

News from the IAEH

Student Dialogues: EcoHealth Offers a Home to the Interdisciplinary Student

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Our graduate school experience has been shaped by the concept of interdisciplinarity. We have participated in discussions on the proper usage of the prefixes: cross-, trans-, multi-, and inter-. We have been taught to recognize the vast diversity of epistemologies of our peers. And we have honed our jargon-free elevator speeches so that we can explain our dissertations to your grandmother in one minute or less. Despite this intensive preparation, it is easy for interdisciplinary scholars to be left searching between departments and feeling without a disciplinary home.

The International Association for Ecology and Health (IAEH or EcoHealth) is an organization that was established to provide just such a collaborative and interdisciplinary community of scholarship dedicated to sustaining the health of people, animals, and the environment in innovative ways. It is to this community that transdisciplinary scholars can look to follow innovations in the field, connect with new collaborators, or find a venue for publishing their work. Such a community thrives on interactions across disciplines. At our biennial conferences, presentation topics range from conservation medicine to ecological ethics and the researchers are equally as diverse. Members represent some of the most progressive and cross-cutting programs in the world. Student members are

inquisitive, open-minded, and eager to push forward an interdisciplinary agenda.

Our own personal experiences with the IAEH have been in the positions of Student Representative to the IAEH Board. Through these appointments we have experienced support and encouragement from the Board of the Association. They often remind us that we are the future of the organization and have welcomed us to their Board meetings and committees to foster skills of management, collaboration, and institutional development. Through interdisciplinary and student-professional interactions, we have seen new ideas and partnerships developed in ways that would not have been possible had we remained solely within our institutions or respective fields of study.

Over the past few years, we have been cultivating an EcoHealth student community through initiatives such as an EcoHealth book club; a Facebook and networking website; panels, poster competitions, and socials at the conferences; and most recently, the “Student Dialogues” pieces (such as this one) to appear in the “News from the IAEH” section in the *EcoHealth* journal. These pieces will present a dialogue between students and professional members of the IAEH. We are excited for this latest development and know that this will further student involvement within all aspects of the IAEH, build leadership within the student community, and provide opportunities for student members to have a voice in our journal.

Students are the future of EcoHealth, so let's get to know one another!

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WHAT CHALLENGES? WHOSE FUTURE?

The International Association for Ecology and Health, like all professional associations, needs to hear the voices of those students and early careerists, who will develop the field of *EcoHealth*. Issues of interdisciplinarity, demographic and generational changes, new technologies and new policy settings demand participation by original thinkers. Indeed, the emergent and difficult challenges embraced by sustainability, ecology, and public health highlight this imperative, since the challenges we face and the problems we define will not necessarily be wedded to the disciplinary successes of the past.

I recently attended an annual congress of a scientific society (of which I have been a member for many years),

and in the program for the congress I noticed that the society was honoring one of the pioneers in the field with a series of plenary talks, but I did not recognize the names of the speakers. When time came for the session, four doctoral students gave their invited talks. One after the other, while acknowledging the pioneer perfectly appropriately, they gave us their new interpretations of theory and enthused us with their innovation, across what seemed to be a breathtaking array of topics. After the papers, at lunch, the chatter was loud and lively; we all felt the same buzz, and the mood was different. The collective experience and realization were that we had all learnt and that the future for this society was bright. I was buoyed not only by the fact that the congress organizers had provided this sort of platform, but even more by the doctoral students who had grasped this challenge. Both needed to happen! I think the *EcoHealth* Student Dialogues will provide the same sort of opportunity: genuine professional participation by students members who are working at the cutting edges of the fields that are important to us. I'm looking forward to reading these pages!

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