

Forestry Education – Introduction

by Nancy Luckai¹

The series of articles that make up the theme section of this issue of *The Forestry Chronicle* represent contributions from individuals located across Canada. I am indebted to their efforts to summarize the current state of post-secondary and continuing forestry education. As is the case with many aspects of forestry, their target was a moving one. In several places we therefore see the words “proposed” or “under development.” If there is one consistent theme, it is that every aspect of forestry education in Canada is responding to, or attempting to respond to, the evolving demands and expectations of a variety of spectators and participants. Students, professional and academic accreditation bodies, taxpayers, ministries of education (among others), first nation peoples, employers – all have a stake in ensuring that the graduates of our various educational endeavors are adequately prepared to meet the challenges of practicing forestry under the triple bottom line – economic, social and ecological.

A few words of context may assist the reader. First, we have tried to consider undergraduate and continuing forestry education nationwide. A glimpse at a website such as <http://www.canadian-forests.com/ed-res.html> will confirm the wide array of options available. At the undergraduate level, this means programs accredited through the Canadian Forestry Accreditation Board, those accredited through other organizations and those not seeking, or requiring, accreditation at all. This is a new and somewhat perplexing situation for some. Programs that are geared to produce “foresters” ready for membership in provincial Professional Forestry associations are no longer in the majority. This diversity reflects the variety of career paths available to graduates as well as the increasingly wide range of expertise required to do the job yet impossible to cover in a single version of the curriculum. Recognition programs, such as the CIF/IFC Silver Ring, have responded by including graduates from a variety of baccalaureate programs and stressing the importance of our common goal – excellence in forest stewardship.

Prof. G. Weetman (retired, UBC) starts us off in his editorial (page 186) with a question about the existence of a “system” and a reference to the skill sets identified by the CFAB and Zundel and Needham (1996). I would suggest that there are at least two more guides to the development of forestry curricula. These are 1) past programs with all their warts and beauty marks and 2) the expectations of the people we serve. The “social license” under which we operate dictates that all aspects of forestry – renewal, re-establishment, recreation and resource extraction – stand up to professional and public scrutiny. Certification, one theme of the CIF/IFC Annual General Meeting held in Ottawa in 1998, has changed the way the business of forestry is conducted. For example, Fitzgerald (1998) reported that only one small forest had achieved certification as of October 1998, now millions of hectares are cer-

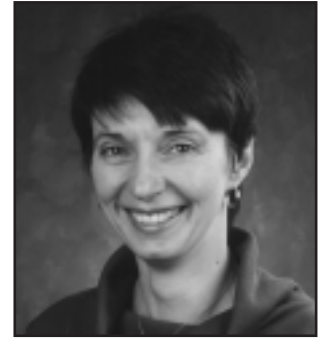
tified. Similarly, skeptics dismissed the idea of “carbon credits” only a year or so ago. At the 2001 AGM in Whistler, Clark Binkley, former Dean of UBC, confirmed that the market for carbon credits is developing. Peter Duinker, in his summary of that meeting, said “the context [of forestry] will never stabilize, so forest professionals should start to learn better how to operate in an ever-changing environment.”

The obvious message is that our graduates must find the balance between traditional skills and emerging trends in order to succeed. This dynamic equilibrium – a fundamental characteristic of natural ecosystems – is emerging in all aspects of forestry education.

Prof. Weetman continues with a list of the “good and bad” features affecting professional forestry education. Having listened to the debates and discussions for a few years myself, it seems that these features are indeed widely applicable to all forms of forestry education across the country. Those looking for a historical perspective are directed to a very readable summary in Apsey *et al.*'s “The Perpetual Forest” (Apsey *et al.* 2000). This account affirms that history does indeed repeat itself – especially when we aren't watching closely. By all means, celebrate the good and bemoan the bad in our “system” – but don't be complacent! Most educational programs rely heavily upon input and resources from the practicing community. Next time an educator (or Development Officer) comes looking for support for his or her program, consider carefully how your response to the request now will impact the supply of good graduates in the future.

The articles completing the suite are intended to capture traditional and emerging elements from program content to program delivery. (Given the constraints of time, energy and space, not every aspect of every topic – nor every institution offering forestry programming – could be included. Readers are urged to contact the authors with further comments or to consider Letters to the Editor if omissions or errors are noted.) Gauthier, Parsons and Comeau provide a survey of Continuing Education templates, Naysmith reviews the wide variety of international opportunities available to Canadian undergrads, Luckai considers the common curricular elements among the programs offered by the “Big Seven” (those universities whose undergrads are eligible to receive the CIF Gold Medal), DeGiacomo offers a primer on the role of Experiential Education and Smith brings us up-to-date on Aboriginal peoples and issues in forestry curricula. Pudlubny, Knapp and Galon challenge our readers to consider carefully the implications of the shift from field to office skills in the training of forestry diploma students.

Readers will note the absence of survey information on diploma and graduate programs as well as on the research compo-



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ment of university curricula. Also missing is a review of post-secondary institutions in Canada offering forestry course content through majors, minors and specializations but not falling under the aegis of the CFAB. It is anticipated that all of these important elements will be included in future issues of *The Forestry Chronicle*.

For some, the array of educational alternatives is exciting and invigorating, for others – perplexing and upsetting. Let's hope that the latter emotions are reserved for the administrivia that seems to haunt all complex anthropogenic systems, while the former characterize our individual and collective approach to lifelong learning!

Thanks to V. Nordin and R. Comeau - first, for asking me to coordinate this issue and then, for making it possible for me to complete the project. It's been a unique and valuable educational opportunity!

References

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- Fitzgerald, D. 1998.** Certification: the view from the “other” end. *For. Chron.* 74: 828–830.