CORRESPONDENCE COURSES — A SURVEY OF NEEDS

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A report on a survey conducted to investigate the need for correspondence courses in environmental education and the form such courses might take.

BACKGROUND AND METHOD

EEASA recently conducted a postal survey on behalf of the Working Committee for Environmental Education of the Council for the Environment. The survey, conducted by the writer, was aimed at finding out whether or not there was a perceived need for correspondence courses in Environmental Education (EE) (including environmental extension and environmental interpretation) and if so, what form the courses should take.

A questionnaire and covering letter were sent to 35 individuals identified as being engaged in EE in one form or another. The list included lecturers at colleges and universities and persons employed by conservation organisations. Selection was however based on individuals and *not* the organisations for which they worked. The covering letter explained the purpose of the questionnaire and made clear the standpoint that, for the purposes of the questionnaire, EE would include both environmental extension and environmental interpretation. The questionnaire itself was divided into two sections relating to *technikon courses* and to post-graduate *university courses*. Each section contained questions on:

- the *need* for correspondence courses in EE
- appropriate programme(s) which might include EE
- suggested contents of correspondence courses
- the numbers of officials who might take advantage of a correspondence course should it be offered.

RESULTS

19 individuals responded to the questionnaire. Responses may be summarised as follows:

1. THE NEED FOR CORRESPONDENCE COURSES

All respondents agreed that there was a need for both technikon courses and post-graduate courses. A number saw the need as urgent. A number of respondents emphasised that the *concepts* of EE, environmental interpretation and environmental extension be thoroughly discussed before any curriculum planning take place. The inference of this was that respondents saw a need for absolute clarity of concepts before courses were designed or proposed. Many respondents emphasised the conservation component of EE.

2. REPLIES RELATING TO TECHNIKON COURSES

a. Year in which EE should be included:
   1st year: 1
   2nd year: 1
   3rd year: 4
   Each year: 7
   Any 2 years: 1 (n = 14)

b. Duration of course:
   12 weeks : 2
   1 term in each year : 4
   1 semester : 4
   As for any major subject: 2 (n = 12)

c. Potential numbers of students:
   * Total number of officers who might want to do EE as *part* of their Nature Conservation course: 40
   * Total number of officers who might be interested in an EE course as a post-diploma course: 50.

3. REPLIES RELATING TO UNIVERSITY COURSES

a. Type of course:
   Discrete course for interested persons: 5
   As part of HDE (Higher Diploma of Education): 12 (n = 17)

b. Duration of discrete course:
   One year: 8
   One Teaching Unit: 1 (n = 9)

c. Duration of course within HDE:
   One year: 2
   Two years: 3
   One Teaching Unit: 8 (n = 13)

d. Existing courses which deal with EE (as reflected by answers to the questionnaire): University of Bophuthatswana: B.Ed. (one year elective), U.E.D. (one semester elective); University of Witwatersrand: H.D.E. (one elective course); Natal University: H.E.D. (one lecture and one voluntary field trip); University of South Africa: H.E.D. (one elective course)

e. Qualifying subjects for post-graduate course:
   Any : 8
   Biology and/or Geography: 6
   Science : 1 (n = 15)

f. Number of potential students:
   i. Discrete course: 37
   ii. Part of H.D.E.: 29

4. SUGGESTED CONTENTS OF COURSES

a. Technikon course

Contents of course:

* Philosophy/Background to EE
* Aims and objectives of EE
* Basic ecology
* Introduction to basic didactic principles
* Introduction to environmental psychology (behaviour change)
* Teaching methods (including audio-visual methods)
* Field techniques (using the environment for teaching)
* Urban studies
* Evaluation techniques (programme and self)
* Running clubs
* Oisplay techniques (including photography).

Continued from page 27

Practical work to include:
* Working with potential target groups (school groups, adults etc.)
* Preparation of worksheets, teaching aids etc.
* Practical experience over periods of time at recognised EE facilities
* Planning and executing EE projects (e.g. field trips)
* First aid course.

b. Post-graduate University course

Course contents to include:
* Aims and objectives of EE
* EE background and philosophy
* Status of EE in South Africa
* Basic didactic principles
* Ecology
* Environmental interpretation
* Existing EE centres and their work
* Environmental psychology
* Inter-curriculum EE
* Urban studies.

Practical work to include:
* Course design
* Design and evaluation of materials
* Environmental impact assessment
* Evaluation.

Continued from page 26

representatives of the MOSS Committee. The Parks, Recreation and Beaches Department has set aside money to spend on the ARC trail. This will be spent on the notice board, bird hide, bins, benches, tree labels, the brochure and colourful mini-map of the area.

The survival rate of the planted indigenous trees is being monitored. It is intended to utilize the area as an open air laboratory, with pupils using the area for educational purposes.

CONCLUSION

In his effort to control what he does not have, man has lost control of what he has always had. By establishing the ARC trail, the Conservation Team has undone one of the harmful deeds committed by man against nature. They have helped man to regain control of what he has always had and feel that their project is fulfilling and worthwhile as the quality of life in the area has been improved, aesthetically and ecologically. The team has made a positive contribution towards awareness, recreation and conservation of this threatened area. Finally, the symposium taught the team a great deal about the environment and conservation and it has been one of the most exciting events in their lives.

BOOK REVIEWS / BOEKBESPREKINGS

ON WILDLIFE "CONSERVATION" by Ron Thomson
Published by United Publishers International, New York 1986.

In developed western countries, particularly amongst the affluent segment of urban society, the conception of wildlife 'conservation' is fraught with dogmas and taboos that are often based upon illogical sentiment. Much of the popular literature on the subject panders to, and hence reinforces, this public perception, and judgement, of the wildlife resource. The end result has been a long history of irrational decision making and an abysmal failure to halt the degradation of wildlife resources throughout the developing countries of Africa.

In this book the author has 'stuck his neck out' and boldly challenges the established dogma both in the public arena and within official nature 'conservation' agencies. He advances these challenges from a platform of considerable experience in dealing with wildlife problems in developing Africa. This has been done before, but only within the profession itself. Never before has anyone tried to present the real problems of the wildlife management profession to the layman. And, never before has society's currently in vogue, sterile and often fanatical attitude towards wildlife been so forcefully exposed.

The first part of the book expresses complicated ecological principles in a style designed specifically to be understood by the man-in-the-street. While professionals may find fault with the way in which these principles are expressed, they must bear in mind that no-one before has had the courage or energy to undertake this arduous task. This is important since no matter how far ecologists develop their understanding of the wildlife resource, their recommendations will never be effectively applied unless the principles upon which they are based are understood and accepted by society as a whole.

Parts two and three focus on philosophical issues. Here the style is biting and the content highly controversial. This will no doubt ruffle many feathers and provoke considerable counter-attack. By eliciting this reaction the book will surely serve much of its purpose since philosophical progress is best achieved by this process.

From a scientific point of view the book may be criticised in so far as it presents a number of hypotheses - no matter how logical they may seem - as fact. Many of them still require proper testing in applied situations. The relationship between black rhino population growth rates and hyena predation is one such example. Nevertheless, in fairness, it must be appreciated that society's current attitude towards the wildlife resource has so far not allowed wildlife managers to put such ideas to the test.

Criticism can also be levelled at the author for falling into the trap of carrying his own dogma and 'fanaticism' to the reader when, elsewhere in the book, he criticises others for doing exactly the same thing when supporting their diametrically opposite points of view.

Despite these criticisms, a book of this nature is unique and long overdue. It opens the door to a whole new way of thinking and will undoubtedly bridge the gap that exists between the professional ecologist's understanding of wildlife management and the layman's perception of it. While directed at the man-in-the-street, it is strongly recommended that this book be read critically and with an open mind by wildlife managers, environmental educationalists and especially politicians.

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