



People and Nature: Our Future is in the Balance

National Wildlife Federation

11100 Wildlife Center Drive • Reston, VA 20190 • <http://www.nwf.org/>

Associated Colleges of the South Environmental Programs Decatur, Georgia (project status, Spring 1998)

Member Institutions:

Associated Colleges of the South (ACS) is a consortium of 15 liberal arts colleges and universities across 12 states in the Southeast from Virginia to Texas. Member institutions include Birmingham-Southern College, Centenary College of Louisiana, Centre College, Davidson College, Furman University, Hendrix College, Millsaps College, Morehouse College, Rollins College, Rhodes College, Southwestern University, Trinity University, University of the South, University of Richmond, and Washington and Lee University.

Group Profile:

Incorporated in 1991, ACS' mission is to make the case for liberal arts education and strengthen academic programs of its member institutions. Since that time, it has accomplished these aims primarily through fostering cooperative ventures, including such activities as faculty training in use of technology, overseas programs for students, a virtual electronic library among the member institutions, cost containment and energy conservation programs on their campuses, and the recent environmental citizenship initiative. Through its efforts, ACS has demonstrated the value of collaboration in strengthening overall programs and in producing efficiencies and cost savings that benefit all its members.

Project Goals and Summary:

In the fall of 1997, with receipt of a gift from a major foundation, ACS formally began a major environmental initiative. The ACS Environmental Initiative is designed to increase "environmental citizenship" among the ACS campus communities to include the students, faculty, staff, and administrators. The ACS initiative not only seeks to extend across institutional boundaries, but to establish community partnerships, amplifying the role of the individual institutions and the consortium. Specifically, the ACS initiative seeks to foster collaboration in environmental studies and activities among faculty, staff and students at the fifteen member institutions of the ACS. The program encompasses collaborative efforts in course development, collaborative and interdisciplinary research, campus outreach and service and on-campus service operations.

Through its environmental initiative, ACS has dedicated itself to making environmental concerns an integral part of campus life. Toward this effort, ACS has established some broad goals:

- Seek to increase environmental citizenship among the campus community, thereby serving as effective environmental citizens and maximizing consortium efforts to alleviate environmental problems;
- Enhance its leadership role in American higher education toward advancing environmental literacy and sustainability;
- Foster partnerships with entities outside ACS to include non-ACS institutions, and other groups in the public and private sectors; and
- Serve as a model for institutional collaboration, demonstrating the transforming effect that this property can have on institutions and individuals.

Accomplishments:

During the first year of this initiative, considerable effort has been given to building the organization, identifying potential collaborators and expertise on which to draw for assistance and planning, and deciding on projects to be pursued in the near future. The consortium began its effort by appointing and bringing



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together a faculty program committee, representing all of the member institutions. The group focused its attention on developing illustrative projects, the decision-making process, as well as other policies and practices critical to the initiative. Leadership groups were organized on all of the campuses. These groups reviewed the various ACS materials describing the project and prepared proposals for projects that they would like to pursue. The chief academic officers of the institutions have played a critical role in the organization building phase. They have reviewed and approved program guidelines, requests for proposals, and have guided the overall program direction in cooperation with the program committee and ACS staff. During this initial planning phase, a number of proposals were reviewed by the program committee, chief academic officers, and staff. Six proposals were recommended and approved for funding. Common among all of the approved projects are interdisciplinary studies, widest possible participation of faculty, students, and staff, and broad collaboration among consortium members.

Strategies and Steps Taken:

Special features of the initiative call for "environmental fellows" and "student interns" on the campus who will take the lead to promote environmental topics and activities. The fellows and interns were appointed this spring and will begin their duties in the fall of 1998. The appointment of the fellows and interns will complement and directly aid the previously appointed environmental program committee members who have provided considerable policy guidance and expertise to the initiative in its first year. The environmental program committee will be instrumental in developing a long-term environmental strategy for ACS. Stipends and project funds are also available for faculty and students who will take part in environmentally related research projects. The focus of initial projects is on workshops specifically related to pilot course development and service, and is in keeping with the ACS decision to establish a broad sense of support throughout the consortium at the outset of this initiative. Funds are also being directed toward career planning in environmental areas, and a meeting of the 15 ACS Career Planning Directors is scheduled for May. The ACS chief Business Officers recently met to discuss on-campus operational matters including recycling and energy conservation. Additionally, a funded environmental lecture series is currently being planned to bring environmental experts to member campuses over the period of the grant.

In all these areas, considerable information is being assembled on current practices and policies. In this way, the consortium is developing a much sharper awareness of strengths to build upon, as well as eliminate identified weaknesses throughout this new environmental initiative.

Key Groups/Allies involved:

ACS has sought to establish strong working relationships with several key groups who are able to bring to ACS the necessary resources and expertise to enhance and complement the ACS environmental initiative. The Boston-based organization Second Nature is assisting in the planning of several ACS workshops, as well as providing program guidance. Joint activities are also being planned with the Center for Respect of Life and Environment and the National Wildlife Federation's Campus Ecology Program. ACS has actively conferred with numerous educational associations, and colleges and universities in an attempt to gather further information on environmental activities currently taking place and the possibility for cooperation in the future.

Next Steps:

ACS has recently announced its second funding cycle and request for proposals. The program committee and staff will work actively through the summer with various ACS faculty, staff and students to prepare proposals in preparation for the fall meeting of the program committee and subsequent meeting of the chief academic officers. The recently appointed environmental fellows - the key spokesperson for the ACS project on the individual campus - will come together this fall to seek ways to further environmental and sustainable development activity on the campuses, and coordinate the gathering of information and the dissemination of that information among the ACS institutions. Several workshops are planned for this



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summer and fall and should considerably enhance the development of "community" areas among the 15 ACS institutions, and greatly facilitate future collaborative projects in each of the identified priority.

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