidly about enhanced strategies for bringing that expertise to bear on high priority program areas in the College. The report recommends that we "develop a comprehensive and integrative web presence..." and the College administration agrees that this can and should be an immediate priority. We propose that a web development

committee be the first working group of the NRES Initiative. TFCE and Ag Communications staff will work closely with NRES Initiative faculty and staff to develop a truly superior web presence, first at the College level, but if mutually advantageous also offering support for a web platform for the university-level ES effort as well.

Sustainability has become a focus for interdisciplinary efforts at the university and college level. College of Agriculture faculty have assumed a leadership role at the university level. In consideration of the widespread interdisciplinary interest in sustainable ag, food and natural resource systems, we strongly recommend that the NRES Initiative include a working group on these and other sustainability issues to coordinate and facilitate relevant college programs.

Recommendation #3 in the report, provide seed funding for interdisciplinary NRES projects, is already being partly addressed through existing programs. We will encourage strong and formal linkage between the NRES Initiative structure and the faculty and administrative leadership of SB-271 and PRM. SB-271 and PRM have provided several million in NRES research support over the last several years. We propose that these programs further emphasize the investment in interdisciplinary projects, particularly those investments that can be characterized as seed funding, leading to expansion of extramural funding sources.

### **Undergraduate Programs**

Considering current university priorities, including the Top 20 plan, advancement of undergraduate programs **must be** a, or perhaps even **the**, leading element of an NRES Initiative. The report recommendation “Consider how the existing NRCM undergraduate degree program and any potential new programs would relate to this initiative” does not adequately reflect the urgency and priority of this issue. Promoting undergraduate success, attracting the most talented students, and increasing our capacity to provide excellent instruction and advising for more students will need to be as prominent in the NRES Initiative as it has been in the Equine Initiative if we are to justify new investments.

NRCM is a successful program, but we believe there are great opportunities to attract more and better students, particularly emphasizing the recruitment of strong entering freshman as has occurred with Ag Biotech. The College administration is committed to supporting the advancement of this program. A periodic program review of NRCM is underway. When this report is completed we propose that a working group of the NRES Initiative be formed immediately for implementation and response to the review findings. NRCM program leadership would become a continuing element of the NRES Initiative.

The initiative to establish a new undergraduate program in Sustainable Agriculture should also be considered while planning for NRES. While the current emphasis in this area on ag production may not be fully compatible with undergraduate goals for NRES,

there are sufficient ties between sustainability initiatives and NRES efforts that they must be coordinated.

### **Graduate Programs**

College-level development of alternative or additional NRES programs appears to now be dependent on progress of planning for the university ES efforts. We are supportive of College participation in or even leadership of such programs at either the undergraduate or graduate level, but do not believe the College should initiate such plans unilaterally at this time. In response to the recommendation to “establish an interdisciplinary graduate degree in NRES...” we suggest that we must look first to the university-level planning process.

### **Responses to Other Recommendations**

“A College policy on how to allocate project overhead funds..” Such a policy exists. The unit (typically a department) paying the salary and holding the primary appointment of the faculty or staff generating either salary savings or indirect cost return controls such funds. Department chairs negotiate the use of those funds with faculty generating them, typically considering investments that both support the program of that faculty member and enhance the overall benefit to collaborating scientists. Faculty generating such funds can recommend the direction of a fraction or all such funds to an interdisciplinary or non-departmental program if they choose to do so, and there are many precedents for agreement by the chair.

Extramural award totals are typically not recorded except for academic departments or centers and institutes that are distinct budgetary units. However, it is possible to collect data on grants to faculty and staff participating in this, or any other defined initiative. We believe that collaborative grant totals would be a particularly significant metric for the NRES Initiative.

“Effectively involve external advisors/stakeholders in program development...” We support the formation of NRES Advisory Committee. Initial plans have been made by the Ag Experiment Station for such a group. Formation of this external group should await the initial stages of the NRES Initiative establishment and should be done in collaboration with the College administration.

“Develop a metric that values interdisciplinary work...” “Recommend a College policy for ...recognition (of interdisciplinary efforts)” This is not a new issue or one that is unique to NRES. The College administration believes that faculty peer evaluations are much more frequently the barrier than administrative evaluations. College performance reviews and promotion evaluations give heavy value to individual efforts that make group projects more effective. Support of colleagues in and outside of ones own discipline can perhaps be more prominently featured in guidelines for evaluation.

“Initiate a monthly or bi-monthly informational meeting...” We agree this should be a high priority for the NRES Initiative, and the College will provide resources for refreshments, guest speakers, staff support, etc. upon receipt of a proposal from the NRES Steering Committee.

Weaknesses identified in resources: In support of the NRES Initiative, we have included a cluster of 4 NRES positions in our recent reallocation proposal to the provost. As will be announced separately, 2 of those will be funded. The College hopes to leverage additional resources to budget a third new position in NRES. These faculty positions will be expected to contribute to undergrad advising and instruction in NRCM and to participate actively in the NRES Initiative.

## **Summary**

- 1) We propose to establish the Natural Resource and Environmental Sciences Initiative. A part-time Director and Steering Committee will be named as soon as is feasible.**
- 2) The ongoing university development of an “Institute for the Environment” must be considered in addressing several of the concerns raised in the report.**
- 3) Linking and coordination of existing NRES programs will be a critical objective of our College Initiative. We recommend the formation of a sustainability working group within the NRES Initiative.**
- 4) A staffing plan will be developed by the administration that utilizes current college-funded staff in TFCE, ENRI, and elsewhere and identifies remaining gaps essential to NRES.**
- 5) Advancement of undergraduate programs in NRES must be a top priority of the Initiative, and the existing NRCM major is seen as a promising vehicle.**
- 6) The College will give high priority to and commit staff support for developing a superior web presence in NRES.**
- 7) At least two new NRES faculty positions will be funded through the provost’s recent reallocation process.**