LTER Network Social Science Committee Report

Tuesday, May 5, 2009

Grove, Gragson, Ogden, and Boone

Progress Realized. The development and incorporation of social science research in the LTER Network has made significant progress over the past few years. The ISSE document is a notable and important example of this progress. Even without substantial, direct financial commitments from SBE, social scientists have been recruited and begun work at a variety of LTER sites. This has often come through the investment of resources and attention from Site PIs. Also, several sites have been able to leverage their existing programs to submit successful NSF CNH proposals.

A number of LTER Network workshops have been held over the past year.   Social scientists have participated in most of these workshops and their participation has solidified the development and incorporation of social science at site and network levels.

Education Opportunities. This spring, Gragson, Boone, Ogden, and Grove taught their distributed graduate seminar course, "Social Science Methods for Long Term Interdisciplinary Research." Sites participating in the course included BES, CAP, FCE, and BNZ. This is the second year that this course has been taught, and we are working to gain the necessary resources to convert the course materials into a book.   We anticipate that a complementary course, Social Science Theory for Long Term Interdisciplinary Research" will be added in the next few years.

Consolidating Our Progress. As the number of social scientists working in the LTER Network increases, there is a growing need to share conceptual frameworks, data and analytical approaches, and publications. This is important for growth and success at the site and network level. While this "need to share" is probably not unique to the social sciences, it is important to consider what role the Network Office can play to support the cultivation of social science research at a network level?

We recommend that the Social Science Committee work with the Network Office to identify and secure the necessary collaborative tools. This may include Wikis, Blogs, Group Pages / File Sharing, and so on. Existing, free services may be sufficient. The point here is to identify and choose which collaborative approaches to use, develop these approaches, and then share with the Site PIs, existing social science LTER community, and interested ecological scientists. We believe this will also play an important resource for students working on LTER sites.