

## Commentary on the Report of the Berkeley Summit on Forestry Education

R. Scott Wallinger



The November 2015 *Journal of Forestry* report on the Berkeley Summit on forestry education is outstanding—and it reprised what Al Sample and I had discussed in 1992!

Three themes recurred in all of the articles:

1. *Forestry has clearly evolved from the utilitarian goals of early 1900s forestry into the full range of ecological and social values of forests.* This is at the root of the debate about the “forestry profession” and what constitutes a “professional forester” that SAF still struggles to resolve.
2. *There is universal agreement that graduate foresters need more managerial and social skills to enable them to meet contemporary societal and organizational challenges—communications, supervisory ability, conflict management, and other.*
3. *There is real tension between technical and social/managerial courses in a 120-hour Bachelor of Science curriculum, with forestry degrees losing ground to more general environmental sciences/studies programs in the employment marketplace.*

The original professions were law, medicine, and the clergy. These evolved to include engineering, teaching, accounting, forestry, and other fields based on a defined, comprehensive university education. Today, many other fields have certified professionals, e.g., firemen, policemen, emergency medical technicians (EMTs), electricians, plumbers, and cosmetologists.

In reality, the array of technical and social and managerial skills for a professional forester requires more than 120 credit hours. So, are forestry graduates really educated “professionals” or are they highly educated technicians who seek recognition as a broadly based profession? Mary Watzin, Dean at North Carolina State University’s College of Natural Resources, noted in a conversation that graduates in natural resources have more managerial training than forestry graduates because Society of American Foresters (SAF) accreditation requirements leave no room in the 120-hour curriculum for meaningful management education.

Can scientifically educated PhDs with no managerial training or experience provide relevant managerial education in their classes? I had some undergraduate professors with extensive experience managing people, budgets, and programs via the Civilian Conservation Corps or other programs before they became professors. They provided practical context in their courses. Could they be hired as tenure track faculty in today’s world that emphasizes a scientific PhD with a focus on research?

My career began with 158 undergraduate credit hours and my Master of Forestry degree added 36 credit hours while studying under two professors who each had 20 years of prior work experience. It included a graduate level course in psychology of administration! I worked for the Forest Service in Idaho, for the Virginia Division of Forestry, and for Weyerhaeuser in Washington State in the summers. That was followed by Naval Officer Candidate School and 3 years as a deck division officer and head of a Navigation Department on a large navy ship. When I began work in forestry at age 26 I had diverse technical, field, and managerial experiences. That proved to be a solid foundation for a career in landowner assistance, wood procurement and industrial forestry, including oversight of company forests in the United States and Brazil.

My former colleague, Bill Baughman, began his study in prelaw at Marietta College in Ohio and concluded in forestry at the University of Michigan with a Master of Forestry. Several colleges had 3-2 programs in which students spent 3 years of prescribed study at the first college and then 2 years at a major university that concluded with dual degrees. Bill became Westvaco’s vice president of timberlands. He and I implemented a policy in the early 1980s to only employ graduates with master’s degrees and strong academic and experience backgrounds. They needed to understand a growing spectrum of scientific advances and have the social and managerial skills to deal with the public and internal organizations. Their work earned numerous forestry and environmental awards. Many of them became SAF leaders at state and national levels and in conservation organizations. Two became state foresters.

More than half a century ago two prominent forestry educators, W.D. Duncan and F.H. Kaufert (1960, p. 24) stated:

Forestry education (if it is to provide adequate professional leadership in an increasingly complex society) must ensure that prospective foresters demonstrate a high level of intellectual capacity, an understanding of and interest in people, and a broad yet thorough technical background. The profession must encourage the most able young men to enter the field, at

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**Affiliations:** R. Scott Wallinger ([rswalli@bellsouth.net](mailto:rswalli@bellsouth.net)), Society of American Foresters (member since 1957), Seabrook Island, SC.

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the same time recognizing a need for the less gifted. Education must stimulate in all a broad interest in human affairs. It must provide insight into forest management, recognizing responsibility not only for the production of wood, but for the provision of water, forage, recreation, and wildlife as well. Forestry education in 1960 requires more of its graduates than could have been expected in earlier years.

The Berkeley Summit echoes that and what Bill and I (Baughman and Wallinger 1999, p. 12–13) wrote in the *Journal of Forestry* for a section on education organized by Nadine Block from the Pinchot Institute for Conservation. It is as relevant today as it was back then:

The founding foresters like Pinchot, Graves, Schenck, Fernow, Leopold—the list goes on—were very well educated for their time. They were broadly educated, not just trained in the limited technology of the day. They were able to exercise clear leadership because they were viewed by society as professionals.... As we start a new millennium, we really do have to seriously rethink what constitutes a *professional* forestry education. We need not just a deep scientific and technical education, not just a how-to education of forestry on the ground, but the broad professional understanding of the sci-

ence, the sociology, the economics, and the politics associated with the management of complex natural resources that are important to the public in economic, ecological and sociological ways.... What's at stake is whether forestry as we know it remains a profession of leadership.

While I greatly admire what today's graduates know and accomplish with fewer courses and initial years of maturity and experience, the Berkeley Summit highlights significant shortfalls in their education and skills. There are very real issues today of the high cost of even a 120-hour college degree and the changing requirements of today's smaller organizations that employ foresters. The multilayered line-staff organizations of forest products companies and most government agencies have given way to smaller organizations with less time and budgets for employees to participate in postemployment education.

That fact makes online continuing education highly relevant to the forestry profession and SAF. Perhaps SAF might partner with leading universities to offer access to

online professional courses to members as a membership benefit so foresters can continuously add to their 120-hour degrees with high-quality, relevant information at modest cost on their own time. That is different from certification via short courses and meeting attendance.

For decades, SAF defined the requirements for a professional forestry education. In today's world, SAF is allowing state university degree constraints to define the scope of a forestry education rather than SAF. Perhaps it is time for SAF to *first* define what a truly professional forester with leadership capability needs in today's world and *then* identify the kind of academic program that can produce it.

### Literature Cited

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