



BROWN UNIVERSITY
CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

August 13th, 2003

Dear President Simmons,

We are writing to commend you and the Administration on the creation of the Environmental Change Initiative as part of the Academic Enrichment Initiatives. It is a powerful statement of support for the study of the environment and human health at all levels of Brown University education. This is clearly a time of change at Brown, and we are excited for all that the future promises for the school and its students.

This spring, in celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Center of Environmental Studies at Brown, graduates from the past two decades formed the Brown University Center for Environmental Studies Alumni Association. The Association will strengthen connections among graduates in our field and create a mechanism for CES alumni to stay informed with environmental work at Brown. Our website - www.browncesalumni.org - is a venue for sharing our views and opinions about the value and importance of the Center and its interdisciplinary educational program. We are currently establishing class representatives to assist us in a comprehensive outreach effort to all CES graduates. We have collected over thirty personal statements from a wide range of graduating classes which we have posted on our website. The Association will also serve as a way to coordinate alumni giving to support ongoing environmental work at Brown.

The decision to form this organization came at a time of flux in the way environmental issues are studied at Brown. The retirement of Professor Harold Ward, founder of the Center, creates an opportunity for new vision and direction in Brown's environmental programs. Clearly, the Environmental Change Initiative will be part of this process of change and development. The ECI offers an incredible opportunity to enrich the collaborative teaching and research capacities between related Departments, the Center, and external institutions. The recently announced partnership with the Marine Biological Laboratory is testament to the nascent potential of this effort.

We are, however, concerned with certain aspects of the proposed Initiative. The ECI proposes to revamp environmental education at Brown without stating a commitment to a thorough, critical evaluation of the strengths of the existing CES program or the Center's past achievements. Your March 20th letter to Alumni describes the creation of new "multidisciplinary centers or institutes that will bring faculty expertise and resources to bear of problems...outside traditional disciplinary boundaries." The Center for Environmental Studies has served as just this sort of body in the past, and should continue to serve this role in the future. We find the lack of articulated support for the existing Center troubling.

We agree that it is necessary to create stronger mechanisms for multidisciplinary departmental collaboration and better graduate and doctoral programs. However, we believe that the Administration should also commit to explicitly strengthening the undergraduate environmental program. The Center currently has the best urban environmental program in the country, clearly displaying the high "level of excellence and ...culture of collaboration" that the University values.

As alumni, each of us feels that the Center for Environmental Studies is one of the finest, most rigorous and pragmatic environmental programs in the United States. We are committed to helping to make certain that the same quality of *interdisciplinary* – not simply multidisciplinary -- education continues to thrive in the study of the environment at Brown. Harold Ward's departure necessitates a new vision and direction for the Center. At the same time, we believe that it is crucial to respect and enrich the Center's tradition of applied, integrated environmental problem solving. The new Director of the Center must have a critical dedication to the existing values of the Center even as he or she moves the program in powerful new directions.

We understand that The Environmental Change Initiative is still a "living" and dynamic proposal. We feel that it is important that these considerations be fully addressed before the ECI is implemented.

We respectfully request a meeting with you to discuss some of our concerns in more depth, and to create possible mechanisms for engaging our Association in helping you to develop the future of environmental studies at Brown University.

Representatives from the CES Alumni Association are available during August and early September. We will follow up on this letter with a call to your office in the next week.

Sincerely,

The Brown CES Alumni Association

Matthew Amengual, '01
Ana I. Baptista, MA '00
Anna Brown, '01
Colin Cheney, '01
Chip Giller, '93
Garvin Heath, '94
Justin Huxol, '01

Jeffrey Klein '01
Nathan James, '01
Patrick Macroy, MA '01
Michael Muller Leuchtenberger, '92
Christina Page, '91
Andrew Pleasant, MA '00
Daniel Swartz, '81