Interdisciplinary Ecology Gets Discovered

Enrollment Strong Despite Economic Downturn

By Dr. Stephen Humphrey, SNRE Director

Prospective students looking at SNRE’s graduate degree are curious about how the Interdisciplinary Ecology program is being received. How strong is demand? Has enrollment grown? How has the economic downturn affected admissions? What are the prospects for getting financial assistance to attend?

Interdisciplinary Ecology competes successfully with the best universities in the world for outstanding graduate students. In its first decade, enrollment grew to 145 students, then stabilized slightly below that number despite funding pressures of the recent recession. Seventy-five percent are doctoral students, and some of our best doctoral students were our master’s students. Twenty-five percent of our students are from outside the United States, and many of our U.S. students conduct their research in other countries. This wide geographic scope adds a strong international flavor to our program. University of Florida faculty like recruiting students into the Interdisciplinary Ecology program because it attracts such excellent talent.

Such talent is rewarded as Interdisciplinary Ecology students are well funded. About 85% are supported by state-funded fellowships, assistantships, faculty grants, or external fellowships. These students don’t have to borrow to obtain their graduate degree, and they can enter the workforce debt-free. The rest of the students are self-funded from savings or family resources. UF’s normal offer of financial support from state funds, or from a combination of state and grant funds, is for two years for master’s students and four years for doctoral students. Students needing more time because they chose an unusually difficult research project will write grant proposals in partnership with their faculty advisors to support the extra effort. The cost of living in Gainesville is low compared with many areas of the United States. SNRE normally pays $16,000 per year for assistantships and $22,000 for fellowships, plus paying for tuition and basic health insurance. International students are eligible to receive these assistantships and fellowships, as well as to apply for UF’s assistantships in Tropical Conservation and Development.
The Interdisciplinary Ecology program provides access to an unusually wide array of courses, and it enables students to achieve the balance of breadth and specialization that custom-fits their goals. Our focus on the Social-Ecological System as the conceptual model for understanding complex, interactive systems is bold and nearly unique. The program is a magnet for students wanting to address both natural and social dynamics, seeking to understand sustainability as a disciplined way of thinking and acting. Each year we admit 25-30 new students. The normal range of GRE scores for U.S. students admitted is from 1100 to 1500 (verbal plus quantitative scores); average GRE for U.S. students funded by SNRE is 1290. International students are required to receive a minimum score of 80 on the TOEFL exam.

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