

Chairs' Corner -- February 2011
College of the Environment

TO: UW Foundation, Deans/Chancellors, University Advancement Staff

FROM: Lyn Grinstein, Chair, UW Foundation
Howard Behar, Vice Chair, UW Foundation
Dan Evans, Immediate Past Chair, UW Foundation

Dear Friends,

Orson B. Johnson is one of the UW's early legends. He joined the faculty in 1882 as a professor of physiology, botany, zoology, biology, mineralogy, geology, chemistry and natural philosophy. He also had a law degree. From our era of ever-more specialized knowledge, this portfolio looks astonishing. (Of course, it also suggests an upstart territorial university that was making the most of the human material available.)

Johnson was an interdisciplinary one-man band, of a sort that no longer exists. But he would be pleased, we think, at the things now going on in "his" building. Johnson Hall, which faces Mary Gates Hall across the top of Rainier Vista, is the home of Earth and Space Sciences (formerly Geology and Geophysics) and the Quaternary Research Center, the first (1969) interdisciplinary center at the University. And both those units are now part of the new College of the Environment, which was created to bring disciplines together into a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

This winter, on Wednesday afternoons, Johnson Hall hosts one of the new College's first initiatives, a seminar on the science, policy, and ethics of geoengineering (defined as "the deliberate modification of the earth's climate system"). We haven't attended any of the sessions (which are open to the public), but the titles suggest a lively debate: "An Urgent Problem Meets a Bad Concept," "Frankenstein's Academy: What Geoengineering Can Help Us Learn," "Ethics, Policy, and Geoengineering: An Easy Day in the Mountains," and so on. Speakers come from all over the country (and Oxford) and from multiple specialties.

This series, says Lisa Graumlich (who became Dean of the College last July), "has really taken off. It's fostered new collaborations, among geoscientists, philosophers, atmospheric scientists, and scholars of public policy." The seminar is one of five projects to which the College has awarded seed grants, funded by a private gift. All five are intended to jump-start the kinds of "transdisciplinary" dialogues and explorations that are an important part of the College's mission.

Not that all this is a startling new departure for the UW. Indeed, for Dean Graumlich the College of the Environment grows directly out of a UW culture she first encountered in the early 1980s, as a doctoral student in the College of Forest Resources.

“Long before climate change became a public issue,” she says, “researchers at the UW were already looking at both the scientific questions and the practical concerns around this topic. You could study here with some of the best earth scientists in the nation and, at the same time, with experts in hands-on resource management. The Quaternary Research Center had a seminar series led by Estella Leopold and Steve Porter, where we talked about climate change and environmental change every week. Disciplines didn’t matter. I thought, ‘This is the way the world should be!’”

By her own account, Dean Graumlich’s whole career has been an effort “to recreate what I experienced here: responding to grand challenges in an integrated way.” (Her field is paleoecology—the study of how ecosystems and human societies adapt to climate change, especially drought.) By 2008, she was Director of the School of Natural Resources and the Environment at the University of Arizona. As a UW forestry alumna, she was tuned in early to the discussion about creating a College of the Environment here. “When I saw the plan presented to the Regents [in May 2008], I took it right in to my dean and said, ‘This is what we should be doing here.’” Budget woes prevented any action in Arizona—but two years later Lisa Graumlich became the person who would take the new UW College forward. (Budget woes, needless to say, are still with her.)

The College of the Environment, which opened for business in the fall of 2009, follows very closely the plan submitted to the Regents. Virtually all the academic units and research centers named in that plan eventually signed on to the College: Aquatic and Fishery Sciences, Atmospheric Sciences, Earth and Space Sciences, Forest Resources, Marine and Environmental Affairs, Oceanography, the Program on the Environment, Friday Harbor Laboratories, the Joint Institute for the Study of the Atmosphere and Ocean (including the Climate Impacts Group), Washington Sea Grant, the NASA Space Grant Consortium, and many more.

What do you gain by throwing an administrative net around all these disparate entities? At first glance, it may seem that nothing much has changed. Physically, nobody has moved. Financially, each unit brought its own state funding, research grants, and donor base into the alliance. Substantively, most of the same courses are being taught, the same research is being conducted, the same collaborations are going on. Why—as more than one skeptic asked when the College was proposed—jeopardize longstanding strengths and traditions for an uncertain benefit?

One answer has to do with students, people in the community, and donors. For all these groups, “environment” is a word of escalating interest, significance, and urgency. The UW has for years been doing ground-breaking, wide-ranging research and teaching on environmental matters, but there was no clear, central point for connecting with that work. The College, with its Dean and staff and clear label, now provides such a focal point. It helps guide undergraduates into the specific areas that excite them. It helps potential community partners—government agencies, NGOs, etc.—find connections. It helps donors understand the specific needs and opportunities for their philanthropy in this large and complex field. All of this enhances the work of individual units.

One sign of success: in the first six months of this fiscal year, private gifts and grants to the College (meaning all its components) rose more than 33 percent over the same period last year. (For comparison, the rise in gifts to the UW as a whole was about 19 percent.) And early in the College's formation, one family donated more than \$4.2 million to establish the Dean's first endowment. "The giving public," says Marilyn Montgomery, who directs fundraising at the College, "is more drawn to these kinds of cross-disciplinary, multi-partner approaches and projects than at any time in the past."

The giving public, in other words, is endorsing the central goals of the new College: "to catalyze the best science in addressing the biggest questions, to take the next step into even deeper transdisciplinary efforts, to create an intellectual community," in the words of Dean Graumlich.

You will not be surprised to learn that current budget realities have put some plans on hold. The Dean's staff (in the Ocean Sciences Building) is small and stretched thin, and none of the projected 20 new faculty members—some in science, some in social and policy issues—have been hired yet.

But Dean Graumlich is making down payments on the big goals. Besides the five seed grants we mentioned earlier, the College is sponsoring a graduate seminar this quarter called "The Framing of Global Environmental Issues." The College has also worked with the Department of Global Health to broker and support another new initiative, "Climate Change and Global Health," which has already involved faculty from virtually every corner of the University.

We will watch with great interest as the College of the Environment comes into its own. Here's to Orson Johnson and his 21st-century heirs.

Lyn, Howard, and Dan

Looking Back

- **Contributions July 1, 2010 through January 31, 2011, total \$208,954,995.**
- The **January 2011 Report of Contributions** is attached and contains fundraising details.

Looking Ahead

- **Friday, April 29, 2011**, UW Foundation Board of Directors Meeting, 8:30 a.m. coffee; 9:00-11:00 a.m. meeting, Walker-Ames Room, Kane Hall.
- **Friday, September 9, 2011**, UW Foundation Board of Directors Meeting, 8:00 a.m. coffee; 8:30-11:30 a.m. meeting.