

# TEACHING OF CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN ILLINOIS COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: A RE-APPRAISAL

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A decade ago Troy L. Pewe, a professor of geology at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois, presented a paper before this Academy on the "Teaching of Conservation of Natural Resources in Illinois Colleges and Universities." He reported that 13 of the 45 accredited four-year colleges and universities in our state, but not one of the junior colleges, offered a general course in conservation. According to Mr. Pewe, the University of Chicago has the distinction of being the first institution to initiate such a course. That was in 1909. His study also brought out the fact that in 12 of the 13 schools the course was taught in the department of geography.

It is now ten years later and time for a re-appraisal of the status of conservation education in the accredited institutions of higher learning in Illinois. Following the pattern set by the original study, all seminaries, technical schools, and special schools of art and music were eliminated from the survey. Course offerings were checked as listed in the official school catalogs for the academic year 1956-57. The following schools were offering a general course in the conservation of natural resources at the undergraduate level:

INSTITUTION	DEPARTMENT
University of Illinois (Urbana).....	Geography
University of Illinois (Chicago).....	Geography
Illinois State Normal University.....	Geography
Northern Illinois University.....	Geography
Eastern Illinois University.....	Geography
Western Illinois University.....	Geography and Geology
Southern Illinois University.....	Geography
Chicago Teachers College.....	Geography
University of Chicago.....	Geography
Northwestern University.....	Geography
Augustana College.....	Geography
Concordia Teachers College.....	Geography
Wheaton College.....	Geography
Rosary College.....	Geology and Geography
St. Precopius College.....	Biology
The Principia College.....	Biology
Joliet Junior College.....	Conservation

The results of this study emphasize the following:

1. At present, 16 colleges and universities or only one-third of all the accredited four-year institutions of higher learning in our state offer a general course in the conservation of our natural resources. The schools which did not appear in the original list ten years ago are: University of Illinois at Urbana, University of Illinois at Chicago (Navy Pier), St. Precopius College, and

Wheaton College. In addition, one junior college now offers such a course. It is true that the University of Illinois at Urbana did offer courses in conservation ten years ago, but they were advanced courses or of such a technical nature that they were not intended for the general undergraduate student. One college listed in the original survey and not appearing in the present listing is McKendree College at Lebanon, which reportedly dropped the course because of limited staff. General conservation courses at Northwestern, whenever they were offered, were taught only in the summer, but none are scheduled for the 1957 summer session. We must conclude, then, that the actual institutional gains have been very slight.

2. General conservation courses are still largely taught in geography departments. St. Precopius and The Principia are the only colleges in which such a course is taught in the biology department; in Rosary College the course is taught in the geology and geography department but the same course may be taken for biology credit. The biology department at Shurtleff College gave a course in the conservation of biological raw materials, but because of this restrictive terminology it was not included in this survey.

3. The greatest variety of conservation courses is given in our state supported institutions, especially in the former teachers colleges. Some of them offer conservation clinics or special courses for in-service teachers during the summer sessions. The state universities and

the University of Chicago also offer advanced work in resource management and resource problems.

Mr. Pewe closed his article with the following observation (1947: 115), "Illinois with its tremendous wealth of natural resources and its wonderful colleges and universities, should be one of the leading states in education of conservation of natural resources. The students of the nation should be taught the importance of conservation of natural resources by being required to take at least a general course during their college days. It is the educators' duty to see that the youth is informed of the importance of conservation to insure our national heritage for future generations."

In view of the findings presented in this paper I wonder whether conservation education in Illinois colleges and universities has really made any great advance during the last decade. If we agree with Mr. Pewe, that conservation education is essential to the well-being of our state and nation, then we must be willing to take the initiative in the fight for more conservation education in our institutions of higher learning. The present situation indicates that one of the greatest strengths of conservation courses lies in the training of elementary and secondary teachers. Would it be logical to insist that every prospective teacher in our public school system take at least one course in the conservation of natural resources before a teaching certificate is issued? Practically every college in our state has a teachers' training program, but the majority of them

do not offer any courses in conservation. This might be the path we must explore in the next decade.

#### SUMMARY

There has been very little gain in the number of colleges and universities which offer courses in the conservation of natural resources. It is, of course, highly probable that much incidental teaching is done

on some aspect of conservation in connection with other courses. A concerted effort is needed, however, to acquaint our elementary and secondary teachers with the philosophies and problems of conservation.

#### LITERATURE CITED

- PEWE, TROY L. 1947. Teaching of conservation of natural resources in Illinois colleges and universities. *Trans. Ill. Acad. Sci.*, 40: 107-115.