

Five Year review of Forest Ecosystems and Society (FES) Graduate Program

Background

This review is based on the self-study prepared by the FES program and meeting with Troy Hall (FES Chair), Lisa Ganio (FES Graduate Program Director), Jessica Bagley (FES Graduate Program Coordinator), as well as one hour meetings with five graduate students and about six faculty members on January 12, 2018. These meetings were coordinated by Stephanie Bernell (Associate Dean, Graduate School). This report is prepared by Walter Loveland (WDL, Chemistry) and Sourabh Apte (SVA, MIME) who reviewed the program.

Summary and Findings

We were very pleased with the extensive (50+ page) self-study report furnished to us prior to the in-person review. Overall the FES graduate program is off to a good start and is in good shape. The student enrollment is growing as anticipated. The graduate students enrolled seemed reasonably pleased with graduate experience. A majority of the students liked the flexibility offered by the program to choose their own coursework in consultation with their committee making it truly interdisciplinary. However, they also felt that some core courses (especially at the Master's level) would help bring the graduate students together.

With respect to the preparation for the full 10 year review, we do not see any major issues. The five year review document was thorough, and well prepared, and included all necessary data available at the time. Collecting some data on the alumni of this program would further complete the document.

Expanded Comments

Below some detailed remarks are given based on our interactions with the faculty, the students and the administrators. Some potential improvements to the program are suggested.

- (a) The FES graduate program is in good shape. The thirty-five active graduate faculty who regularly direct research in the program are sufficient for the number of enrolled students (29 Masters and 34 Ph.D. students). There has been a drop of about 25% (roughly 10-12 Tenure track/Tenure faculty) in the active faculty since the inception of the program but the impact of this decrease has not significantly affected the program quality. The five new faculty hires provide a reasonable balance of faculty at different ranks. The original projections for the program in the enabling Cat. I proposal were "overly optimistic." (7 Ph. D. students/year starting with the first year). This was potentially based on the number of degrees offered prior to the restructuring and creation of this program. The students that were in the previous program were not included in the graduate degrees offered by FES in the first five years. After five years of very small production (0-1 students per year), the program seems to be hitting its stride with 6 Ph. D. degrees being awarded in 2017.

Some graduate students (especially doing master's degree) felt that having a list of potential courses (or a catalogue) would help them locate the various options available. Also, a majority of the students felt that they do not know their peers or their research work because of the breadth and interdisciplinary nature of the FES program. Students suggested that a common seminar, some opportunities to share

courses, or informal gatherings getting to know faculty and their research area would be useful.

- (b) The research faculty are, for the most part, doing well with 2-3 postdocs and 2-3 technicians per faculty member. The destruction of Peavy Hall and the slow pace of its replacement has posed a challenge to the program that is of concern to several of the faculty. Specifically, a few faculty expressed concerns on lack of laboratory space as well as infrastructure support for their research. Since the primary mechanism for support of graduate students is faculty sponsored GRA positions, there is concern about the future of the program if there are cuts in Federal support of natural resources research.
- (c) The graduate students in the program are reasonably pleased with their graduate experience (based upon the very small sample of 6-8 students of the enrolled 60+ students who showed up to meet with the review panel.) Some of their concerns about the program are reflected below in our suggestions for possible program improvement. The 6-8 students seemed relatively clueless about what they would do upon graduation with most anticipating a struggle to find employment. The majority of the students reported that they or someone they knew had been subject to sexual harassment/bullying during their graduate career—**not necessarily in the FES program.**

Suggestions for the improvement of the program include:

- (a) Establish a list of recommended courses for most students that can help guide their academic programs. Provide data to the students on when these courses are offered.
- (b) Track the program graduates more carefully as part of a program to keep them engaged with OSU/FES.
- (c) Make a stronger effort to achieve diversity and inclusion in the students and faculty.
- (d) Form stronger connections between the program/students and potential employers. Forming an Industrial Advisory Board (IAB) could provide some avenues for such connections and/or additional input to the curriculum development.
- (e) Use of some incentives for faculty to hire graduate students as opposed to postdocs may help grow the graduate program.