

## Task Force on the Environmental Sciences

### Summary of Activities

The Task Force on the Environmental Sciences was convened by the provost in September 2008 in response to one of the top-level findings of the doctoral program assessment process, which revealed critical issues about the organization and administration of the instructional and research efforts in the environmental sciences across the university. These issues must be addressed for Ohio State to achieve the enormous potential it has to be a world leader in these fields. This is a tremendous opportunity for Ohio State and a defining moment for its faculty, researchers, and students in the environmental sciences.

#### Co-Chairs and Members

The task force is co-chaired by **Joan Leitzel**, Interim Executive Dean and Vice Provost Designate of the Colleges of the Arts and Sciences, and **Patrick S. Osmer**, Vice Provost for Graduate Studies and Dean of the Graduate School. Members include:

**Doug Alsdorf**, Associate Professor, School of Earth Sciences

**Nicholas Basta**, Professor, School of Environment and Natural Resources

**Ralph Boerner**, Professor, Department of Evolution, Ecology, and Organismal Biology

**Tim Buckley**, Associate Professor, College of Public Health

**Jay Hobgood**, Associate Professor, Department of Geography

**Berry Lyons**, Professor and Director, Byrd Polar Research Center

**Karen Mancl**, Professor, Food, Agricultural, and Biological Engineering, Chair of the Environmental Sciences Graduate Program

**Jay Martin**, Associate Professor, Department of Food, Agricultural, & Biological Engineering

**Bobby Moser**, Vice President for Agricultural Administration, University Outreach, and executive dean for the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

**Matt Platz**, Distinguished University Professor and Interim Dean, College of Mathematical and Physical Sciences and College of Biological Sciences

**Gregory Washington**, Interim Dean, College of Engineering

**Linda Weavers**, Professor, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering and Geodetic Science

**Caroline Whitacre**, Senior Vice President of Research

**Randy Smith**, Vice Provost (serves as the Office of Academic Affairs' liaison to the task force)

#### Charge to Task Force

- Identify how Ohio State's academic programs in the environmental sciences should be optimally configured.
- Recommend appropriate organizational processes and arrangements to support high-quality educational and research efforts. The task force will look at overarching research themes, existing strengths, and opportunities for Ohio State.

The full task force has met seven times since October 2008 and formed three working groups. Discussion has focused on the scope of the task force, working group activities, and establishing next steps. The task force reviewed two reports on environmental science at Ohio State written in 1996 and 2001. Berry Lyons, director of the Byrd Polar Research Center, and Kate Bartter,

associate director of the Institute on Energy and Environment, made presentations to the task force. A presentation by faculty from OARCD-Wooster is also planned.

**Research Frontiers and Directions Working Group: Linda Weavers, chair**

- This working group was charged with identifying research and academic opportunities for Ohio State. The group will help to identify research and academic opportunities for Ohio State and to identify what direction Ohio State should take. It examined research and academic trends and directions identified by professional societies, funding sources, and other universities.
- The group reviewed reports from the NRC, NSF, NASA, and NIEHS and governmental agencies such as EPA and summarized its findings in a draft report.
- The group notes that Water and the recently awarded TIEs (Climate, Water, Carbon, Energy, Sustainability, and Environment) are among Ohio State's strengths (or emergent strengths).

**Inventory of Existing Programs Working Group: Jay Hobgood, chair**

- This working group was charged with creating an inventory of existing research efforts and instructional programs at Ohio State.
- The group sent a survey to departments, interdisciplinary programs, research centers, and other units, and the results are being compiled. The survey indicates that environmental science efforts at Ohio State are very decentralized, especially at the undergraduate level. The graduate level is more complicated, where there are multiple hubs. Barriers to successful work are being recorded.

**Best Practices Working Group: Nick Basta, chair**

- The working group was charged with identifying organizational processes and arrangements at other institutions as well as those that already exist at Ohio State and are working well.
- The group reviewed organizational structures for environmental sciences at Penn State, Arizona State, Colorado State, and the University of Minnesota, which has a fluid model for faculty participation.
- Several themes are emerging from this review: 1) the need to help faculty build teams and to create or identify common facilities (and reduce duplication of resources), and 2) a need to attend the curriculum, and 3) a need to provide prospective and current students a portal into the university's offerings in environmental science.