

# **Plan for Growth**

## **2006-2015**

### **Future Generations Graduate School Applied Community Change & Conservation**

#### **Focus:**

In support of the mission of Future Generations (Future Generations teaches and enables a process for equitable community change that integrates conservation and development...), the focus of the Future Generations Graduate School is on helping students (community-based scholar/practitioners) empower their own communities to engage social change and conservation. While this program will teach individuals, beyond the individuals whom we teach the real students are communities whom they teach—in this way we become a school for communities.

By applying such learning in real time and place, by honing research questions and skills in daily life, and by referencing challenge and success in light of one's classmates' communities and four terms of residential-based studies, each student matures into a community-embedded scholar practitioner-leader with analytical, synthesizing, and evaluative abilities. It will require a multi-year, experimental process to learn how to help communities engage in such on-going learning.

Just as a medical school has an applied purpose to teach individuals who then go and enable others to become healthy, so also Future Generations is teaching the change agents of communities. Just as medical education blends the theory of classroom instruction with the hands-on of the teaching hospital, so also Future Generations combines theoretical instruction in the residential and on-line pedagogies with the hands-on of student work in their home communities.

#### **Goals:**

- To create a borderless community of life long learners, committed through a compact of accountability, to lead engaging lives while fostering community change and conservation.
- To offer a rigorous academic program that prepares students to integrate scholarly research with learning from development success stories in the communities we serve.
- To offer development practitioners an advanced degree program that allows them to study and learn while remaining connected to their communities and their jobs.
- To offer short-term, skill-specific, certificate programs in community development, community conservation, and the SEED-SCALE methodology.

#### **Objectives:**

Functionally, for the nine-year vision of this plan, the Future Generations Graduate School will address three tasks.

- It will provide a rigorous, applied Masters Degree in the subject area of the school, applied community change and conservation.

- It will conduct research into deeper understanding in the subject area of the school.
- It will provide focuses training programs
  - Short-term training that leads to a certificate,
  - Longer-term training leading to a diploma,
  - And encouragement for further Masters-level applied studies for diploma-holding trainees.
- It will investigate the possibility of a doctoral degree under the English model, Both state and accreditation requirements must be examined. Furthermore, a thorough market study of needs and support will be considered.

Operationally, for the nine-year vision of this plan, the Future Generations Graduate School will seek to complete accreditation under the policies of the North Central Association and it will remain an institution “in good standing” with the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission.

Financially, the Graduate School will seek financial security through developing a revenue base that includes income from the following sources: tuition, grants, scholarships, government-backed loans, fees for training courses, revenue from endowment.

Over the next several years, there will be ongoing experimentation in this Graduate School as it seeks to augment learning effectiveness through several iterations of Master’s classes. Online modules are one area for improvement. In-country training will be adjusted. Combining effective mentoring through the Board of Mentors plus the regular faculty will be a further area of focus. Each of the next classes will continue the practice from the last three classes of making significant adjustments to its instructional design. Several options lie before the Graduate School:

- A longer period for curriculum completion, anywhere from 25 to 36 months.
- A five-residential approach, requiring that students complete four of five residentials.
- Greater mentoring, instructional input, and community buy-in via four linked Practicum courses.
- To effect more constructive course/time management, reduced and staggered online learning.
- More student-interactive, community-descriptive, and community-responsive online exercises.
- Greater instructor and instructional adaptation to community-based student needs.
- Continuing emphasis on student evaluation and feedback.
- Enhanced Master’s homepage with paths to courses, research, cybrary, and Blackboard portals.
- Workshops to help professors hone their teaching (online, in residentials, and to support student research)

- Greater attention to students' diverse backgrounds so as to accommodate differences and facilitate inter-cultural, inter-lingual, and trans-disciplinary research.

Informational Access remains a challenge for a student body scattered over the world. The objective is not only to provide information during the time of academic instruction, but (as this is an applied academic program) to set up a system of information access so graduates have on-going information access. What value is it to train people how to use a library as a tool to work professionally when after training they lack access to a library? The Internet provides the obvious solution to part of this information access need, and many cybraries are evolving.

However, the primary information access need for such an applied profession is not for external information but community-specific information. New methods will need to be incubated by Future Generations that help students learn how to gather information accurately and efficiently inside and in partnership with their communities. Given the applied nature of this program, a librarian will also have to be combined with a research advisor. This will be an evolving/experimenting quest.

### **Strategy:**

The three-part mission of the Graduate School will become operative in the following schedule:

- Masters is already operating – but will move to a new class beginning every year starting in September 2008
- Research focus is already operating with a specific application in peace building – this single focus will continue through 2008. It is expected that in 2008 a second track will be added to monitor and examine the pedagogical processes of blended learning. In addition, the research in the graduate school will coordinate closing with established research foci in the NGO that investigate community change, conservation, primary health care, and other applied topics.
- Training has been a part of the NGO side of Future Generations. These county-based certificate-providing training programs will continue, refining in an experimental manner the Future Generations training approach and curriculum. From this tested base, then in 2008 several day, certificate-granting training programs will begin in the graduate school offerings. In 2009 or 2010, a longer (perhaps two-week) diploma training curriculum may become available.

### **Cultural and Physical Accommodations**

Whereas the traditional academic environment creates an artificial environment, the Graduate School presents and tests a real-world path for students and communities to learn the subject matter of social change and conservation.

First, let us be candid about how traditional academic environments and standards treat the complexity of societal-state challenges. The *status quo* in modernist education separates learning from society. It places students and curricula within walls. The outside

world is introduced through books and described in lectures. Laboratories are viewed as environments where variables can be controlled. Students are typically young, malleable, and without responsibilities. This artificial environment then sends forth graduates as if they will be able to recognize, let alone accurately reflect upon and operate in the real world.

By contrast, the Graduate School seeks a more optimal, connected-to-reality way to learn the subject matter of social change and conservation. These topics are complex and the lessons become more understandable the more real-world they can be made. Variables of civilization, culture, language, politics, economics, and ecology cover the diversity of life. Indeed, these variables are too complex to be contained within the traditional inside-the-walls approach to education. Moreover, social change and conservation mandate accountability by the very communities that are to be re-shaped for better or for worse. People do not let themselves be acted upon as laboratory animals; and natural environments are not so predictable as the controls of a laboratory. Thus this Graduate School offers a process of students and “communities of learning” linked through applied instruction, observation, research, and clearly monitored and evaluative work in communities.

Hence it is imperative that the instructional mode for this pedagogy be community-based. If our learning is to be useful, it must adhere to conditions under which it will be applied. A learning environment must be created where students learn from Future Generations instruction, from the direction of one’s own community, and from the comparative analysis and synthesis of “communities of learning” examined alongside one another. The pedagogy of Future Generations, therefore, is necessarily adaptive. The Graduate School will always (like a natural or community system) be modifying its instructional, experiential, and applied approaches. But it must remain open to the learning and instruction of these diverse communities. Future Generations is only beginning to understand the significance and consequences of this different instructional approach.

Part of the awareness demanded by such a reorientation can be grouped under the term intercultural communicative competence. In traditional learning structures students can be asked to speak and function in the language and culture of the university: students must be able to understand what is being taught to them and they must be able to return answers. That is part of the cultural and physical adaptive challenge, but the other part in the applied mode of Future Generations is that students are not just learning from their communities, they are also very much part of their communities.

- How do they balance, for instance, schedules? What takes priority—a professor’s demand a paper be handed in, or a community’s demand the student participate in some function?
- How do students balance integrity? For another example—how do they question in a transparent way with their professor and then flip and keep their mouth shut when dealing with a fear-invoking dictator in their home country?
- Or, there are a host of specific cultural issues that are harder to separate from when instruction is applied and not inside artificial walls. Such as the fact that if a person does not understand something, the proper response is to keep quiet; or

that one always works as a member of a team, and hence that makes it okay to copy directly material another person is writing; or that the definition of English varies to such an extent that a person can be fluent, can have studied in English for 15 years, and suddenly in such an instructional program will find him or herself among English speakers where half of what is said is incomprehensible.

A learning challenge stands before Future Generations. So much of the instruction in change and conservation originates in the communities of our students. Moreover, there is the dynamic of the very “community of learning” that successive classes of Master’s students create. Thus it is unlikely that our students will fit into a traditional academic environment; it is also unlikely they will adapt to our alternative mode if the Graduate School is too rigid in its approach to applied learning. The Graduate School, therefore, anticipates a very steep learning curve over the next decade. There are improvements in Class Two over earlier iterations in Class One and the “Faux Master’s” before that. Still this learning approach must evolve. Throughout, the institution will seek to understand and thoughtfully respond.

**Administration and Faculty:**

Dean (to be hired in 2007)

Academic Director (hired)

Training Program Director (to be hired in early 2008)

Registrar (hired)

Director of Student Management (hired)

Full Time Faculty and/or Adjunct Faculty (as needed and funds permit)

Five Endowed Professorships in Equity & Empowerment

- Health, (hired)
- Conservation, (hired)
- Youth, (in process)
- Poverty Alleviation (soliciting funds)
- Applied Research Methodology (soliciting funds)

**Physical Facilities:**

Affiliated Field Campuses (India, the United States, Peru, China/Tibet)

Explore further affiliated campuses in Canada, Africa, and East Asia

Graduate School Building on North Mountain

Cybrary—under development

Physical library of core journals, essential texts, research documents, and course-related materials