Undergraduate Studies Report: Faculty of Environment General Assembly 2018
Brendon Larson, AD-Undergraduate Studies

We are a leading Canadian university for students seeking an interdisciplinary, problem-oriented environmental education, so my responsibility is to maintain areas of quality and to help improve where I can. My vision is that our environmental curriculum reaches every UW student and that our own graduates lead environmental change as a result of their work-integrated, experiential, supportive and quality education.

Here, I report on the areas of activity and priorities (consistent with UW and Faculty Strategic Plans) highlighted in my previous (2017) report, tracking outcomes where possible. My portfolio is broad (including tasks split among three Associate Dean-Undergrad in the large faculties), so in several areas listed below I rely heavily on regular interactions and excellent work from central services such as Co-operative Education & Career Action (CECA), Marketing and Undergrad Recruitment (MUR), the Registrar’s Office (RO), and the Student Success Office (SSO). I thus emphasize my more “personal” priorities with asterisks.

Importantly, I am here to support the units in reaching their objectives. I would be more than happy to hear your ideas for how we can work together to further the undergraduate agenda in our Faculty.

A. RECRUITMENT

We are in a new era of funding with not just a new UW Budget Model but a corridor-based funding model (and Strategic Mandate Agreement) with the province. There is low impetus for further growth, though given demographic trends we will have to work to maintain our domestic enrolment – even as we reach abroad.

I will continue to work with MUR (and the new manager of strategic enrollment) to further analyze challenges/opportunities for our Faculty. Here are my priorities:

1. *Broaden sustainability education at UW
   With the release of the UW Sustainability Strategy (and Policy 53), we have a wonderful opportunity to expose a broader range of UW students to sustainability (which doubles as an internal recruitment mechanism). This year, I prepared a service-teaching strategy to help our Faculty reach more undergraduate students across campus with appealing and influential courses. I also chaired the hiring of two new faculty-level lecturers (Erin O’Connell and James Nugent), and James is working hard to develop an online ‘sustainability fundamentals’ course for the UW community. Finally, I have been consulting with colleagues across campus to create a sustainability minor for UW students for Fall 2019.

2. Explore new markets
   As with other North American universities, we need to broaden our base beyond China. Canada-sourced visa students are a key group and the easiest to reach, but we are also planting seeds in potential markets in the U.S. and further abroad. To help nurture the growth of our Indian population, in April 2018 I spent eight days in India and Dubai to give “outreach” presentations to 1100+ high school students in 15 schools.

3. Develop high school outreach plan
   We also need to continue to grow our reputation among Canadian high-school students. As one example, in late May 2018 we will host the provincial high school Envirothon competition for the first time, which will bring 18 winning teams (90 students) from regional competitions across the province to our campus.

B. CO-OP AND EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Work-integrated and experiential education form a key plank in our educational mandate. These experiences can provide some of the most fulfilling memories in an undergraduate degree. My priorities are as follows:

1. Increase student involvement in work-integrated learning
   Our overall co-op employment rate is very high, though it varies among programs and it is lower for first work terms. As a member of the Co-operative Education Council and the de facto AD-Co-op, I have been involved with consultation and implementation of evolving opportunities for student’s work-integrated learning, namely co-op 2.0 (including certificates and flexible work terms) and EDGE (the experiential education certificate). I will continue to represent our students and Faculty to develop these initiatives.

2. *Improve student reflection
   In response to long-standing concerns about the efficacy of work-term reports, Jeff Casello struck a working group on student reflection that proposed an online e-portfolio for our students. Unfortunately,
the software has not been available, though I have been involved with an RFP. A result is expected soon, which will reboot our discussions around a revised approach to student reflection and work-term reports.

3. Increase field experiences for our students
   About 14% of our courses (37/258 from EDGE compilation) have a field experience. Our students greatly benefit from these experiences, so I am working with the Ecology Lab to increase these offerings.

4. Increase internationalization
   In addition to my trip to India, the most exciting news here is the creation of a new position, an Administrative and Faculty Exchange Coordinator. With Jaime Fohkens’ hire, we expect that the added promotion and support will increase the number of exchanges from current level (~25 students/annum).

C. STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND SUCCESS
   We can support our students in many ways, though some of my foci, in cooperation with the SSO and others, include improving transition into university (e.g., coordination of 5-minute metacognitive skills workshops to reach all of our students), awareness/support for mental health, integration/support for int’l students, and 4th-year experiences. In the coming year, I will represent our Faculty on the NSSE Action Planning Committee, which will coordinate the campus strategy for ensuring rich student experience.

D. OUTSTANDING ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING
   Our faculty are committed to high-quality teaching. Our curricula must be well-designed to ensure solid domain-specific knowledge and core competencies. Among other areas, here are my priorities:
   1. Ensure communication competency being met
      As a member of the Steering Committee, English Language Competency Initiative (SCELCI), I have initiated an external assessment of our Faculty’s communication courses.
   2. *Ensure continuity and complementarity of ENVS courses
      Jean and I are committed to ensuring that regular faculty/lecturers will teach our key ENVS courses, and the hiring of James and Erin this year was a huge step forward in this regard. This fall, I will turn to a curricular review to ensure our faculty-level courses are complementary (e.g., ENVS195-200) and form adequate pathways (e.g., ecological science beyond ENVS200).

E. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND POLICY
   • The Office of the ADUG regularly deals with issues of academic integrity (as well as all issues related to Policy 33, Policies 70-72), including 109 cases in fiscal 2017-18, a significant increase compared to last year. In the interests of prevention, I am working with the SSO to map out where our first-year students learn about plagiarism and other violations of AI, so that we can improve accordingly. I am also leading a UW-wide initiative to provide guidelines on collaboration and penalties for “excessive collaboration.”
   • I am involved with diverse efforts to clarify/improve policy related to UG matters, including updates to our calendar through the UGSC and ongoing campus-wide review of UG policies and procedures with the other ADUGs (through the Undergraduate Operations Committee and Senate Undergraduate Council).

F. THE ECOLOGY LAB
   The Ecology Lab supports a range of hands-on lab and field activities and is keen to help develop and support experiential learning in our courses. Over the past year, it supported 25% more students in our courses (1500), 33% more workshop attendees (400), and 50% more outreach workshop participants (1500, e.g., Envirothon, iBASE, IDEAS, Indigenous Student Centre, Shad). Highlights include: completing the TREE lab; initiating multiple activities in UW urban forest (e.g., tree mapping, wildlife monitoring); supporting UW restoration by expanding naturalized areas; and planning to host the provincial Envirothon.

G. THANK YOU
I am grateful for the support I’ve received from so many of you over the past year. It’s been wonderful to work with such a great team: Anne Grant, Anne Galang, Carol Knipe, and additions Jaime Fohkens, James Nugent, Erin O’Connell, and Jay Smith this year – as well as the Dean’s Office. Thanks to all of you for your daily dedication to our students that makes the job as ADUG meaningful.