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Forestry school looks to become global force

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As Yale's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies enters its second century, students and faculty alike are reflecting on its history, with a critical eye towards the future.

The school started 100 years ago as a pioneering school of forestry. Thirty years ago, it became the first school of environmental management focused on national issues. Today the school looks to become a global school of the environment.

The school opened on Sept. 27, 1900, with only seven students, three faculty and \$150,000. Now, it has 301 students, 30 faculty members, and has just announced that it has raised \$30 million of its \$60 million dollar goal to endow faculty, student scholarships and a new environmentally friendly facility for the school.

The school was the product of a gift from Gifford Pinchot, Class of 1889, and his family. Their gift endowed the entirety of a department of forestry that became a school of forestry.

The school was launched into a position of immediate prominence at Yale and is now the oldest continuously operating school of forestry in North America.

Pinchot originated the phrase "conservation of natural resources." He defined conservation as the wise use of the earth for the good of present and future generations.

Since its founding, it has been the school's mission to turn Pinchot's vision of conservation into educational and professional reality. Leading that quest until 1940 was the school's first head, intellectual leader and later dean: Henry S. Graves.

"In the early 60s, the school began to reflect the movement away from seeing forestry as a business," said history professor Robin Winks. "It endorsed the idea that a school of forestry is a place to study how to respond to the environment."

In 1972, the school changed its name to "School of Forestry and Environmental Studies" out of the recognition that environmental problems are broader than forests alone.

Now environmentalists are increasingly global in their aims. The scale of human activity on the planet has become so vast that international approaches are needed to match the problems. As the school heads into its second century, more changes have been made.

Two years ago, Dean James Gustave Speth was hired to execute a plan aimed at expanding and strengthening the school's curriculum and increasing the diversity of its faculty and student body.

In these areas, the school has had much success. Today, the face of its student body and faculty has become increasingly diverse. Currently, a third of forestry school students are from abroad. Of the 225 master's students, 64 come from 34 different countries, and over half are women. Of the school's 76 doctoral students, 20 come from 13 separate countries outside the United States.

"Political issues tend to get very confined if they are only looked at from an American perspective," said Mahua Acharya FOR '02, who is Indian.

In the past year, seven new faculty have been appointed, four of them women. In addition, visiting faculty were recruited from China, Ecuador, Japan and Kenya, and professors in the practice were recruited from Argentina and Costa Rica.

Today, many of the international students intend to return to their native country or region after completing their studies, forming a bridge between the school and developing countries throughout the world. The school now has cooperative programs with environmental institutions in many countries around the globe.

"Cooperation between developing and industrialized countries is critical," Speth said.

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