

Education Committee report: October 2021

National Association of University Forest Resource Programs (NAUFRP)

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1. SAF Accreditation

At the Spring 2020 NAUFRP Executive Committee meeting, it was requested that SAF include the NAUFRP education chair as a part of the discussion of accreditation standards review. The Education Chair was appointed (January 2021) to the SAF Educational Policy Review Committee. This committee has been working to finalize the accreditation standards, and the new standards were approved by the SAF Board at a meeting in August 2021. Ongoing work is refining the forms and tables that are associated with the accreditation report writing process, and updating the handbook for visiting teams.

Some key issues that were addressed and shared with the SAF Board of Directors were:

How does SAF accreditation fit with institutional accreditation?

- Remove duplication – e.g., admissions and graduation policies, student support services, library collections details, detailed outcomes assessment procedures

Eliminate references to general education

- SAF accreditation does not establish requirements for what ‘general education’ should be at any given institution, rather that students achieve competencies, some of which may relate to coursework considered by the institution to be ‘general education’.

Accreditation for the 21st century

- Include awareness of social justice concepts, require efforts to create inclusive cultures where both faculty and students have a sense of belonging

Some key changes and considerations (based on previous NAUFRP Exec Committee discussions) are included below:

Words Matter

Careful selection of wording to be inclusive when, for example, the focus is on issues relating to DEI

- Example: Context statement for program purpose
 - *Best practices of contemporary scientific and traditional ecological knowledge systems*
 - *Professional and ethical behaviors*
 - *The value of diverse people, perspectives, and practices*
- Example: Student development and support
 - *The program must include (a range of) experiential learning and engagement opportunities for students that promote the recognition, value, and inclusion of diverse perspectives and practices in the profession.*
- The committee sought the input from experts in conveying DEI values, recognizing that the wording of these is important.

Lists of standards

The current handbook lists standards as:

1. Mission, Goals, and Objectives
2. Organization and Administration
3. Students
4. Parent Institution Support
5. Curriculum
6. Faculty

The new handbook lists standards as:

1. Program Purpose and Learning Outcomes
2. Administration and Institutional Support (combines current 2 and 4)
3. Faculty
4. Curriculum
5. Student Development and Support

For the minimum number of faculty requirement:

Professional (4 year) programs

Requirement for a minimum of 8 retained; however, now offers an alternate path that allows the program to make its case that it has a sufficient number.

The expectation is a critical mass of people working in unison toward the common goal and that the structure of this critical mass is effective in supporting the deliverables.

The revisions to faculty requirements are putting stronger (or at least clearer) emphasis on demonstrating the necessary disciplinary expertise, as well as on effective teaching skills and balancing teaching loads.

Depth, breadth, and balance across the identified disciplinary expertise categories needed to ensure that program learning outcomes can be met should be evident.

Technical (2 year) Programs

Remove requirement for 2 full-time faculty members; instead, 2 faculty members employed by, or with a formal obligation to, the institution – but also allows the program to make the case that its faculty is sufficient.

Allows programs flexibility to hire adjunct faculty who are well-qualified to teach and will remain year after year for consistency, without having to be an employee.

Remove required full-time equivalent faculty to full-time equivalent student ratios

Additional details of key changes can be provided on request.

2. Global Forest Education Project – Update

The International Conference on Forest Education was held June 22-24, 2021. The regional report for North America is not available online at the time of writing this report. The Regional Assessment Report of Forest Education in North America (Canada and the United States) was written by UBC Faculty of Forestry, Terry Sharik, Michigan Tech, and Rocco Saracina Project Learning Tree Canada were regional partners. The regional report is part of a global study of forest-related education that spans primary, secondary, and tertiary education, and involved teachers and administrators, students, and external organizations. It includes the outcomes of a survey that was administered in 2020 as well as discussion of some of the history of forest education in North America. Survey

response numbers were lower than planned, in large part due to the survey being administered during the pandemic.

Project Link: <http://www.fao.org/forestry/forest-education/en/>

The project result in a call for action (see below from: <http://www.fao.org/3/cb5258en/cb5258en.pdf>. NAUFRP members may choose to sign up to this call for action.

Called for action to:

Strengthen policies and strategies to improve forest learning at all levels of education and training;

Heighten awareness of the societal importance of forest careers, and improve their image among youth, students of all ages and the general public through targeted communications;

Promote at all levels of education a more holistic and interdisciplinary understanding of forests, a greater appreciation of the factors of gender, age, rights-based approaches, social inclusion and landscape values in forest and tree management, and an improved understanding of traditional and indigenous forest-related knowledge;

Foster greater appreciation and knowledge of forests and forest careers in primary and secondary education through increased coverage in the curricula, greater use of forest-related learning materials, and direct exposure of youth to forests and forest professionals;

Improve the quality of vocational training and university education programmes through timely forest curriculum revision in consultation with stakeholders, increased use of improved teaching approaches, digital tools and online learning, better incorporation of evidence-based scientific knowledge and of local (traditional and indigenous) forest-related knowledge into learning materials, and provision of a conducive learning environment for all students, regardless of gender, ethnicity or race;

Increase funding for forest education, research and extension programmes and provide scholarships, international exchange opportunities, internships and part-time work opportunities for forest students at vocational and university levels;

Support the expansion of non-formal education (including continuing education, extension training, farmer field schools) and informal learning (e.g. through public media educational programmes, nature clubs, museums, etc.) on forests and trees; and

Strengthen forest education stakeholder engagement and partnerships, including through expediting the dissemination of information, facilitating networking and fostering collaborative action.

3. Guest blog for SAF

The NAUFRP education chair and the NAUFRP president co-authored an SAF Convention Friday Focus On blog. The theme was 'Forestry instruction during the pandemic: how it happened.' This blog post went live on August 11. The [blog series](#) is available on the SAF website. The text of the blog is included below.

SAF Convention Friday Focus On blog: Forestry instruction during the pandemic: how it happened

The COVID-19 pandemic brought sweeping changes to how many university forestry courses operate. In the blink of an eye, faculty and administrators pivoted to a different method of teaching. As with so many parts of society, higher education had to step up during the pandemic. This meant adapting and continuing to work to fulfill our mission to educate the foresters of tomorrow.

Students were sent home in March 2020 and told to prepare for online course delivery. Graduation ceremonies were cancelled and summer courses were offered in new ways (if offered at all).

The fall semester of 2020 brought face coverings, face shields, social distancing, greatly reduced classroom capacities, the need for access to student isolation spaces, and the challenges of course delivery to students located in the same room as well as students located remotely. All instructors and students are to be congratulated on how operations went. Through this, students and instructors have shown remarkable adaptability, patience and resilience as our forestry programs worked to navigate a pandemic that developed on different timelines and intensities around the country. The core thrust of the response was how to get students outdoor, hands-on education to prepare them for their careers!

In late summer and early fall, members of the National Association of University Forest Resources Programs engaged in online email discussions to compare notes about the summer, and to learn from one another about plans for the fall. While some saw drops in fall enrollments, others reported increases. Almost all had worked on developing a fall semester that included some in-person classes, online content, and hybrid classes that had course delivery in multiple ways. A few, however, had no in-person classes, and many limited in-person classes to field based classes and reduced capacity lab sections. Instructional personnel had to be ready for everything – students simultaneously in person and online, sudden shutdowns of in person teaching, students absent due to the pandemic, and teaching wearing face coverings and shields.

Most forestry programs offer some type of in-person field-based programs in the summer. The response of different institutions to the pandemic in the summer of 2020 was varied. While very few went ahead as planned, most either went virtual or were postponed until summer 2021.

Delivering virtual field-based education in the pandemic often involved shipping field equipment to students, lecturing online, and using technologies such as live streaming to engage with students. Given the speed of the change, things went remarkably well. Despite the success over the pandemic, it is paramount that educators and employers continue to work with new foresters to help them hone their field skills as part of their ongoing professional development.

Over time, almost all institutions have made giant steps towards a more 'normal' classroom and field experience, and some of the focus has shifted into what we have learned from the pandemic that may make long-term improvements to course delivery, and to improved access to forestry education.

The innovation due to necessity has now become innovation due to opportunity, and we are looking forward to bringing access to quality forestry education to more diverse audiences, and engaging with the public in new ways that expand and elevate the perception of the profession. Everyone looks forward to field classes remaining at the core of forestry education, but our eyes have been opened to other opportunities that can benefit society in the future.

As a part of the virtual SAF Convention, the Friday Focus On session **Forestry Education in a Post-pandemic World** will continue to discuss the challenges and opportunities brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Join us to engage with four panelists of forestry educators and administrators as they reflect on what worked during the pandemic, the challenges that impacted their institutions, and the opportunities for forestry education in a post-pandemic world.

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