

WOOD AND FIBER SCIENCE

JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY OF WOOD SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

VOLUME 43

OCTOBER 2011

NUMBER 4

REBRANDING WOOD SCIENCE ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

The 54th International Convention of the Society of Wood Science and Technology was held 22 June 2011 in Portland, OR. The theme of the meeting was Challenges and Opportunities in Wood Science Education. The program featured presentations that detailed the problems facing our wood science academic programs. Speakers also discussed opportunities for wood science programs to “rebrand” themselves to become more appealing to today’s college students.

Currently, 13 universities offer wood science majors, 6 offer minors or options, and 1 graduate only program. The ongoing global economic recession has also reduced state and government support to these programs.

North American wood science programs are rebranding themselves to serve the needs of both students and industry. One method that was discussed that seems promising is to change the name to include words such as bioproducts, sustainable, and renewable, which are more enticing to students than forest products and wood science. Additional curriculum changes that include more schedule flexibility, a broader bio-based curriculum, and internal and external marketing efforts will certainly advance this effort. We will well serve our students and the industry by including other bio-based materials and products in our curriculum and their poten-

tial to be used alone or in combination with wood for bio-based materials, chemicals, and energy.

I believe that the wood products industry will be supportive of wood science programs that assume a broader bio-based focus. The “Green, Bio, Sustainable” movement should be a positive for wood as its attributes are compared with most other materials. The industry will need students with fundamental wood science knowledge and a broad knowledge of other bio-based materials as they evaluate their raw material and end product options.

The current SWST accreditation standards are detailed, prescriptive, and narrower in scope than most of the programs that are currently accredited. The standards are currently being revised so they are not overly prescriptive with respect to curriculum content and allow for a broader base of subdisciplines to be accredited. These changes will also allow for a more international focus but will not abandon the unique body of knowledge distinctive to the science and technology of wood. I look forward to your comments on these changes and other ways in which SWST can better serve you.

TODD F. SHUPE
President