From: Paul Anderson <panderson@maine.edu>
Date: Fri, 12 Nov 2010 16:22:14 -0500
Subject: proposed suspension of the aquaculture BS degree
To: onsrud@spatial.maine.edu

Dear Harlan - Please accept these written comments regarding the suspension of the Aquaculture undergraduate degree program in the School of Marine Sciences at the University of Maine.

These come from Maine Sea Grant which can be considered from "other constituency" since we are not technically on the faculty or within the College’s administrative unit.

The Maine Sea Grant College Program provides support for research, education and outreach relating to many of Maine’s most pressing coastal needs, including safe and sustainable seafood supply. Thus, our portfolio includes significant effort in Marine Aquaculture and a significant portion of our human and financial resources (~25%) are dedicated to aquaculture. We have strong connections with the industry and have helped to enable it’s sustainable growth in Maine over the past 30 years.

Although I can understand the financial strain that the University is under, and the need to identify cost savings opportunities, I don’t feel that the minimal savings (if any) that might be realized by the elimination of the BS degree in aquaculture is worth the negative signal this sends to the growing aquaculture sector and the consequent loss of momentum we are just now realizing in the University’s overall commitment to growing this sector.

Aquaculture currently fits into one of the economic sectors being supported by the R&D investment in the State of Maine and is therefore being supported via the MEIF administered by the Vice President for Research. Coupled with other investments from NOAA, USDA, the Maine Technology Institute, and others, there is significant commitment being made to provide the science and technological development that will result in a more robust and diversified aquaculture industry in Maine. This economic sector has very real potential for Maine, and with the right leadership from the private sector, and via government, this sector should continue to grow and provide quality seafood to the nation and the world.

There have been significant developments in policy and technology over the past decade, and I believe there will be a modest but steady growth in the job market for graduates with training in marine aquaculture.

Perhaps the Marine Biology degree with a concentration in aquaculture is a reasonable option, but we do loose the opportunity to truly market UMaine to students from around the world that may be interested in this growing field. The world’s consumption of seafood continues to grow and wild harvest of fish is not going to meet the demand of the future, so the aquaculture sector world-wide is going to continue to grow, and many think Maine has the opportunity to be part of that growth. It is my understanding that other institutions in the US have had to curtail aquaculture education because local industry development has stagnated, but with the unique opportunities offered by cold-water aquaculture in Maine, along with developing technology and proximity to domestic and European markets, we can substantiate maintenance of this program and probably begin to attract more students.
It is also evident that the faculty capacity to deliver aquaculture programming is actually growing at UMaine due to investments in the Aquaculture Research Institute and related faculty. Not only does this make the undergraduate curriculum easy to deliver, but also enhances the growth of the graduate program that, in turn, will build the research capacity and ultimately our support to economic growth of the sector. Maine Sea Grant and Cooperative Extension currently have two professional Extension Associates on our Marine Extension Team that are working with the aquaculture industry and we are about to hire a third person that will work closely with the Aquaculture Research Institute to focus on the development of a more sustainable integrated multi-trophic approach to commercial aquaculture in Maine. If successful, this will result in a more publicly accepted development of the industry and more jobs, thus feeding the need for graduates in aquaculture.

I don't believe there are any proposed cuts in faculty as part of this proposed suspension, and with the planned growth in the research capacity, there is a real opportunity to make this program more significant. If anything, we need to promote this opportunity better than we have and perhaps the establishment of the Aquaculture Research Institute will help us to do just that.

Thank you for accepting and sharing these remarks.

Paul

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Paul S. Anderson
Director, Maine Sea Grant College Program
5784 York Complex
University of Maine
Orono, Maine 04469
voice: 207-581-1435
fax: 207-581-1426
email: panderson@maine.edu
web: http://www.seagrant.umaine.edu/