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GENDER ISSUES IN NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT: PREPARING FOR DIVERSITY IN THE WORK PLACE*

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ABSTRACT: Women comprise a growing number of undergraduate and graduate students who are pursuing degrees in the natural resource disciplines. Likewise, women represent an ever increasing percentage of natural resource professionals. Gender issues thus become a relevant attribute of training for both women and men so that awareness may lead to improved, stable and productive working environments.

This paper's goal is to assist in increasing understanding of gender issues in natural resource management by discussing a course that addresses gender issues relevant to natural resource disciplines and the professional work environment. Awareness by both women and men of gender issues that affect the working environment may help prepare professionals to enact change in some current behaviors and practices. The goal of this paper is to include both women and men in this awareness building.

This paper gives a brief history of a gender diversity course which has been taught in the College of Natural Resources at Utah State University since 1992. The course has three principal objectives. First, the course seeks to empower students to address gender issues in natural resource management by assisting them to acquire knowledge of sociological issues involved in gender stratifications in society and to help students develop skills for recognizing and assessing gender-specific images, languages and policies. The second objective is to stimulate discussion in the College of Natural Resources about gender roles in the natural resource professions through college-wide presentations or seminars by interested students or faculty. Thirdly, the course seeks to encourage participants to pursue further education on sociological and cultural issues that affect natural resource management.

The course is broadly composed of two sections. First, sociological conceptualizations of gender and feminist theory are discussed in the context of the culture of science with a focus on the natural resources. Using this theoretical and conceptual basis, the second part of the course examines women's roles in the natural resource professions and the challenges they experience in the work place. Special attention is directed to the challenges women experience as scientists and strategies they have developed for successful contributions in their fields. Discussions focus around issues of affirmative action, backlash to equal employment opportunity programs and the role of mentoring for enhancing professional growth. The paper is enhanced by a home page available on the Internet so that the course contents can be applied to in-service training sessions in the natural resource agencies.

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