

**Minutes: Fall 2021 EESB Meeting: October 15, 2021**  
**Earth and Environmental Sciences Department Alumni Advisory Board**

Meeting called to order by Chair, Amy Sullivan at 9:05 CDT in Trowbridge 126 and ZOOM

**Members participating:** *In person*- Rob Decker, Jim Eagan, Melissa Evans, Lee Phillips (chair elect), Steve Schutter, Grant Smith, Noah Stern, Amy Sullivan (chair), Todd Ririe  
*Via Zoom*- Leon Aden, Mike Burkart (secretary), Rhawn Denniston (secretary elect), Liz Maas, Grant Smith, Jennifer Wade, Aaron Suzuki

**Faculty and staff participating:** David Peate (EES department chair), Kate Tierney Cramer (faculty liaison), Tiffany Adrain, Richard Baker, Brad Cramer, Tom Foster, Emily Finzel, Matt Wortel

**Visitors:** Adam Blind (Center for Advancement)

**Actions remaining from April Meeting**

- 1- Commit to role on committees and open offices of Vice Chair (**All**)
- 2- Volunteer to speak before the Environmental Science Seminar Class. (**All, Swanson**)
- 3- Department will pursue activities to link undergraduate students to EESD. (**All members contribute ideas**)
- 4- **Blind** to chat with all EESB members to explain his role.
- 5- Initiate Fundraising Committee meetings after a hiatus since October 2020 (**Sullivan**).
- 6- Post updated mentoring spreadsheet showing students and alumni volunteers. (**Ririe**)  
Respond with comments (**All**).
- 7- Establish access to “Speed Mentoring” platform (**Ririe, Tierney**).
- 8- Post minutes after adoption by Board (**Denniston, Burkart, and Wortel**).

**Today’s Action Items**

- The EESB needs a Nominating Committee Chair, Alumni Outreach Committee Chair, Fund Raising Committee Chair and Vice Chair. Board members may self-nominate OR committees should determine who will be the next chair.
- **Kate Tierney** will organize a Doodle poll to define a time for speed mentoring. She will also find the necessary software.
- **Todd Ririe** will reach out to people beyond the board to participate in active mentoring.
- **Todd Ririe** will circulate the mentoring spreadsheet to match mentees with mentors.
- **Amy Sullivan** will update **Brian Glennister’s** Geode Star biographical sketch to include his role in the formation of GAAB and the Friday seminar.
- **Mentoring Committee** will review what is available at the Pomerantz Career Center and see if the ENVS program is appropriately connected to that resource.
- **Lee Phillips** will work with Matt Wortel to update the EESB website adding Jim Eagan and Aaron Suzuki bio/contact info and removing Aden, Burkart, Smith, Schutter and Wade information.

- **Lee Phillips** will call for 2022 Distinguished Alumni Award nominees (Alumni Outreach Committee). Amy Sullivan has agreed to continue to work up nominee information.

**Sullivan** welcomed all participants and guests. Thank you to **Rhawn Denniston** for hosting a gathering at his home Thursday evening while stuck in New Mexico, and **Lee Phillips** and **Jeff Dorale** for opening the home and cleaning up. The outline of other activities for the weekend includes: the student poster session Friday afternoon; Zoom seminar by **Ron Blakey** at 3:30, who is being honored as the 2021 Distinguished Alumni; parade watching/drinks/snacks early Friday evening; and field trip Saturday morning. **Joanna** and **Ed Thamke** will join the meeting later after meeting with students on the topic of careers.

The minutes from the April 2021 meeting were approved without comment.

**David Peate** (EES chair) provided an update on the status of the department including a brief overview of external funding successes. Of note were funding for Ashton Prairie sites (of primary importance to the Environmental Science program) as discussed by **Brad Cramer** at the April meeting. The potential exists for acquiring additional monies to hire a person to oversee this project, install monitoring wells, and build a WiFi network there. The prairie serves as a field site for the hydrology and other Environmental Science classes. Over the last 18 months, other grants include one to **Bill McClelland** (\$300,000 for work in Alaska), Emily Finzel grant for \$330,000 for provenance study, the Iowa Environmental Internship Pathways received \$400,000, an Iowa Geological Survey (IGS) grant for state mapping with 6 department faculty working with the IGS, and a NSF Critical Resource Availability (CRA) grant built on collaboration with the Iowa and Kansas geological surveys (\$4 million total; \$2.2 million to EES).

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences has major funding issues. As a result, the college is making it harder for faculty to teach low enrolled courses. Lakeside Lab enrollments are hampered by, among other things, international student visa restrictions that do not allow them to take classes outside of Iowa City (over the last few years, the number of international students has dropped from 2600 to 600, further compounding this issue). In addition, there will be no calls to replace or expand faculty lines this year, and this may be the case for several years to come. The department has transitioned a postdoc to a faculty line (**Shamar Chin**). Some money has become available for opportunity hires. Public/private partnership opportunities (a collaboration between EES, chemistry, and environmental engineering has been submitted that would provide several million dollars/year and 3 faculty lines – Geophysics will be the next faculty line proposed by EES).

There are currently about 230 students with ~40 undergraduate geology majors and ~30 geology graduate students and 160 environmental science students. Undergraduate enrollment remains consistent with a 70:30 ratio of Environmental Science to Geoscience majors. The Environmental Science program is weighted heavily toward biological sciences, although the biology faculty are leaning increasingly toward the molecular/genetics side of their field at the expense of ecology and field biology. This shift poses challenges for the Environmental Science program.

After a Covid-related hiatus, the department is again running field trips: Montana, Big Bend, TX; Baraboo, WI, and the Badlands.

**Adam Blind** (Center for Advancement) updated the board on fund raising at the university, college, and department level. University wide, fund raising is 145% higher than last year (last year's level was particularly low). Fund raising for the college and the department is up 40%. The university is currently in the silent phase of a \$2.5-\$3.0 billion campaign. The department is aiming for \$5 million and since 2018 has raised \$1.6 million. Adam reports that big gifts to the department may be on the horizon. Ex-DEO **Tom Foster** and current DEO **David Peate** support the creation of named professorships (requiring a \$1 million endowment) and/or chairs (\$2 million). Other areas of interest are a technology fund (\$100k endowment), and funds to support field camp, field research, and graduate students, plus the impending move of department collections (fossils/rocks/minerals) from the dilapidated space in Oakdale to a new building on Sand Road.

**Sara Sanders** (Dean, CLAS) appreciated her invitation to meet with us because she believes alumni boards are a critical source of insight. She defined her background as clinical social work. She has spent her entire academic career at U Iowa. During Covid, clinical social science labs have completely curtailed because they are exclusively person to person. Many of the other sciences could continue with modified laboratory teaching and research. College budget issues are common to all other Big Ten colleges. Our issues seem worse mostly because we are in the middle of them. Budget issues have roots in a variety of factors. Out-of-state enrollment declines are influenced by neighboring states' incentives to attend in-state schools; the College's budget deficit of \$14.2 million, thanks to pandemic-driven decreases in enrollment, reflects a substantial decrease in students from out of state. We cannot overcome that problem. She noted that **Stratis Giannakouris**, Director, U Iowa office of Sustainability and the Environment, suggested that diversity issues may be at the root of many enrollment issues. Equity issues need to be addressed if we are to deal with declining enrollment and student retention, particularly among minority, disadvantaged, and underserved populations. She also noted that EES was hit by the pandemic in ways unique from other sciences owing to the department's emphasis on field experiences.

The College remains committed to finding ways to increase diversity. Shamar Chin was hired from a postdoc position within the university. The college is working closely with 5 core introductory STEM courses to open door for increased equity. **Brad Cramer** provided some updates on equity programs: Iowa has been lagging peers in the Big Ten but is now focuses on at-risk first year students. Early implementation has increased retention by 20% for these students; hoping to expand it to 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students. Support from alumni has helped address emergency financial need for some students.

**Todd Ririe** updated the committee on the work of the Mentoring Committee. Todd sent out a mentoring spreadsheet but this needs to be updated. Todd noted that mentees should be made more aware of how to package their skills. BA degrees may be denigrated by prospective employers and so applicants should highlight math and supporting science coursework. Even skills like Excel should be promoted. **Ririe** received multiple inquiries from geography students but as most of these students are focused on environmental policy and planning, EES alumni are not necessarily well positioned to serve as their mentors. This geography program is too new to have produced alumni capable of serving as mentors; Geography also lacks an alumni

board. **Leon Aden** suggested that the department could construct a list of skills, coursework, etc. that employers are typically looking for and help students develop the lexicon to properly explain/promote their experiences on their resumes.

**Ririe** related his positive experiences with speed mentoring, which **Ririe** uses an app/platform that involved a simultaneous meeting of mentors and students. First, topics will be identified. Then, students and mentors selected a topic to provide questions and answers. Students asked questions of an individual or panel of mentors. One to 1.5 hours is suggested to avoid extensive demand on any individual's time. Board members should inform Todd if they are interested in mentoring.

**Amy Sullivan** discussed the status of EESB membership. Amy has been the default Nominating Committee and Fund Raising Committee chair but both committees need a board member to fill those positions going forward. The Alumni Outreach Committee Chair is also vacant with Steve Schutter leaving EESB. Amy also noted that 5 other candidates have been identified who are possibly interested in joining EESB. **Leon Aden, Mike Burkart, Steve Shutter, Grant Smith,** and **Jennifer Wade** are leaving as voting board members. **Rob Decker, Melissa Evans,** and **Noah Stern** are holding positions that will expire in 2023. The EESB thanked **Amy** for her service to the board.

Meeting adjourned at 12:00.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Rhawn Denniston, Secretary