

Where have all the students gone?

November 3 2008

Why are the number of students studying soil science as a major declining across the United States? Mary Collins, University of Florida, Gainesville, writes about this in an article published in the 2008 *Journal of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Education*.

Collins notes that the faculties who work closely with undergraduate students have seen this steady decline for several years. And there are many reasons one can give for why this is happening.

"This decline affects not only the students but also the courses offered, quality of graduate students, and the possible merger of departments," says Collins.

The National Academy of Sciences through the National Committee for Soil Science established a subcommittee to study the declining trend of low enrollments in the major. The outcome of the subcommittee work and international commentaries on this subject are reported in this article. The international soil science education community is also facing a similar tendency.

Today many of our graduate students come to soil science with various undergraduate backgrounds including non-science disciplines.

Collins explains, "These graduates may be outstanding, but they do not have the fundamental educational background in soils common at the undergraduate level."

How can we increase the enrollment in our courses and major? Possible solutions include recruiting the "undecided" students already on-campus; having the best lecturer in the department teach the normally high enrolled introductory soils course; discussing with your colleagues if the courses offered have been static; changing the names of the courses; offering courses through distance education; establishing a combined B.S/M.S. degree program; and advertising how a student can major in soil science and still prepare for a professional school.

Source: Soil Science Society of America

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