

BACKGROUND AND REQUEST

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Master in Environment and Natural Resources

RECOMMENDATION

This program clearly meets the Chancellor’s standards for graduate degree programs. The Regents’ Advisory Committee on Graduate Study recently voted unanimous approval for the new degree program. There were no serious concerns raised in the review.

Request: The Ohio State University’s School of Environment and Natural Resources, and the College of Food, Agriculture and Environmental Services, requests approval for a Master in Environment and Natural Resources (MENR) degree program.

Program Mission and Background: The purpose of the proposed MENR program is to provide an applied graduate degree for practicing professionals and others who want to enhance their professional competency in environmental and natural resource science and management. The target audience for the proposed program includes managers and technical specialists with local, state and federal agencies, environmental scientists and resource managers in the public and private sectors, parks and recreation personnel, teachers (K-12), interpreters, Peace Corps volunteers, natural resource communicators and students in related programs who are seeking dual degrees in areas of environmental and resources science and management.

The proposed MENR degree is a non-thesis degree that will replace the “Plan B” non-thesis option currently available to students pursuing the Master of Science in Natural Resources graduate program. Students wishing to pursue research-oriented careers will continue to enroll in the MS program and engage in research leading to a thesis. The MENR will be a separate degree program that students will select for its theory-into-practice orientation. The MENR will provide a balanced and rigorous program, creating valuable educational and training experiences for persons planning for, or already engaged in, a professional career in environmental and natural resources management beyond that acquired during bachelor degree programs, and at the same time improve their decision-making and communication skills.

Enrollments: The first groups to be actively recruited to the program include professionals from state and federal agencies and in-service educators. Enrollment in the MENR program should grow over the first five years from 5 to approximately 24 students, and remain stable thereafter for at least five to ten years. The estimated time to completion of the MENR program for most of the students will be three years or 12 quarters. At these enrollment levels, credit hour subsidies will be in excess of program

costs by year two. The School of Environmental and Natural Resources (SENR) has been successful in increasing the number of female students. Of the 63 students enrolled in the Environment and Natural Resources graduate program during the Spring Quarter of 2008, 31 (49%) were women. Attracting outstanding minority students is an ongoing objective at Ohio State and in the SENR. Since the proposed MENR will draw largely from an in-place client base of professional agency and educational personnel, the success in enrolling minority students will be determined more by the ratio of minorities in the clientele audiences than by any overt recruiting efforts on the school's part.

Curriculum: The proposed curriculum will require a minimum of 55 graduate credit hours, which is the current requirement for the non-thesis option. Since the professional degree relies more heavily on coursework than traditional thesis-based MS programs, it is anticipated that 55 credits represent an adequate amount of exposure and preparation for a graduate degree in the absence of research. The program is designed to allow completion in one year (4 quarters) of full-time work. However, many students enrolling in the program will likely choose part-time enrollment. Working professionals might expect to complete the MENR in eight to twelve quarters or two to three years.

With the exception of in-service teachers, MENR students will be encouraged to maintain continuous enrollment of at least one course per quarter until the degree is completed. In-service teachers will be able to focus much of their course work and the project of study at Stone Laboratory during the summer months when their schools are out of session. Students enrolled in the MENR as part of a dual-degree program can be expected to add two to three quarters to their total time to degree for both degrees. The proposed curriculum will include specific requirements of all students, but it will allow enough flexibility in course selection and scheduling to meet the individual needs of students. The proposed program will allow students to take advantage of nontraditional course formats (e.g., evening and weekend offerings, distance-based courses, and short-course formats) as well as field experiences at F.T. Stone Laboratory, OSU's field station on Lake Erie, and the Olentangy River Wetland Research Park on campus. Credit hours would be apportioned as follows:

MENR Component	Quarter Credits
Core Courses (4)	17
Field of Study Courses	30
Independent Project	8
Total Credits	55

Faculty, Facilities and Resources: OSU recognizes that implementation of the MENR program will carry additional advising responsibilities for faculty mentors and may change the nature of certain benefits normally derived from advising (i.e., publications based on research). The advising demands are substantially lower for MENR students than traditional thesis/research-oriented MS students. It is expected that most SENR graduate faculty will participate in the MENR program at some level, and it is believed

that a subset of faculty with strong connections to agencies will likely be most active in the program. Existing faculty at the SENR will be sufficient to handle an increased advising load, and the current courses will support the curriculum. The MENR program will demand a continued commitment in offering courses at nontraditional times (e.g., evening, weekend, summer) and/or in nontraditional formats (e.g., web-based, distance learning). Many faculty in the school already are engaged in such efforts, and several new distance-based or nontraditional times (e.g., week-long, summer, and/or evening courses) currently are available to students. It is not expected that the demand for the MENR program will exceed the capacity to advise high-quality admissible students. However, if it becomes necessary, a “cap” will be placed on numbers of students entering the MENR, based on the capacity of the faculty agreeing to advise students, the number of project liaisons, and instructors to teach specific courses for the MENR students. As is the case of the MS program, the SENR will not admit more students than they can effectively advise.

Evidence of Need: There is a growing demand for professionals with expertise in natural resource and the environment. A sample of job opportunities advertised on internet databases provides some information—about 45% of the available positions in winter of 2004 specify a preference for people with their master’s degrees in the field. Yet of those job descriptions, only 26% appear to require the research expertise that would normally be obtained in the existing master of science degree program. Thus, there is an identifiable market for individuals with advanced degrees that do not necessarily include an in-depth research experience.

Further evidence of the potential demand for the proposed MENR degree comes from several sources: 1) projected trends in personnel needs and movement within environmental and natural resource agencies at the state and federal levels; 2) comparison with a similar professional degree at Virginia Tech University; 3) evidence about the current employment market; 4) historical enrollment in Ohio State’s non-thesis MS program; and 5) recent requests from potential students.

In Ohio, there are related but differently focused degree programs at the master’s level. Only Miami University offers a non-thesis, professional degree in Environmental Science. Since the proposed program is located in a different region of the state, and Ohio State expects that geographical constraints are an important consideration for program selection by in-service professionals, it is expected that the MENR will draw a different clientele group than Miami University.