

Establishment of a Memorial Center of Excellence at the Institute of Forestry - Executive Summary

Distributed to the IOF faculty, students and stakeholders during the Scoping Mission to Kathmandu, Hetauda, and Pokhara on November 4-10, 2007

Virginia Tech, in conjunction with faculty associated with Yale University and Principia College, is pleased to respond to the challenge of building an internationally recognized Center of Excellence within the Institute of Forestry (IOF) at Tribhuvan University to honor the memory of our tragically fallen colleagues and friends. We offer a practical, results-driven program led by a team of highly regarded faculty who have extensive experience in Nepal and the IOF, and have been integral to the development of recognized, forestry-related centers of excellence at their respective institutions.

Our proposed approach includes interventions that will lay the foundation for excellence, something an institution cannot assert on its own behalf, but rather may be achieved through actions and recognition by its peers. Our program will establish a well-focused Center and build related bridges for national and international collaboration in the private and public sectors that ultimately will lead to recognition of excellence. The Center we envision will be a major source of strength from which the IOF can build to complement and improve other forestry programs. At the same time, it will fulfill urgent national and regional needs in education, research, and outreach.

To achieve our goal of establishing a Center of Excellence, we propose an ambitious slate of objectives, activities, and tasks necessary to produce deliverables that will help meet common "center of excellence" criteria. These program elements will be refined during an initial core team visit to Nepal during which we will hold consultations with local stakeholders and lead a planning workshop with IOF faculty and administrators and other stakeholders. This event will also determine the mission, vision and focus areas of work the Center will champion within the IOF, as well as establish a baseline we will use to monitor the progress of our activities throughout the project. Immediately after the workshop, the Center will begin operations through seed funding provided by the project and serve as the focal point for subsequent related project activities.

To improve professional skills, knowledge and teaching effectiveness among IOF faculty, we will review and improve course content within determined areas of excellence by providing IOF faculty systematic exposure to current trends in syllabi, readings, outreach and extension materials, as well as related experiential learning. These efforts will be complemented by faculty exchanges whereby selected IOF faculty will be embedded in pertinent departments in the United States for six weeks to become familiar with U.S. teaching practices, materials and technology, give guest lectures, and work with U.S. faculty on the preparation of a research proposal.

Since building research capacity and excellence requires practice, the project will establish a competitive research grant mechanism targeting IOF faculty as project

investigators to work with collaborating faculty in the United States and local organizations in a field of interest relevant to the Center of Excellence. This “bottom-up” approach will emphasize women researchers and needs, and is expected to result in the publication of at least one scholarly paper in a recognized journal.

Cognizant of the need to help students from diverse backgrounds and create a supportive environment for study, we propose to develop a student advising/mentoring system at IOF and to provide student learning support. This project will be led by Prof. A.L. (Tom) Hammett, who will take a Virginia Tech. He will be teamed with Dr. Bill Burch from Yale and Dr. Mike Rechlin of Principia College.

Increasing diversity at the IOF will be a major goal of the project. Among other activities, we propose providing a tailored distance learning course in gender sensitivity based on courses required of all Virginia Tech personnel to reach a large number of people. We will also create a speakers series for Nepali women to share their experiences and provide role models to female students, and to help create a long-term diversity plan for IOF that focuses on the hiring of female faculty.

As successful research does not automatically translate into successful institutions, we believe it is equally important to work closely with IOF administrators to improve their administrative capacity. To this end, we will train a top IOF administrator or designate on grant-related management and control procedures in the United States, and provide training and oversight based on capacity at Virginia Tech. This aspect of the project will also emphasize improving grant-writing capabilities at IOF.

The project’s success will be measured through the implementation of a rigorous monitoring and evaluation system to accompany reporting systems, and will be evaluated by an external consultant to ensure objectivity.

To accomplish these tasks, we have recruited a team of some of the most recognized Nepal experts in forestry and will provide technical backstopping through a network of world renowned experts in the College of Natural Resources at Virginia Tech, as well as the administrative support of the Office of International Research, Education and Development (OIREED) at Virginia Tech.

The participation of our partners ANSAB, WWF, and WINROCK International will be invaluable to the success of project. Other collaborators will be added as their level of interest and participation is determined. The Center will succeed with the input and participation of many stakeholders and organizations. We invite your participation in this important project.

Thank you for your interest in the project. For more information please contact the Dean of the IOF at Pokhara, or Tom Hammett, Partnership Director, Virginia Tech (email: himal@vt.edu). Scoping team members that met with faculty and students in November 2007 were: Dr. Mike Rechlin, Dr. Hammett, and Dr. Maria Elisa Christie.