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NEW ACCREDITATION STANDARDS?

The process that resulted in the 1989 Standards and Procedures for Accreditation of Wood Science and Technology Programs started in the late seventies. There were numerous meetings, discussions, proposed standards, revisions, and compromises. The 1989 document and the accreditation process were designed to assist and improve wood products undergraduate programs.

I recently asked selected representatives of wood products associations and wood products industrial firms to review our current undergraduate curriculum at Penn State and the SWST accreditation standards. All of the responses from the representatives indicated that communication skills needed to be identified and emphasized in the accreditation standards. The responses that we received relating to the required science, technology, and other courses for accreditation were grouped under one of the following statements: 1) more science credits were required than were needed to function in the business/technology aspects of the wood products industry, or 2) wood products graduates entering the science/engineering aspects of the wood products industry needed all the required science courses and probably more science would be helpful. Employers of our wood science and technology graduates focused on one of two somewhat different areas of specialization—science/technology or business/technology.

Our current accreditation standards require a minimum of 20 credits in basic sciences and 21 credits in wood science and technology courses. Many undergraduate wood science and technology programs require more than the 41 credits of science and wood science courses suggested in the 1989 accreditation standards. I believe that our present accreditation stan-

dards need to identify more than 41 credits in the science and wood science areas.

The current standards are oriented more toward science than technology and may result in excluding some wood products undergraduate programs that might want to emphasize business rather than basic science courses. Our accreditation program may discourage some potential wood products students who may want to heavily emphasize business related courses from entering the undergraduate program because numerous science courses may be listed as prerequisites for the wood science courses. Should we as a professional society involved in granting accreditation recognize and accredit programs oriented toward wood technology and business?

Many wood science and technology undergraduate programs over the past few years have advertised for forest products marketing faculty members. This is an indication of the need for the business-oriented wood technologist. We as a professional society should not rest on our laurels. We need to continue to examine our objectives with the ultimate goal of strengthening our ranks. I believe SWST needs to examine the possibility of further defining our accreditation standards to better identify and include communication courses and both a science/technology and business/technology undergraduate focus. This exercise should include input from a broad spectrum of wood science and technology employers. It is time to expand and strengthen our accreditation process.

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