Panel: The importance of social science, design, and planning when hard science is under attack

On Monday, March 19, 2012, Dean Dan Nadenicek of the UGA College of Environment and Design will host a panel of scholars to discuss the challenges of addressing issues of environmental science in higher education. The panel is comprised of academics who have both a scholarly understanding of environmental issues and first-hand experience in “real world” applications. The discussion will address policy making that uses empirical science and cultural understanding and how these can inform higher education in the fields of landscape architecture, preservation, land use planning and social sciences and the humanities. The panel discussion is open to the public and will be in room 101 in the Miller Learning Center at 5 p.m.

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Dean Dan Nadenicek (UGA CED), Moderator
Dorinda Dallmeyer
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Jim Porter
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“Basically, I am interested in having our students and the university community hear a well-informed discussion about environmental policy that is not afraid to talk about real science. In some ways scientific knowledge is under assault at a time in human history when we need the most broad and deep understanding of complex issues like climate change, world economy and global justice,” explains Nadenicek. “This is hardly the time for environmental designers not to understand or address the complexities and intricacies of the environment and radical societal change. My hope is that this will invigorate the debate and be beneficial to our entire community.”

“Many writers and commentators today are noting an ‘assault on science’ in which facts are mixed with opinions and research results are distorted for political purposes. Consequently, federal funding agencies such as the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Department of Agriculture increasingly are focusing resources on communicating the benefits of research with an emphasis on ‘actionable science.’ That is, financial research support is going to disciplines such as ours that combine science and cultural scholarship with applications in the world. We hope this panel discussion will shed more light on the disturbing refusal to engage and inspire scholars in responsible ways,” Nadenicek added.

Nadenicek has been dean of the College of Environment and Design since 2008. He welcomes Joan Iverson Nassauer, professor of Landscape Architecture in the School of Natural Resources and Environment at the University of Michigan; Wayne Wilkerson, director of the Water Resources Research Institute at Mississippi State University; Jim Porter, Josiah Meigs Professor of Ecology at the University of Georgia (UGA); Dorinda Dallmeyer, director of the Environmental Ethics Certificate Program at UGA; and Norman Thomson, an associate professor in Mathematics and Science Education at UGA.

The panel represents a broad coalition of academics who have spent their professional lives addressing cultural and policy-making issues while using their scientific expertise to base decisions on unbiased, empirical knowledge.

Nassauer was named a Fellow by the American Society of Landscape Architects (1992), a Fellow of the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture (2007), and Distinguished Practitioner of Landscape Ecology in the US (1998) and Distinguished Scholar (2007) by the International Association of Landscape Ecology. She focuses on the cultural sustainability of ecological design in human-dominated landscapes; teaching and research projects apply this
approach to brownfields, vacant property, exurban sprawl, and agricultural landscapes. Most recently, Nassauer was awarded a grant from the National Science Foundation by way of the National Socio-Environmental Synthesis Center, addressing challenges of ecological wealth and changing human populations.

Jim Porter is the Josiah Meigs Professor of Ecology at the University of Georgia. Dr. Porter has received the University of Georgia’s Creative Research Award, the University’s Meigs Teaching Award and the prestigious Eugene P. Odum Award for environmental education from the Ecological Society of America. As an accomplished marine ecologist he specializes in the biology, ecology, and assessment of Floridian and Caribbean coral reefs.

An associate professor of landscape architecture at Mississippi State University, Wayne Wilkerson is the new director of the Water Resources Research Institute, which focuses research on economic and environmental issues affecting water resources. He also currently coordinates Mississippi State’s graduate programs where he has taught since 1999. Wilkerson’s own research focuses on producing computer models that enable the development industry to design and build more resilient and sustainable communities.

Dorinda G. Dallmeyer is director of the Environmental Ethics Certificate Program at the University of Georgia. A native of Macon, Georgia, she holds degrees in geology as well as a J.D. After law school she joined the staff at the Dean Rusk Center for International Law. Over the course of her 21-year career there, her primary research areas crossed a broad spectrum of international law and drew support from major American foundations. Among other titles, Ms. Dallmeyer edited books on civilian uses of space, globalization and environmental ethics, NAFTA, the negotiation of maritime boundary disputes, and marine environmental ethics and most recently, books on the environmental history of the American Southeast. Dallmeyer is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and past vice-president of the American Society of International Law.

Dr. Norman Thomson is an associate professor in Mathematics and Science Education at the University of Georgia. He taught and has worked in East Africa for many years and his current research interests include Hominin evolution, climate change, and indigenous science knowledge. His life time endeavor has been to explore the question – “What do we teach and learn in science and why?”

The panel discussion will include brief presentations from each person, with a dialog and debate following. For further information, contact Dean Dan Nadenicek at dnadeni@uga.edu.