Master’s in Sustainable Development Practice

Proposal submitted to the
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
and Earth Institute, Columbia University

University of Florida
Center for Latin American Studies
Center for African Studies

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a. PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The University of Florida has developed a niche in graduate training in conservation and development, at the heart of which is an inter-disciplinary learning approach that bridges scholarship and practice and uses non-traditional learning spaces including team-based learning. Somewhat unorthodox for a Research 1 university, this is driven by faculty with longstanding partnerships with practitioners in Africa and Latin America, with experience in both academia and practice, and by a commitment to improved field practice in sustainable development. Consequently, we are attracting a significant number of mid-level conservation and development professionals to UF, especially from Africa and Latin America, who are funded by an array of fellowships that is widening beyond our original strengths in conservation.

The objective of this proposal is to expand our capacity and originality by developing a non-thesis Masters in Sustainable Development that consolidates and builds on our current strengths, to produce professionals with the analytical training, professional sense of responsibility, and disciplinary breadth and management skills to address the complex challenges of the 21st century. We will specialize in training professionals to work effectively and towards clear objectives at the intersection of environment, development and health, with a focus on southern Africa and Latin America.

We will train and socialize highly skilled generalist practitioners that:

- Are intellectually and culturally able to confront complex sustainable development challenges;
- Have competency in the core disciplines of health, natural and social sciences, but are able to work across disciplinary boundaries;
- Are able to analyze and communicate multi-dimensional development problems (such as poverty, weak governance, climate vulnerability) at the interface of environment, health and development;
- Are able to plan, manage and monitor development interventions;
- Have acquired knowledge and skills for assessing or managing organizations, staff and teams;
- Have developed skills to work in groups, resolve conflicts, and manage participatory processes;
- Are able to bridge scholarship and practice by acquiring interdisciplinary knowledge and skills, and applying these practically during a summer field experience.

b. RELEVANCE TO ICESDP REPORT

As academics with a commitment to conservation and development, we agree whole-heartedly with the tenor and objectives of the ICESDP Report, and are genuinely excited by this opportunity to move our programs significantly in this direction. Especially in the current economic environment, our ability to secure two academic and one administrative line and a total direct commitment of $746,004\(^1\) argues to both the commitment of UF to the sustainability of this initiative, and to the strengths, unity and determination of the colleagues driving it. Moreover, the current program at UF is poised pedagogically to accomplish the central elements and spirit of the ICESDP Report. With a strong focus on field practice

\(^{1}\) Direct commitment includes 2 faculty lines and 1 administrative line ($500,000 from Provost), a further $192,590 in fellowships from the Office of Research, and direct contributes from CAS and LAS for part time hires ($45,414) and book scholarships ($8,000). In addition, in-kind faculty participation through advising and teaching is estimated to be worth an additional $765,000 in the first five years of the MDP program.
and partnerships in African and Latin America, we intend to achieve the central elements of the ICESDP Report, by:

- Developing a new Master’s in Development Practices aimed at providing professionals with competencies and skills for addressing complex development challenges in the 21st Century
- Providing a foundational bridge across core competencies in natural science, social science, health science and management, and their practical applications to development;
- Reaching beyond the classroom by incorporating structured learning opportunities (e.g. clinics, case studies, internships), including field work on real projects in Latin America and Africa;
- Educating practitioners who can recognize and address inter-related challenges in the environment, poverty alleviation, health and management;
- Contributing to a global network and strengthening the MDP’s open source knowledge exchange centers.

UF will structure a curriculum that systematically covers the core competencies in the four pillars of social, biological, health, and management sciences and practice; that bridging across them through integrated core courses and field projects in Latin America and Africa; that enables students to obtain an additional certificate through specialized elective coursework; and that promotes a culture of teamwork and collaborative learning.

By linking with the University of Botswana (UB) and with the Autonomous University of the Yucatan (UADY), among others, we will contribute to the development of regional centers of excellence as well as to a global network. This will expand the coverage and impact of the program through shared courses, faculty exchanges, reciprocal field sites, etc.

UF is a pioneer in a) interdisciplinary training and b) research and practice around conservation and development in Latin America and Africa. UF has a track record of attracting and training well-rounded, inter-disciplinary professionals with leadership and practical skills, and a strong sense of commitment. Because of this strong foundation, and the close alignment of our goals with those of the MacArthur Foundation, our proposal is well-matched to the goals of the MDP program.

c. CONTEXT

**Focus on Environment, Development and Health**

Resource-rich countries are often development-poor, as we know from our long history of working in tropical economies. We can best add to the network of MDPs being catalyzed by the MacArthur Foundation and Columbia University by focusing on our strengths: working in tropical countries, and particularly with poor communities in resource rich environments, to understand and improve institutions and organizations to create more value from natural systems while simultaneously using them more sustainably and improving human well-being. With a strong global agenda to incorporate environmental services into the marketplace, especially in complicated property regimes associated with dysfunctional markets and inexperienced governments, we anticipate that there will be considerable demand for these skills, which are complex and interdisciplinary in ways recognized by the ICESDP Report. Because of this comparative advantage, we will target our Master’s in Development Practice towards practitioners
e. CURRICULUM DESCRIPTION

Strategy to Combine Core Competencies and Achieve Integrative Thinking

The UF Masters in Sustainable Development Practice (MDP) builds solid disciplinary competencies but emphasizes an interdisciplinary way of thinking, and the integration of theoretical, practical and skills training – including field training in Africa and Latin America. Fulfilling the MDP requirements within a 54 credit Master’s requires considerable innovation in combining disciplinary training, skills, field work, and program performance management:

- *Ten foundational courses* provide disciplinary competency. The faculty driving this process will emphasize inter-disciplinary approach, which will be reinforced through retreats each semester.
- Students take *four elective courses* in a selected specialization (which they can use to get an additional certificate) or in a broader, discretionary manner.
- A weekly seminar on *Sustainable Development Practice* (replaced in year 2 by a field assessment process and capstone course) will provide students with an opportunity to plan and lead discussions about development.
- *Skills training* includes communication and leadership skills, and (based around the field experience) participatory planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting skills.
- Professional development is centered on an intense *field experience* that requires a tangible product.
- The MDP is structured to teach management skills. It is structured like a development project (section d.), while students will be ‘contracted’ in with a ‘job description’ and defined metrics to track competencies. Tracking students and the program at several levels, including individual and participatory evaluations, provides experiential learning in *performance management*.

![Figure 1. Integrated Framework of the University of Florida’s MDP](image-url)
On arrival, students will participate in an orientation process that clarifies expectations, emphasizes our training philosophy (peer-to-peer learning, inter-disciplinarity, teamwork, results-driven approach, use of performance metrics), and begins cohort-building. Each student will then sign a ‘job description’ outlining expectations, and be introduced to the Competency Scorecard used to define and track required competencies.

In the two semesters, students will take a core course in each competency area (see Table 1). Sustainable development will be addressed from both an economic and sociology perspective. Students will develop literacy in tropical ecology and the management of natural resources, as the background for understanding the role of science, technology and innovation in sustainable environmental development. Students will learn about how health impacts development, and the relationships between epidemiology and the realities of health sector policy and administration. Students will be introduced to development theory. As noted, students will be required to lead a seminar series in Sustainable Development Practice to tie these threads together. In addition, they will receive skills training in communication and leadership, and will be taken through a participatory project planning process to prepare them to utilize their field practicum to best effect.

Following the field practicum (section f) students will receive further training in development economics and administration, plus a capstone course in the management and governance of sustainable development. They will also be required to reflect and report on their field experience to demonstrate an integrated knowledge of development theory and practice. In addition, students take four elective courses. We anticipate that many will use this to obtain a specialization and certificate, for example in GIS and Remote Sensing, Public Health or Latin American Development. In this manner, the intensive 54 credit master’s degree curriculum provides disciplinary competency, skills training, integrative activities and field training:

Core Courses: Disciplinary Foundations. Ten core courses provide disciplinary ‘competencies’ including (semester 1) basic concepts, principles, definitions, challenges, and best practices and (semesters 2–4) greater depth and opportunities to develop competence in the application of skills and knowledge. Core course descriptions are in Appendix I. We have specifically used jagged lines in to indicate our intention to avoid disciplinary silos by developing both MDP faculty and students as a community-of-practice with an integrative culture following the TCD model. The unique blend of faculty championing this process, combining recognized academics, scholars who have crossed the boundary into practice through long-term field partnerships, and development practitioners who are now scholars, will be instrumental in fashioning existing courses (which are numerous) and designing new courses to encapsulate the challenge of bridging scholarship and development practice, and disciplinary boundaries.

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5 This will be modeled on a ‘points’ system that is used by service agencies to track and promote staff where a wide range of skills is required. A similar system has just been introduced by our Masters in Public Health, and we accept that it takes several years to develop competency tracking matrices and indicators.
# Table 1. Schedule of Courses

**Orientation (1 week):** familiarize students with this curriculum, its philosophy, its sequence and its academic tools. Cohort-building activities

Introduce performance management system related to competency training.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester One (Fall) 12 Credits</th>
<th>Social Sciences</th>
<th>Natural Sciences</th>
<th>Health Sciences</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Sustainable Development Practice</th>
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<tr>
<th>Semester Two (Spring) 12 Credits</th>
<th>Social Sciences</th>
<th>Natural Sciences</th>
<th>Health Sciences</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Sustainable Development Practice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SDP3-Plan field season with facilitated Logical Framework Approach workshops [BC]</td>
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**Evaluation (Year 1):**
- Evaluation of individual performance (in terms of competencies; skills; group participation and leadership), and throughout the educational process
- Participatory evaluation of overall program (facilitated retreat)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summer Field Training 6 Credits</th>
<th>Social Sciences</th>
<th>Natural Sciences</th>
<th>Health Sciences</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Sustainable Development Practice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Field Study, Internships, etc. in Africa, Latin America 6CR, Includes field skills, project design and evaluation* Comparative Governance Practicum (whole 2 years)</td>
<td>SS3-Economics of Sustainable Development [Useche]* 3CR</td>
<td>Two Elective Courses (6 credits)</td>
<td>SDP4-Field project Assessment, Analysis, Write-up, and Presentation+ 3CR</td>
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<tr>
<th>Semester Three (Fall) 12 Credits</th>
<th>Social Sciences</th>
<th>Natural Sciences</th>
<th>Health Sciences</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Sustainable Development Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SS3-Economics of Sustainable Development [Useche]* 3CR</td>
<td>Two Elective Courses (6 credits)</td>
<td>Two Elective Courses (6 credits)</td>
<td>SDP4-Field project Assessment, Analysis, Write-up, and Presentation+ 3CR</td>
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<tr>
<th>Semester Four (Spring) 12 Credits</th>
<th>Social Sciences</th>
<th>Natural Sciences</th>
<th>Health Sciences</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Sustainable Development Practice</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M3-Collaborative Management/Development Administration* [Child +] 3CR</td>
<td>Two Elective Courses (6 credits)</td>
<td>Two Elective Courses (6 credits)</td>
<td>SDP4-Field project Assessment, Analysis, Write-up, and Presentation+ 3CR</td>
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**Final Evaluation:**
Evaluation of individual performance (in terms of competencies; skills; group participation and leadership)
Participatory evaluation of overall program (facilitated retreat)

*Courses to be developed, by present or new faculty. +Team taught courses
Elective Courses and Certificates: In their second year, students take two elective courses per semester. This mechanism allows students to qualify for a graduate certificate in a dozen existing fields of specialization, the most applicable of which are listed below. While there are too many elective courses and combinations to list, several appropriate certificates and concentrations (see Annex V) may include:

1. African Studies
2. Latin American Studies
3. Tropical Conservation and Development
4. Environmental Health
5. Epidemiology
6. Public Health Management and Policy
7. Urban Planning and Sustainability
8. Gender and Development
9. Interdisciplinary Concentration on Geographic Information Systems
10. Climate and Climate Change

Sustainable Development Practice and Management Skills. The curriculum is designed to integrate disciplinary foundations using skills training and team-based professional activities. This includes 1) the weekly student-managed seminar 2) the skills course in communication, leadership, conflict resolution 3) intense preparation for the field training experience including techniques for participatory project design, implementation and monitoring; and analysis and reporting of the field practicum in a second year course 4) a capstone course in the second year and 5) the management of the MDP through a participatory performance monitoring process. Each student will have a formal advisor to provide structured supervision throughout the MDP program. Additional seminars and workshops, reading groups, discussions of policy alternatives, presentations to different audiences, and other practical activities will be encouraged; such student-initiated learning opportunities are an important facet of the TCD program.

To teach students about management, the program will be managed like a project with ‘job descriptions,’ workplans, and a set of performance evaluation procedures. In this way we will inculcate management procedures and discipline into students experientially. This will introduce them to useful tools not normally learned in academia, for example, position/job descriptions and job performance evaluations; participatory project performance assessments using indicators and the logical framework format; and competency matrices for assessing competencies and managing promotions.

Field Training. The field experience will require students to apply the principles and skills gained through core courses to the realities of sustainable (and unsustainable) development. The emphasis will be on participatory analysis, planning and implementation of real projects in partnership with communities, associations, government agencies or non-governmental organizations in Africa and Latin America. Students will be expected to work directly with local partners in the planning or ongoing implementation of conservation/development/health projects of policy processes. In addition, as part of the Sustainable Development Practicum activities, students will be encouraged to observe the many participatory planning processes occurring through local government in Gainesville to provide the comparative perspective of development practice in a ‘mature’ local government.
January 28, 2009

Global MDP Program Secretariat
The Earth Institute at Columbia University
2910 Broadway, Hogan Hall MC 3277
New York, NY 10025

Dear MDP Program Secretariat:

Re: University of Florida proposal to The MacArthur Foundation for a Master’s in Development Practice (MDP) program

I am pleased to endorse the proposal of the University of Florida’s (UF) Center for Latin American Studies and Center for African Studies to The MacArthur Foundation for a grant to support the development of an interdisciplinary master’s degree program in sustainable development practices. This proposal is closely aligned with UF President Bernie Machen’s recently announced strategic initiative to develop a university-wide academic program in sustainability.

The proposed MDP program will build upon established interdisciplinary graduate programs that combine theoretical, practical and skills training—including field training in Africa and Latin America. The aim is to train well-rounded professionals who are able to apply their leadership, problem-oriented and practical skills to meet the challenges of sustainable development in collaboration with developing country partners.

The Latin American Studies and African Studies centers are both long-standing US Department of Education Title VI National Resource Centers in area studies who already have a track record of collaboration in the field of Tropical Conservation and Development. The proposal, developed by professors Grenville Barnes and Brian Child working with a team of faculty from across the university, will take advantage of UF’s deep and broad research and teaching expertise in this critical area.

The University of Florida is one of the nation’s most comprehensive universities. UF is the state of Florida’s land grant institution and a member of the Association of American Universities. The university offers over 130 majors housed in 16 colleges. The UF Health Science Center includes colleges of medicine, nursing, dentistry, veterinary medicine, and public health and health professions, several of which will contribute to the Health Sciences component of the MDP. The UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences include all the disciplines identified within the Natural and Social Sciences components of the MDP. The colleges of Business Administration and of Design, Construction and Planning,
along with elements of the units above, will contribute to the Management component required of the Global MDP.

The University of Florida is willing to provide substantial financial resources in support of the MDP program. If awarded the MacArthur grant, I will fund a gradually increasing share of two faculty lines and one staff position, so that by AY 2013-14, these positions are funded solely from university resources. The Vice President for Research has indicated that he will provide four, two-year fellowships to students in the MDP program. All told, the university will provide $755,468 in matching funds through academic year 2013-14 to establish the MDP program.

The University of Florida has two undergraduate interdisciplinary academic programs in sustainability and we are in the process of developing an interdisciplinary masters-level certificate program in sustainability. The MacArthur Foundation’s support will allow us to complete this rich set of offerings with an innovative masters degree aimed at meeting the challenges of sustainable development on a global scale.

Finally, President Machen is among the first of over 600 college and university presidents to have signed the American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment, which has rigorous standards for achieving specific goals to make all aspects of our institutions sustainable. Under the leadership of the Director of the University’s Office of Sustainability, UF is making substantial changes to every aspect of our campus behavior. We believe our students will learn about living sustainably most deeply if the University of Florida sets an example well beyond the classroom.

I hope these examples demonstrate the University of Florida’s commitment to participating fully in the emerging interdisciplinary field of sustainability and to developing academic programs in this area as well as in sustainable development practices in developing countries. We look forward to The MacArthur Foundation providing the much needed seed funding to help us achieve these goals.

Sincerely,

Joseph Glover
Provost and Senior Vice President

JG/clg