The Director's Report, May 2010

School of Natural Resources
From Earth to Sky and Everything in Between

The end of the semester is near. It's a stressful time for faculty, staff and students. Congratulations to all students who are graduating this semester. For those students returning in the fall, I hope you have a safe and fun summer. We look forward to your return.

The content of this issue of the Director's Report differs from my other reports. The intent with this issue is to summarize some of SNR’s significant programmatic accomplishments of the past year. I appreciate this opportunity to identify and reflect on important milestones that are bringing us closer to reaching our vision. I feel we have made great progress in achieving our goals but much work remains. To use a sports analogy, the successes we have achieved thus far have been through teamwork, the deep respect for one another, and the contributions of all elements of the School. I continue to be honored to serve as your director.

Compiling an exhaustive list of our accomplishments over the past year would take up far too much space. Instead, I have chosen to identify some major highlights of this year that are indicative of our significant progress.

Some of our notable achievements include:

Comprehensive Strategic Planning and Review Process

Our issue-based strategic planning process began in the fall of 2007 and culminated in SNR’s comprehensive review during fall 2009. This two-year self-study process has provided a roadmap for the unit to follow over the next five years, making adjustments and pursuing new opportunities as they arise. The review team was quite complimentary of SNR’s programs and programmatic thrusts but also provided considerable food for thought. Our response to the review team’s report is nearly complete and includes a timeline or roadmap for the implementation of many of the team’s recommendations. This roadmap will serve as our metric and we will follow it as closely as possible.

The planning process that we followed in the development of our comprehensive review team report has been extremely beneficial. Personally, I feel that we have a much better sense of who we are and what we need to do in the years ahead to achieve our vision. To accomplish this goal we now have a new administrative structure -- faculties -- and we have identified five current and emerging issues in natural resources and environmental science that will be the aim of our research, teaching, extension, and survey activities.

Enhanced Outreach Programs

A more comprehensive outreach program has become a major part of the fabric of SNR as we strive to serve clientele and establish a greater presence on and off campus. Our outreach program includes our Tuesday evening outreach lecture series, our partnership with the Mayor’s Environmental Task Force to implement more sustainable practices for the campus and the Lincoln community, the Central Plains Severe Weather Symposium and Weatherfest, the Girl Scout Weather Camp, active participation in the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) program through multiple course offerings, the Summer Institute on Climate Change, the various survey functions for a diverse clientele group, and numerous workshops and presentations given throughout the state by our faculty and staff to improve our citizens’ awareness, understanding, and management of the state’s natural resources.

Enhanced External Funding

Director's Report Archive

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Director's Upcoming Travel

May 31-June 5, 2010
Murcia, Spain
To participate in a working group meeting sponsored by the World Meteorological Organization on agricultural drought indices.

June 29-July 2, 2010
Washington, D.C.
To participate in a series of meetings on drought policy in the U.S. and Australia under sponsorship of the Australian Research Council.
Since January 2009, SNR faculty and staff have been the recipients of $15,559,775 in grants. Our unit ranks second in IANR in grants/research FTE. In 2009, we set an all-time record of $13,005,409 for external funds generated. Since January 2009, SNR faculty and staff have submitted proposals totaling $82,939,846 — a remarkable achievement. Our collaborations both internally (within SNR) and externally (with other UNL and NU faculty and with other universities and organizations) have also increased substantially. Our faculty and staff provide leadership in pursuit of research, teaching, and outreach opportunities at the state, regional, national, and international level. They are frequently invited by their colleagues to participate in collaborative projects at other institutions, in recognition of their expertise.

During April 2010, SNR faculty and staff were awarded grants totaling $330,210. Congratulations to Mike Hayes, Matt Joeckel, Ken Hubbard, Craig Allen and Mary Brown for these awards. The total funding awarded January through April 2010 is $2,554,366.

Faculty, staff, and students submitting grant proposals in April included Bob Oglesby, Shashi Verma, Tadd Barrow, Kyle Hoagland, Mark Kuzila, Paul Hanson, Paul Merani, Dan Snow, Dave Gosselin, Dominic Biondo and Rusty Low. The total requested funding for proposals submitted in April was $6,676,500. Good luck with your proposals! The total for proposals submitted from January through April 2010 was $26,819,481.

**SNR Website Revised and Refreshed**

Over the past 18 months, we have undertaken and completed a process to completely revise and update SNR’s website. This work was initiated originally in parallel with our strategic planning process but the process also had to incorporate a change in the University of Nebraska’s template that all departments and university units must follow. Website revision and maintenance is a never-ending process but through the participation of SNR faculty and staff, with leadership from Mark Mesarch and Jeff Nothwehr, the process was successful. We will work to add and update content for the website with the help of a new web content committee under the leadership of Kelly Smith.

**Publications**

During 2009, SNR faculty were prolific in peer-reviewed and other publications that added significantly to the body of scientific knowledge in the many disciplines represented in SNR. According to data included in the eARFA database for 2009, SNR faculty published 114 refereed journal articles, 18 book chapters, and one book, and a total of 268 publications of all types, including abstracts, extension publications, and popular articles. Given the interdisciplinary composition of our faculty and the importance of the interdisciplinary approach in addressing many of the natural resources and environmental issues facing society, our contributions are noteworthy.

**New Faculty Hires**

SNR has made great strides forward in acquiring new faculty to augment and strengthen existing programs that will have benefits both within our state’s borders and beyond. These new faculty will also have a substantial impact on current and future students. We have welcomed to our unit the following faculty members:

- Qingfeng “Gene” Guan, a specialist in advanced techniques in Geographic Information Systems;
- Martha Shulski, climatologist and director of the High Plains Regional Climate Center;
- Tapan Pathak, extension educator in climate variability and change.

In addition, this fall we will add to our faculty:
• An aquatic ecologist/limnologist (to be announced in the near future).

We currently have as our highest priority the addition of a wetland ecologist to augment campus expertise in this critical natural resource area for the state. This position will serve our clientele in state and federal agencies and other organizations as well. Our faculty are currently engaged in a process to prioritize future faculty needs that we expect to complete this fall.

**Sustainability and SNR: Becoming a Role Model for the UNL campus?**

During the past several years SNR has been striving to be a role model for sustainability at the campus and community level. We have had considerable success with the help of our Sustainability Committee and the participation of our faculty, staff, and students. We have worked with the Mayor’s Environmental Task Force and other groups and have helped to organize and have hosted two Forums on Building Sustainable Partnerships. These events have had significant outcomes and are paving the way for a more sustainable campus and community. Through the initiation of a comprehensive recycling program in SNR, we are leading the way in putting sustainable ideas into practice and through our work with UNL’s Facilities Management Unit, we have had occupancy sensors installed in most offices in Hardin Hall. These sensors have significantly reduced energy consumption in the building. These outcomes are impressive but we need to continue to strive for more ways to be better stewards of our natural resources.

**Graduate and Undergraduate Students and Programs**

SNR’s undergraduate majors were at 286 in 2009, up from 246 in 2008 and 207 in 2007. Fisheries and Wildlife was by far the largest major, with 163, followed by Environmental Studies, with 63, and Geography, with 30. We’ve seen a definite increase in Environmental Studies majors, from 44 in 2007 and 57 in 2008, and in Environmental Restoration Science, which saw the number of majors increase from five in 2007 to 10 in 2009.

SNR graduate student enrollment for fall 2009 was 131, compared with 141 in 2008 and 109 in 2007. The number of graduate students in SNR has increased significantly since 2004, when we had 73.

**Geography Program: A Successful Merger with SNR**

The successful merger of the Geography Program into SNR in August 2008 continues to offer new opportunities for our research, teaching and outreach programs. The participation of these faculty in our comprehensive review process further highlighted the significant contributions this program can make to SNR in the years ahead. During the next year, Geography will continue to be further integrated into SNR to the benefit of our faculty, staff and students. Enrollment in the Geography Program has been fairly consistent over the past few years, at 27 in fall 2007, 34 in fall 2008, and 27 in fall 2009. It’s now up to 36. There are significant opportunities to increase the number of undergraduate majors in Geography in the future with greater visibility for the program on City Campus and through increased connections with SNR faculty and other resources.

**Building a Sense of Community**

Many are familiar with the Gallup Study completed a few years ago that focused on improving the “climate” in departments and other units on campus. One of the comments that I often hear about SNR from faculty and staff outside the unit is the high level of collegiality that exists in the unit. I see it on a daily basis as I interact with faculty and staff throughout the building. This is high praise, especially in light of the size of our unit.