

Graduate Student Committee Objectives

LTER sites constitute a primary national training ground for graduate students in ecology. Currently more than 300 graduate students participate in the LTER network. The nature of the LTER network is such that there is unique potential for educational experiences across sites and disciplines.

Networking and Communication

The ultimate objective of the graduate student committee is to establish a permanent platform for inter-site communication, both between students and between students and scientists. The graduate student site representatives serve as the liaison between the graduate student committee co-chairs and the students at each site, and make up the members of the graduate student committee. It is the responsibility of the site representative to make sure that new graduate students are added to the national LTER database.

The ultimate goal of compiling and maintaining a complete list of graduate students within the network will be the creation of a searchable information database. Any student or PI will be able to enter a subject area they are interested in and find all the students in the database with similar interests. Hopefully this will help stimulate cross-site research and collaboration among students at different sites. Principal investigators could use this database to recruit students into Ph.D. programs, and to recruit postdoctorates or technicians. Students outside of the Network could use the database to gain insight to LTER research.

National Meetings as Opportunities for Outreach

Large meetings such as ESA bring together a diverse group of students. We envision that the LTER graduate student meetings could be expanded to include a greater diversity of students present at these meetings. The goal is to involve more students from the greater ESA community as an outreach and education effort. These meetings can be useful as a forum for introducing undergraduate and graduate students to opportunities within the LTER network, both for graduate study and as a resource for potential scientific information and collaboration. In the future, we will try to make these meetings more formal and more informative for a general audience. In order to ensure that LTER graduate student concerns are also addressed, an option would be to have two meetings: one for the representatives from each site, and one as an outreach to all ESA students. At future meetings, (especially the All-Scientist's Meeting, 2000), we will try to expand the educational and networking capacities of these types of meetings to include sessions on issues of importance to graduate students such as: job opportunities, international programs, gender and minority issues, and others, by having invited speakers.

Student Cross-site Research Opportunities

LTER offers the opportunity to train graduate students across disciplines and ecosystems. Our vision is for LTER to become the primary training ground for students interested in long-term, large-scale ecological projects. To accomplish this, we need to develop sources of funding that permit students to commit to long-term projects as part of their dissertation research and to expand the scale of their projects across ecosystems. A formal arrangement, where funds are specifically set-aside for cross-site work, and interested students submit proposals, will encourage more student participation. This process also gives students an opportunity to practice proposal preparation. We will be exploring several options in order to establish a permanent source of funding for student travel. These include: establishment and management through NET, but with some support/coordination from NSF, and the creation of a separate Dissertation Enhancement program within NSF that is available only to students interested in pursuing cross-site research.

Central Organization and Continuity

The coordination of graduate student activities requires a great deal of central organization, planning and time. Chris French, on loan to NET from NSF, has been dedicated to international activities for LTER students. Through her time investment, several successful programs, including an exchange program between U.S. LTER students and Asian LTER students, have been established. When Chris returns to NSF next year, the Network Office will need to find means to continue her work. We envision an expanded position that would include attention to issues concerning all

LTER graduate students, improving overall graduate education across sites and other opportunities such as long term cross-site research projects.