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New college to meet growing complexity, scale of environmental threats

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The University of Washington Board of Regents today received a preliminary blueprint for a new college that will position the UW to be the leader in environmental research and education, and to better resolve complex regional, national and international environmental challenges, according to Provost Phyllis Wise.



[Draft proposal](#)

Presented as an information item to the UW Board of Regents May 15, 2008

The UW's environmental expertise comprises more than 400 faculty members on its three campuses and extends across 18 fields of study, from the geosciences to natural resources, and from climate dynamics to environmental policy. The UW's environmental expertise spans more fields than Duke, Michigan, Stanford or Yale -- all with existing environmental colleges -- as well as 17 other universities known for their environmental programs.

One key challenge, Wise says, is that UW experts and degree programs are distributed across numerous schools and colleges without overarching strategic planning or coordination. She said creating a new college would provide:

- A single place for students to turn for degrees or to find research opportunities concerning the environment.
- An organizational structure better suited to promote fundamental advances in environmental sciences and address the problems of the 21st century.
- A focal point for businesses, state agencies, non-governmental organizations and others who have said they don't know how to find their way at the UW when it comes to environmental information and problem solving.

Combine new and existing units

What's proposed for the College of the Environment is a hybrid of a traditional college with academic and research programs, an increased focus on cross-college appointments and an innovative institute able to forge partnerships and bring expertise from on and off campus to tackle pressing environmental problems, Wise says.

The ultimate composition of the new college has yet to be determined. Existing units that may move into the new college are:

- School of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences
- Department of Atmospheric Sciences
- Department of Earth and Space Science
- College of Forest Resources
- School of Marine Affairs
- School of Oceanography
- Program on the Environment
- Program on Climate Change
- Washington Sea Grant
- Water Center
- Friday Harbor Laboratories
- Joint Institute for the Study of the Atmosphere and Oceans (a joint program between UW and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration scientists)

One new academic unit is proposed that would draw on faculty from the social sciences who are involved with the environment, a unit currently labeled "Environment, Society and Culture."

A year of discussion and committee meetings leading up to the proposal involved faculty, students, staff, citizens and business leaders. The units that may move into the new college will continue this discussion in the coming year to determine if they wish to join the college, its mission, configuration and academic programs, Wise says.

Comparison with other national, environmental colleges

With the proposed units, the new college could become one of the largest groups of environmental scientists and scholars in the country, Wise says. The college would have three times the faculty and four times the external funding of existing colleges such as Duke's Nicholas School of Environmental and Earth Sciences or University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and Environment.

Proposed institute in college

The UW also proposes creating a central institute within the college where university researchers can build on the strengths of the core units and collaborate with off-campus experts and groups to promote fundamental advances and formulate real-world solutions for pressing regional, national and international problems, Wise says.

The UW expects the institute will bring in additional private gifts and formulate proposals for major new grants in the future, Wise says.

Financing

- The College of the Environment will be funded from federal, state and private sources.
- Existing units eventually included in the new college would bring their state funding for operations and teaching with them.
- Additional resources will be used to increase the number of faculty within the college by 20 full-time-equivalency faculty and 10 full-time-equivalency staff during the first five years to meet the expected growth of the college.
- The UW will launch activities of the institute in the fall using a gift of \$1 million from an anonymous donor.

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