Dear AAP EPC Students, 

27 April 2015

I would like to thank you for your participation in the recent meeting on March 19, 2014. The discussion was very productive and helpful. Drs. Antoinette WinklerPrins and Daniel Zachary take the input from the students very seriously and we continue to work towards resolving issues.

The EPC program is now in its 5th year and during this short period, the program has faced a few challenges. Subsequently, students and alumni have raised a few issues in the ‘Open Letter on the State of EPC’, dated August 7, 2014. Presently, we would like to respond to this letter.

Course offerings in the EPC

We agree that there has been a lack of course offerings in the EPC program. The students have pointed out that there were a number of courses advertised on the AAP website that have either never been offered or have not been offered for some time. This particular situation has now been remedied. We have removed the extraneous course offerings and have updated the EPC website. Of course, these courses will not be neglected. These untaught courses provide a starting point to either improve/update them, or if needed, simply replace them by new and more relevant topics for the program.

The students have also pointed out that there is a genuine lack of course offerings. We are currently addressing this issue. Two new courses are now offered (spring 2015) – ‘US Offshore Energy: Policy, Science and Technology’ and ‘Solar Energy: Science, Technology & Policy’. Following the discussion on March 19th, we are now developing the course ‘Wind Energy: Science, Technology, and Policy’ (planned for the spring of 2016). Furthermore, we will offer a new course, tentatively titled ‘Understanding Public Attitudes and Behaviors for the Communication of Climate and Energy Policy’ that will be taught next year. These courses are all very relevant to the current US/international energy policy and climate forums and we anticipate they will also meet the needs, interests, and expectations of the students. We would like to continue this trend and offer two additional new courses in the following academic year as the program grows.

There are of course logistic issues that need to be mentioned. We would like to increase the course offerings at a faster rate, but we are constrained by the number of students in the program and available faculty. Fortunately, we expect the program to grow both in the numbers of students and in the size and breath of the faculty in the next year. Program growth will be helped by the new ‘lean’ but complete EPC online offerings, allowing for flexibility and choice for the student.
The capstone project

The students have pointed out the systemic lack of faculty support for the capstone project. This issue included the lack of help for students in identifying and securing a mentor. This problem is now being addressed as we update the capstone course guidelines. As of now, the capstone project will be mandatory and will include instruction in performing, writing, and presenting a research project as well as acquiring important ‘soft’ research skills. Part of the course will include oversight by the instructor who will ensure that students have a mentor for their project. The presentation of a project is also an important part of the capstone experience and therefore a presentation opportunity (the ‘Capstone Day’) has now been established for the spring of 2015. A similar day will be set aside in the fall of 2015 for presenting both fall and summer projects.

Conclusion

There will undoubtedly be other issues that will need to be addressed from time to time in the EPC program. The EPC students and the program Associate Director have mutually agreed to meet regularly (a few times a year) to address current issues and to exchange ideas. Indeed, new issues and topics have already been brought up including, for example, a low-cost course auditing option for EPC graduates. This idea has been discussed among the EPC direction and will be discussed at the AAP level.

We view this letter as a first step in working towards a better program in order to equip our students to be successful graduates and leaders in the field.

Kindest Regards,

Antoinette WinklerPrins, Ph.D.
Director
Energy Policy and Climate Program

Daniel (Dan) S. Zachary, Ph.D.
Associate Director
Energy Policy and Climate Program