

# Earth and Environmental Sciences Department Alumni Advisory Board

## Meeting Minutes

October 06, 2023

135 Trowbridge Hall and via Zoom

*Attending in person (\*Board Members):* Dick Baker, Mike Berkhardt, Adam Blind, Brad Cramer, \*Rhawn Denniston, \*Melissa Evans, Emily Finzel, \*Brian Hartman, Tom Foster, David Peate, \*Lee Phillips, Kate Tierney, \*Tim Stroope, \*Noah Stern, Eric Small, Cathy Woida

*Attending via Zoom:* Shamar Chin, \*Richard Denne, \*Jim Eagan, \*Luan Heywood, Amy Sullivan, Matt Wortel,

*Members Not in attendance:* Liz Maas, Todd Ririe, Aaron Suzuki

**Lee** called the meeting to order at 9:05 am. Introductions were made by those attending in person and via Zoom.

**Rhawn** reviewed the major items from the April 2023 meeting.

### EESB Membership

**Lee** noted that **Rob Decker** resigned from the Board last spring and **Rhawn** is stepping down when his term expires (which is December 2023. He will continue to host the pre-EESB meeting bbq as long as **Jeff Dorale** continues to do the cooking). As a result, the Board needs at least two new members soon, and as more board members are retiring next year, we will have to be actively recruiting in the near future. **Melissa** and **Noah** are returning to EESB for another term.

There were two nominations for the Board: **Amy Sullivan** and **Ben Howard**. After a short discussion, both were approved by unanimous vote (no abstentions). **Brad** suggested that the Board reach out to **Nick Johnson** for potential Board membership, as well.

### Fundraising

**Adam** ran through the fundraising numbers. In the last fiscal year, giving to the university was down relative to the year before although that had been an historical high (\$266 million vs \$437 million; however, \$266 was the 4<sup>th</sup> largest ever at the UI).

CLAS did well last year (\$28 million), which was up \$3 million over the previous year.

EES is on track to meet its \$5 million goal.

**Adam** is moving to the College of Engineering, where he will look to improve their relationship with EES. **David** expressed thanks to Adam on behalf of the department for his service.

**Amy** suggested creating campaign champions who spearhead fund-raising efforts.

One Day For Iowa (1D4I) fieldcamp fundraising project was successful last year and **Adam** encourages us to pursue it again. EES has \$13,000 to spend (last year \$5,000 was spent on student aid for field courses) and the fund is growing incrementally. Some additional funds have arrived since 1D4I including a \$1,000 gift this fiscal year.

**Noah** noted that the 1D4I website is shut down such that you can't see the totals. He suggests it might be good to keep that page live. **Adam** didn't know why it was down and will look into it.

**Rhawn** noted a small mismatch for EES on the department and advancement donation websites. **Adam** will add a donation link for the field experience fund.

### **Departmental Update**

**Brad** explained that the number of majors in the department are high. There are 253 total majors – the largest ever by 10% - with 189 in environmental science and 64 in geology. This is increasingly a destination major.

**David** noted that the department is taking steps to engage incoming and transfer students early on. This includes holding a welcome event for new students to meet faculty and learn about the program. The college wants this new school so that these students have a clearer and cleaner gateway to all environmental fields. CLAS thinks there are too many small departments with two few students (e.g., geography has some tracks with no majors in them). American Studies, Gender Studies, etc. may be combined into a single department. The number of students (majors) is the new currency, not semester hours taught. The school may have 400 total students. The enrollment cliff is only a few years away so the university is stepping up recruitment efforts.

No EES faculty member was hired last year. The administration is waiting until planning for the new school has been settled.

### **Update from Dean Sara Sanders and Associate Dean Chris Cheatum**

**Sara Sanders** and **Chris Cheatum** (associate dean for the natural, mathematical and socialsciences) spoke to the EESB. There is an increasingly large focus on the undergraduate curriculum. Sara wouldn't commit to a specific number of hires over the next 5 years. Hires will start next year. Joint meetings of the two departments will begin next year and the two departments would be integrated the year after.

**Chris** discussed long-term goals. Admissions data suggest that students arrive at the UI wanting to save the world but don't know what that means in practice. Of those students who visit the university expressing that interest, the capture rate is far below that of other programs. If that rate were on par with these other programs, there would be 600 students in the program.

As for external funding, major agencies (NSF, NIH, etc.) are excited by work at the intersections of disciplines and team science that addresses big research questions. The new school is an opportunity to bring in new faculty to advance this goal.

**Kate** expressed concern that CLAS might hire 2 faculty but have 600 students, which would overwhelm staff. **Sara** responded that she believes this new structure will work and she will

invest as appropriate to ensure it succeeds. There are fewer tenure-track faculty than ever in CLAS, but more research funding has been awarded than ever: \$117 million in external funding was obtained by faculty in CLAS last year.

**Lee** asked about the role of undergraduate research in the new school. **Chris** responded that CLAS recognizes importance of research at the undergraduate level, along with field experiences, etc.

**Tom** argued for a sequential hiring approach that allows new faculty to have a say in the hiring of the next round of faculty. **Sara** agreed and also noted the need an internal person should head up the new school (rather than an outside person). **Tom** said that EES and GSS each need 5 tenure track faculty. **Sara** has no intention of cutting anything in CLAS and argues for the need to think about how to build capacity through integrated systems and multidisciplinary.

**Emily** asked about space issues for each department. Will the departments be co-located? Sara said she couldn't answer this, and **Chris** said they are working on it, particularly for lab space, and noted that co-location is not realistic, but that a campus hub would make a lot of sense.

**Noah** agreed that combining GEO and GSS makes sense but asked how, since the number of tracks will be reduced, can a diversity of interest be preserved? **Sara** replied that they are working on this.

**Mike** asked about the composition of the committee making decisions on the new school. What is the role of engineering? **Sara** responded that small committees are the most effective but that full faculty meetings occur every 5-6 weeks (biologists, chemists, geographers, geologists, etc.). Engineering just got a new dean and is still working out their plans so it's too early to incorporate them into discussions of the new school.

**Lee** asked how EESB can best serve the department prior to the merger and what happens to the EESB after the merger? **David** and **Sara** will discuss this in the spring. GSS does not have an alumni advisory board. An opportunity exists to develop those relationships.

**Tom** pointed out that EES didn't understand how low the capture rate was until it was pointed out recently, and that it would help to have a staff member who connects students to faculty directly. **Sara** agreed and will work on it.

**Noah** asked about core facilities. **Chris** replied that core facilities are funded by the VP for research (50%) and by his office (25%), with the rest from user fees. "Core facility" writ large is not just instrumentation but also office of sustainability, Ashton prairie, etc.

### **Additional Department Updates**

**Lee** reminded the EESB that the department's sesquicentennial is next year and will include a fieldtrip. He hopes that more alums attend in person. **Melissa** is chair-elect and will take over after another year.

**Lee** asked how the university's retention and graduation rates, which are a little lower than many similar schools, are being addressed? **David** noted that this is partly due to the UI

acceptance rate is artificially high and that the university needs more programs (including for first generation students) to help students in first year.

**Brian** asked what the 6 new majors are. **Emily** explained that working title for the new school is The School of Earth, Environment and Sustainability, and will contain three majors:

1. Earth and Environmental Science (BS) with 3 tracks: (i) Earth, (ii) Environmental Geology, and (iii) Environmental Biology. There is also a BA for environmental law-interested students, as well as also a 4+1 masters with the education department.
2. Geography and Sustainability Sciences (BS) with 2 tracks: (i) GIS and (ii) Sustainability; also a BA for human geography students.
3. Environmental Policy and Planning (BA): 2 tracks: (i) Planning and (2) Policy.

**Tim** noted that the federal government requires 2 semesters of calculus and 2 semesters of physics for hydrology positions. As such, the naming scheme may not mesh well with federal hiring requirements. **Eric** explained that the EPA requires 24 hours of engineering, physical science, and math. **Cathy** said that in her area, some jobs require a BS in geology.

**Tom** pointed out that CLAS administrators are slowly being educated on the role played by geology in environmental science.

**Emily** thinks that 8-10 new faculty lines will be opened over the next 10 years across all these majors. This includes some instructional faculty.

**Lee** asked how social scientists in geography feel about this? **Emily** said that GSS hadn't been adequately updated on these meetings because their liaison They are far behind geology on accepting and adapting to this change.

**Kate** noted that a position in social justice would be an important faculty line.

**David** raised the issue of space. The new storage site on Sand Road was very nice (holding paleontological and mineralogical specimens as well as field equipment). **Matt Wortell** has done a lot of work to move collections from Oakdale. Two weeks ago, however, it was made apparent that the Sand Road space is likely to be sold by the university. **David** will ask geographers if they or their new hires need space for field equipment, etc. to allow better long-term planning. The same for the natural history museum. One possible location is the copper canoe in the IATL. There may also be space in the chemistry building and elsewhere at IATL. Perhaps lab space could be moved into chemistry and geographers into Trowbridge.

### **Mentoring Committee**

**Lee** noted that the mentoring committee is one of the more valuable assets of the EESB.

### **Alumni Outreach**

**Brian** expressed the need to add new nominees and pointed out that nominees don't need to have an advanced degree. Brian expressed regret that his cohort is not more involved. Kate suggested social media be used to spread the word about the big party next year. Brian asked if

we can get contact info for alumni for outreach? **Kate** said yes but that email lists get hacked. **Emily** suggested we use a list serve, which likely won't get hacked.

**Tom** suggested that it would help with recruitment if people on EESB would reach out to their cohort.

Meeting Adjourned for lunch: noon

Scribe: Rhawn Denniston

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