

MES Quarterly Update

Excerpts from the MESsages Blog

Spring 2014

blogs.evergreen.edu/messages

Letter from the Director

Spring Quarter is always a promising time of year on campus. Students, faculty and staff are all working at full capacity and then some! First year students are now full candidates for a master's degree having successfully passed the Winter Quarter core program in environmental sustainability. Spring Quarter core program, Research Methods and Quantitative Methods is never an easy class. Three faculty members, Carri LeRoy, Kevin Francis and Greg Stewart are facilitating the core program. Under Carri's leadership, past students have actually claimed that the program became their favorite, so always something new to learn about research methods! Many of the students are already beginning to define their thesis research and determine data collection protocols.

Second year students are in the middle of thesis research and writing. It's been my pleasure to work with them as a group. I am very thankful for their commitment to complete the program and earn their degrees. I look forward to thesis presentations at the end of the quarter. Every student is working on research that has direct impacts on better environmental management and decision-making. The presentations are open to the public. Information on the exact day, time and place will be widely advertised. Please consider joining us for these research presentations.

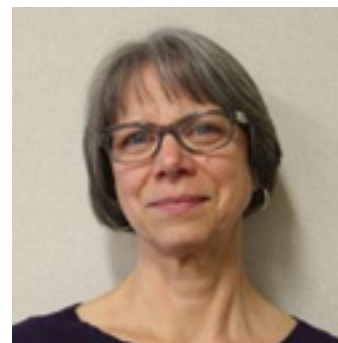
April also brings together two important program events. Applicants admitted for Fall 2014 are invited to campus for Student Admit Day. This year, Admit Day is being combined with the annual Rachel Carson Forum, a day to celebrate our program matron saint. Information about the Forum can be found on this blog site. The forum is being planned by the first year students and promises to be an informative evening. This event is also open to the public.

Admit Day will also be especially exciting this year. Kevin Francis, in-coming Director, has already taken on major leadership by hiring exciting new faculty and bringing them to campus for the Day.

The program welcomes back Erin Martin, Dina Roberts, Kathleen Saul, Peter Dorman and a new faculty member, Shangrila Wynn in climate justice. I am especially glad to see the focus on climate by all of these faculty members. Climate change and its impacts on social and natural

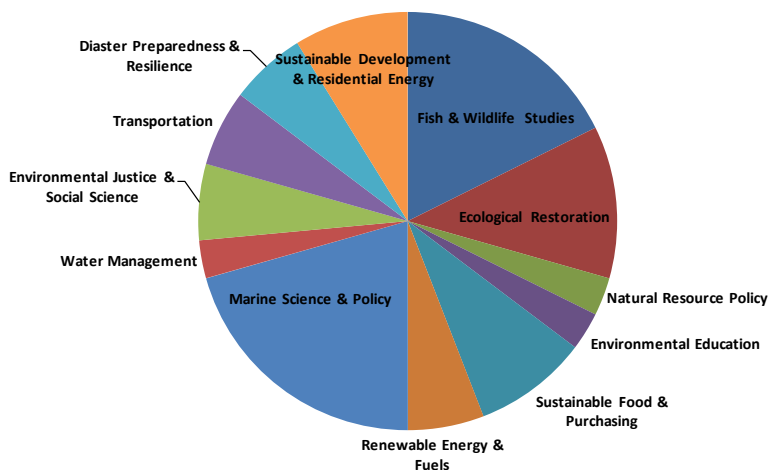
environments will only continue to rise in importance for current and future students. When events like the recent landslide in northern Washington, the loss of the Washington shellfish industry to ocean acidification, and increasing impacts on mountainous ecosystems become more obvious, understanding the role of climate change from an interdisciplinary perspective is crucial. MES is already preparing graduates to meet the new challenges of the 21st century.

Thank you for your interest and support of MES.



Martha Henderson, Director of the Graduate Program on the Environment

2014 MES Theses Topics



M.E.S.

Master of Environmental Studies

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Reflecting on a time in MES 25 years ago

By José Drummond, MES alumnus

I was one of the first MES graduates in the 1980s. I enrolled in the MES degree's third class in September of 1986. I concluded my thesis in August of 1988.

Those two years were among the best in my personal and professional life. I love to talk about them. However, telling current MES students about this almost "remote" experience brings up the issue of its relevance. Probably the program, Evergreen, and their environs have changed substantially after more than 25 years. I have not followed such changes, but I will try to take them into account as I mention a few points important to me and that may be of interest to current and future students.

I entered MES from Brazil looking for a substantial multi- or inter-disciplinary course of study in environmental issues. As I had a bachelor's degree in social sciences, I was looking for a well-crafted and sufficiently "heavy" exposure and training in the basics of natural sciences. I found this in MES, in the exact dose, content and format. I became literate in ecology, biology, forestry, geology, physical geography and hydrology. I learned how to advance further in these fields and how to teach myself about other fields.

At the same time, the particular blend of the MES curriculum allowed me to use and sharpen my social science background, particularly in the fields of natural resource economics, political science and environmental history. It was therefore an experience in both intellectual renewal and background consolidation.

A distinct matter was the training in writing embedded in the curriculum. Although I had published two books back in Brazil before 1986 (in Portuguese, of course), I had never received any instruction on the skills of writing. That changed in MES. In the first four quarters of the program we had the experience of writing - and getting faculty and colleague feedback - a large number and a wide variety of texts, including position papers, a field journal, presentation summaries, posters, term papers, thesis pre-project and project, always following specific instructions. This helped me become a prolific writer.

Before MES I had never made a field trip, although I was a semi-regular hiker/camper in Brazil. The 12 or more MES field trips were both a lot of fun (intensive sight-seeing for a recently-arrived foreigner) and a source of much learning. The trips were all carefully planned to complemently illustrate readings discussed in classes and seminars. We went to the Columbia River gorge (including Dry Falls and the Grand Coulee dam), Capitol Forest, Olympic National Park, several state and national forests, Grays Harbor (at its migratory bird peak), and several points along Puget Sound.



Jose immersed in thesis revision, in Olympia, 1988.

We even spent a full rainy Saturday prowling around Capitol Lake identifying birds and sources of water pollution. The most difficult hike for me was going up (and down) the muddy, rocky, wet and cold gorge of a retreating glacier somewhere in the Cascades. These trips prompted me to make several other leisure trips on my own, including Mt. St. Helens, Rainier National Park, San Juan Islands, Malheur Field Station, Crater Lake National Park, the Oregon coast and more. While having fun in all these temperate landscapes, by contrast I learned a lot about the tropical landscapes with which I was familiar, but took for granted. I also learned the value of first-hand observations of natural and human-made landscapes.

The last point I will mention is that MES prepared me to work with people of different backgrounds, an important "skill" for all people working on environmental issues. Both in my academic pursuits and in consulting experiences, my MES sojourn allowed me to be at ease when working with non-social scientists after more than ten years working exclusively with social scientists. Right after concluding MES, on my return to Brazil, I felt comfortable as I engaged in several professional projects involving professionals with varied backgrounds. Since 1999 I have worked exclusively in a graduate program in environmental studies in which professors and students come from the entire gamut of backgrounds. I would like to brag that I designed or founded this program, but actually I joined it when it already had taken off. However, I can truthfully say that I managed to put MES "fingerprints" on several program directives and activities.

No doubt about it: for me MES was an enriching experience with lasting effects.

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