

Assessing Quality in Professional Forestry Education: A Survey of U.S. Forestry Undergraduate Programs

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Structure of Education Evaluation in US

Society of American Foresters (SAF) sole US accrediting body for forestry education

- **Traditional approach specified minimum hours of coursework in selected disciplines such as general education, biology, management, administration**
- **Change in accreditation standards initiated in 1998 with Task Force on Forestry Education Accreditation**

Other regional entities (e.g., Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) accredit programs generally in US

Task Force on Forestry Education Accreditation (2000) Charge from SAF Council

“(1) to involve forestry educators and employers in a dialogue to address how the Society of American Foresters can assist U.S. professional forestry education by preparing graduates for entry-level forestry employment, and (2) to recommend to SAF Council appropriate actions to maintain effective professional forestry accreditation”

Task Force on Forestry Education Accreditation (2000)

Final Report contained 11 recommendations

competencies “...refer to student outcomes that indicate students have the necessary background to function as a forestry professional.”

General education competencies - oral and written communication; biological, physical, and social sciences; mathematics; and humanities

Professional competencies - ecology and biology; measurement of forest resources; management of forest resources; and forest resource policy, economics, and administration.

Study Objectives

Survey SAF-Accredited Programs to determine:

- 1.How competency is measured,**
- 2.How SAF standards have affected education efforts , and**
- 3.The importance placed on educational efforts by the institution**

Methods for assessing competency of graduates

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>% of respondents</u>
Employment/placement of graduates	27	100
Capstone course performance	22	83
Surveys of recent graduates	20	74
Interviews of recent graduates	18	67
Input from external groups	19	71
Interviews of employers	13	48
Surveys of employers	13	48
Licensing/registration exam results	6	22

How assessments have affected undergraduate curricula

	<u>Frequency</u>
Communication	9
Critical thinking	5
Geospatial technology	4
Ethics	2
Field studies	3
Group projects	2

Have You Changed Because of SAF Revisions?

YES: 14

Why? To enhance outcomes assessment

NO: 13

Why not? Already had adequate assessment procedures in place

How Important is Teaching Effectiveness in Tenure and Promotion Decisions?

Very important (*has been the determining factor in decisions*): 12

Important (*is discussed as part of tenure and/or promotion decisions*): 14

Somewhat important (*reviewed but has never influenced decisions*): 1

Unimportant (*not really considered*): 0

Methods employed to evaluate teaching effectiveness

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>% of respondents</u>
Exit interviews of seniors in the program	21	78
Department Head/Administrative reviews	21	78
University-wide student evaluations	21	78
College or departmental student evaluations	14	52
Internal peer reviews	17	63
External peer reviews	5	19

Conclusions

Schools and Assessment

- 1. Most Programs have been conducting some form of assessment of their graduates for some time, most often informally**
- 2. A substantial portion are beginning to formalize these assessment procedures**
- 3. A very small percentage are incorporating the outcomes assessment philosophy throughout their curricula**
 - **Annual competency exams**
 - **Portfolios**

Next Steps?

- 1. Develop minimum assessment standards**
- 2. Integrate outcomes assessment throughout curriculum**