



Environmental programming extends outdoor learning

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By Martha Irwin, Communications Officer

The setting is serene and beautiful, with fall colours blanketing the area. Not your typical classroom, but very typical of the learning environment for Sault College students studying the natural environment.

Now, with nine different programs available, students are interacting with the outdoors daily and experiencing hands-on learning opportunities throughout the academic year.

Sault College has expanded the kind of environmental and outdoor programming available to meet the needs of today's students and employers.

"We are responding to students who are eager to embrace everything from environmental concerns to industrial forestry," explains professor Mark Harvey.

"With more programs available, traditional forestry students can overlap option courses from others areas and complete two diplomas simultaneously."

Appealing to a wider audience of nature enthusiasts, these programs complement degrees, provide practical training and expose students to industry experts.

Today's employers are also requiring more from forestry graduates. An Ecosystem Surveys - Field Skills program offers the practical hands-on training that employers are seeking. This one year post-graduate certificate program requires an undergraduate degree in environmental science or biology upon entry.

"The combination of theoretical and practical training makes students job ready in areas of research, industrial forestry, field operations and environmental consulting," says Harvey.

"The Field Naturalist one-year certificate program is another new addition providing its graduates with the skills to interpret, guide and explain natural features and processes," explains Harvey.

All Natural Environment and Outdoor Studies students participate in a two-week field camp at Shaw Dam, near Thessalon, Ontario. Living at the Shaw Dam site and the McCreights Junior Ranger Camp in hard hats and steel toed boots, these students experience nature's best as the classroom is the water's edge, and all around. Throughout the two weeks, students are participating in demonstrations followed by

time to practice and be tested in their newly acquired skills. What makes field camp run so smoothly is the level of expertise provided by departmental staff. There are no written tests in these two weeks, however, students are constantly being quizzed verbally and asked to demonstrate their new knowledge.

"Back on campus, our laboratory is at the backdoor. We have a 50-hectare outdoor lab which is really a woodlot on campus. You just walk out the door and we're in the woods," says Harvey. "We also have a lot of facilities and expertise in Sault Ste. Marie that you don't find at colleges in southern Ontario." Those facilities include the Ontario Forest Research Institute and the Great Lakes branch of the Canadian Forest Service which are both based in the city. There are several forestry operations and mills within a short distance of the college.

These students will have the opportunity to make connections with employers while still in school. The co-operative education component to these programs gives students valuable work experience before graduation. Forestry Canada offers work related training opportunities to third year students exposing them to local scientists, experts and projects. The Canadian Institute of Forestry offers programming and special events throughout the year to further connect students to the industry. University presentations outlining articulation agreements are also explained opening new doors to expanding their education.

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