“BEYOND THE CURRICULUM”
CREATING A DEPARTMENTAL ECOSYSTEM

THE SOCIAL ECOSYSTEM

BUILDING BEYOND THE CURRICULUM

What is Beyond the Curriculum?
Why go Beyond the Curriculum?
What strategic goal is advanced?
What are the scope and duration of the activities?
How should activities be sequenced?
Who is the focus of the activity?

ABSTRACT

A thriving geoscience department is a complex academic ecosystem, providing opportunities for students and faculty from diverse backgrounds to find productive niches. Extracurricular activities such as fund raising, developing internship programs, producing an annual department newsletter, social activities, student clubs, a speaker series, and maintaining a useful web site enhance the student’s and faculty member’s experience and reach constituencies outside the department. These activities also serve the department’s strategic objectives such as showcasing accomplishments, gathering financial support, strengthening relationships with the institution’s administration, recruiting and retaining students, and making friends and allies among many others.

Activities beyond the curriculum have both temporal and spatial dimensions. Some, such as academic advising or producing news releases, achieve measurable results in a period of days. Building strong alumni relations or obtaining funds for endowed scholarships or professorships may require sustained effort over a decade or more before the strategic goal is attained. The spatial dimension (or scope of influence) of some activities (e.g., internships) may be limited to only students. Others, such as the sponsorship of a professional meeting, may involve students, faculty, alumni, other members of the profession, and the general community.

Extracurricular endeavors serving strategic goals must be designed and conducted with an understanding of what will appeal to the target group. Presidents, provosts, and deans will not invest their scarce and dwindling resources in non-essential programs unless they are valuable to the institution. Most deans are more likely to be convinced that additional laboratory space is needed if the argument is based on a sound business plan. Likewise, a successful undergraduate recruitment strategy needs to be informed by interests of first and second year students. Students are astute consumers and the entire message of an information brochure can be nullified by a single dated photograph.

Building a strong department requires more than a strong curriculum. While the curriculum and research programs are central to the system, other activities that are in part or wholly “beyond the curriculum” are essential for the well being and stability of the organization.

“EXTRA-CURRICULAR” ACTIVITIES VARY IN DURATION AND SCOPE OF INFLUENCE

“EXTRA-CURRICULAR” ACTIVITIES SERVE STRATEGIC GOALS

SEQUENCING ACTIVITIES

TAILORING THE ACTIVITY FOR THE AUDIENCE

What is wrong with this picture?