OSE Strategic Plan 2020-2025

Mission, Vision, Values

Mission

We study the fundamental ecological processes that shape the world, inspire and train future generations, and create science-based solutions to environmental problems. Building on our legacy of innovation, we create change by harnessing diverse tools and perspectives in a collaborative community.

Vision

To lead the world in ecological science

Core Values

- **Integrity.** We are honest and open in our interactions, professionally respectful, and pursue the truth in our scientific endeavors.
- **Inclusivity.** Diverse backgrounds and opinions lead to a vibrant exchange of ideas and advancement of science. We strive to foster a community in which all individuals are welcome and all feel valued and respected.
- **Intellectual curiosity.** We are motivated by a desire to understand the natural world.
- **Interdisciplinarity.** Because not all questions can be answered within disciplinary bounds, we seek collaborations with other fields of inquiry and respect pluralistic paths to discovery.
- **Innovation.** We seek creative, novel, and effective approaches that advance ecological science, education, and application.

A. Creating a Culture of Inclusion and Sustainability

Current state: The Odum School of Ecology seeks to foster a stimulating, collaborative, and inclusive culture. We recognize that a transformative culture of inclusion, which values and advances greater diversity of people and perspectives, requires individual and institutional reflection, and respect. In addition to fostering interpersonal support and respect, we recognize the need to lead in environmental stewardship. Environmental sustainability is currently considered in some of our operations, but needs to be fully embraced and executed.

Strategic goals: To create a vibrant, diverse and inclusive environment that will promote creative and effective approaches to research, teaching, and service. We aspire to foster a community that energizes its members, and where productivity and effectiveness are a direct result of our culture. We also aim to be a model of sustainability to the UGA community.

1. **Foster a culture of inclusion, integrity, innovation, and curiosity**
   Implement concrete activities to support and enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI); provide opportunities for improved internal communication; and adopt a code of ethical and responsible conduct across the School.
2. **Promote inter-connectedness within the School**
   Adopt activities to increase teaching and research collaboration among the Odum community, ensure suitable training for faculty-student mentoring, and promote a culture of professional respect among faculty, students and staff.
3. **Promote diverse interdisciplinary networks to advance intellectual and cultural exchange**
   Encourage exposure to diverse fields of scholarship through a visiting scholars program, provide seed funding for collaborative research proposals, initiate an annual faculty research conference, support a vigorous seminar series, and nurture connections between the School and its alumni network.
4. **Commit to an environmentally sustainable culture**
   Make environmental sustainability central to all Odum activities—including our academic, research, public service and outreach programs, events, student engagement, and building and grounds operations, including acquisition and stewardship of funds relating to sustainability.

B. Advancing Scholarship

Current state: We strive to achieve excellence in research by recruiting an outstanding, intellectually and demographically diverse faculty, providing faculty with a stimulating, collegial and state-of-the-art research environment, and actively fostering faculty development. Our School is distinctive in our synthetic, conceptual, and holistic approach to environmental science. We are collaborative and are committed to developing deep connections across diverse disciplines as evidence by our joint appointments with units such as Veterinary Medicine, Genetics, the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory, and the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources and other collaborative networks at UGA. Through our centers (the River Basin Center and the Center for the Ecology of Infectious Diseases) and other collaborative work we are engaged in, OSE is a campus leader bringing together a wide range of disciplinary perspectives and translating solutions for planetary sustainability.

Strategic goals:

1.Cultivate an intellectually-stimulating environment

Strive for a research environment that fosters a collaborative culture fueled by intellectual curiosity, within OSE and serving as a nexus for interdiscipinarity at UGA and around the world,

2. Increase faculty support

Develop a specific and actionable plan that provides support, training and mentoring to promote faculty development. Assure that there is sufficient administrative support for faculty to effectively conduct their research and instructional programs. Provide sufficient travel and research support.

3. **Strategically recruit new faculty**

Pioneer an innovative and strategic means of identifying hiring priorities as encapsulated within our hiring philosophy: "*Our recruitment strategy aims to coalesce around centers of excellence, enhancing synergistic, interdisciplinary collaborations within the School. We propose to achieve this by identifying areas of scholarship that add to existing areas of strength whilst simultaneously broadening our thematic diversity through hiring in priority integrative areas*". Hiring decisions will consider advancing these priorities while filling gaps in research and teaching due to new vacancies".

Based on an assessment of our existing strengths and our vision for the future of the School, three strategic hiring areas have been identified. These are: Terrestrial/Microbial Ecosystem Ecology, Evolutionary Responses to Climate Change, and Aquatic Disease/Vector Ecology.

C. Enhancing the Undergraduate Experience

Current state: We offer A.B. and B.S. degrees in Ecology with a current enrollment of approximately 175 undergraduates. In the past 5 years, we created a new degree program, increased undergraduate enrollment by > 50%, launched two online courses, continued our study abroad programs in Costa Rica, and have accounted for 4 Udall Scholars, 1 Goldwater Scholars, 1 Hollings Scholars, and 1 Schwarzman Scholar. Over that same period we boast a 90.8% average placement rate in professional employment and/or advanced studies after graduation.

Strategic goals:

1. **Support program growth**
   Support growth in demand for introductory Ecology courses and new offerings in service-learning, skills-based, conceptual, experiential, and online courses.
2. **Promote experiential learning**
   Support translational and interdisciplinary undergraduate research and internships by systematically curating and advertising opportunities and fostering graduate-undergraduate student bridges through mentored research experiences.
3. **Diversify course offerings and promote state-of-the-art transferable skills**
   Expand training in cutting edge research methods and concepts, as well as marketable skills in applied and translational ecology.
4. **Foster exposure to novel perspectives**
   Broaden student experience by elevating diverse views in current coursework and via study abroad programs.

D. Training the Next Generation of Ecologists: Graduate Programs

Current state: The Odum School has a vigorous graduate program, comprised of approximately 75 students across two M.S. programs (Conservation Ecology and Sustainable Development (CESD) and Ecology) and one Ph.D. program (Ecology). We attract and train highly-qualified students into our core programs, and through interdisciplinary programs such as Interdisciplinary Disease Ecology Across Scales (IDEAS) and Integrative Conservation and Ecology (ICON). From 2014-2019, OSE graduate students have been awarded 10 NSF Graduate Research fellowships, 1 Fulbright fellowship and 1 Ford Foundation fellowship.

Strategic goals:

1. **Develop and enhance the curriculum**
   Develop and/or enhance curricula that instill in-depth understanding of ecological principles and their applications, and that embrace innovative research, interdisciplinary perspectives, and active-learning strategies.
2. **Increase opportunities for training and professional development**
   Provide training, resources, and professional development opportunities to nurture our students and promote excellence in scientific research, communication, and education.
3. **Increase financial support**
   Focus on access and financial support to improve recruitment and increase retention of students throughout their degree program.

E. Engaging the Broader Community

Current state: The School engages with the public and stakeholders in a variety of ways, including activities with K-12 students hosted by EcoReach, solving real-world water-related issues through the River Basin Center, and additional outreach and service activities conducted by faculty and students

Strategic goals:

1. **Increase engagement at UGA, the surrounding communities, and region**
   Increase engagement between the School and the community by increasing support for the EcoReach program and STEMzone. Engage with local governmental and non-profits in Athens-Clarke and Oconee counties and regionally.
2. **Provide training in science communication skills**
   Provide opportunities for students and faculty to increase their communication and community engagement skills.
3. **Maintain expertise in ecological policy**
   Ensure continuity of expertise in ecological problem solving by recruiting a faculty member in environmental policy who would also serve as the Director of Policy for the River Basin Center.
4. **Explore new connections**
   Promote strategic partnerships with other organizations including NGOs, businesses, municipal, state and federal agencies.

F. Ensuring Effective and Efficient Future Operations

Current state: Innovations in ecological science will require advanced facilities, supporting infrastructure, and highly trained staff. These three areas need to grow with the mission of the School. Our functions have outgrown the School's current physical facilities and space. Dedicated administrative and research staff are an important source for innovation, creativity, and knowledge; continued investment in their training and development is essential.

Strategic goals:

1. **Improve space to support and enhance School functions**
   We aspire to house all School faculty, students and staff in a single building that offers high-quality space for research, outreach, and collaboration. We envisage such a building would enhance interactions within the School and foster new and diverse collaborations.
2. **Ensure support for research and administrative staff and that School staffing needs are met**
   Determine staffing needs that support recent growth in our unit with a 5-year staffing plan and ensure access to state-of-the-art training and development opportunities for staff.
3. **Improve research facilities**
   Improve research facilities for faculty, including computing and wet lab infrastructure, and dedicate funds for the upkeep and improvement of research facilities.
4. **Advance strategic fundraising**
   Develop a comprehensive funding plan for the School to support all aspects of our mission, including facilities and infrastructure improvements.
5. **Develop comprehensive communication plans**
   Develop comprehensive communications plan for the school, including within OSE and in engaging with stakeholders and the broader community.
6. **Optimize School events for engagement and environmental sustainability**
   Coordinate planning of School-wide events to optimize positive impact on School culture and be consistent with commitment to environmental sustainability.

Appendix

The appendix includes specific action items associated with each of the strategic goals, with the group(s) and/or individuals who would oversee their initiation and implementation. Designated holders are indicated with full recognition that success for attaining each strategic goal will be measured and carried out by our collective responsibility. Abbreviations as follows: ADAA (Associate Dean of Academic Affairs), ADRO (Associate Dean of Research and Operations), AFD (Administrative and Financial Director), APC (Academic Programs Committee), GSO (Graduate Student Organization).

A. Creating a Culture of Inclusion and Sustainability

1. Foster a culture of inclusion, integrity, innovation, and curiosity

a. Collate and disseminate resources on tools, techniques, and strategies for incorporating DEI in teaching and mentoring. Identify and advertise UGA trainings and workshops in DEI. Plan and execute annual workshop on DEI (Diversity Committee, School Administration)
b. Identify and institute specific programs to support students of under-represented groups, e.g. via increased financial commitment for SEEDS program; (Undergrad, Grad & Diversity committees)
c. Review recruitment and admissions processes and graduate program oversight to assess opportunities for more diverse recruitment and retention; (Graduate committee)
d. Annually, seek ideas for new initiatives pertaining to the Odum School/UGA culture that make for a happier, healthier, and more enjoyable work-life experience; Solicit ideas and implementation plans at faculty, staff and GSO meetings. Includes assessment of whether mechanisms for airing and addressing grievances are adequate. Annually report progress towards these initiatives; (ADAA, Diversity Committee)
e. The Odum School will create a code of conduct for all Ecology-administered buildings and field locations; Consider creation of OSE guidelines for interpersonal interactions that respect different perspectives (Dean)
f. Evaluate facilities and implement a plan to promote accessibility and inclusivity of School buildings (e.g., gender-neutral restrooms, lactation room, wheelchair access). (Facilities committee)

2. Promote inter-connectedness within the School

a. Annually, faculty to consider opportunities for shared research that reinforce and promote a culture of working together towards common goals. Potential foci:
    i. Summer interdisciplinary research program (ADRO)
    ii. Odum faculty research conference (Seminar committee)
    iii. Odum seed grant; (Deans)
b. Promote best-practice in faculty-student relations and mentoring by all constituencies by conducting annual mentoring training for faculty and students; (Graduate committee)

c. Increase open communication in faculty-staff-student relations. Each year, seek suggestions from staff, students and faculty for improved relations and efficiency. Annually report progress towards this goal; (AFD + Dean)
d. Annually, evaluate and report all aspects of communications that promote OSE activities. (Executive committee)

3. Promote diverse interdisciplinary networks to advance intellectual and cultural exchange

a. Initiate a funded visiting scholars program. Identify UGA funds; (ADRO)
b. Increase administrative and financial support for the School seminar series. Ensure broad representation by discipline, geography and culture; (Seminar committee, Dean & AFD)
c. Increase collaboration with alumni on the following initiatives. One, formulate an Ecology Alumni Council to build connections, mentor, and promote the mission. Second, promote the UGA Mentorship Program within OSE. Third, promote opportunities for current students to engage in peer-to-peer mentorship. (Development Coordinator)

4. Commit to an environmentally sustainable culture

a. Maintain and enhance the partnership with the Office of Sustainability and other UGA units to ensure that the Ecology building and programs set a standard for resource use efficiency via affordable technologies; (ADRO)
b. Create an events group aimed at assessing the cultural, environmental, and monetary impact of each Odum event. All events should have a sustainability plan, including a target of zero waste. Engage with ecology club & conservation biology group. Interface with UGA and Athens Clarke County offices of sustainability; (Events Lead Person + AFD + Communications + Development)
c. Provide reference material for recycling initiatives (electronics, lab equipment, etc); (AFD)
d. Coordinate faculty participation in the UGA Green labs program; (ADRO)
e. Incorporate sustainability into the undergraduate and graduate curricula in coordination with the sustainability certificate program. (ADAA + Faculty)

B. Advancing Scholarship

1. Cultivate an intellectually-stimulating environment

We strive to increase intellectual interactions within the School and with other units as appropriate and complementary to our mission.

a. Fostering collaborative research projects (working groups) around common themes and pressing societal problems, such as climate change, spread of infectious diseases, anthropogenic environmental change, and biodiversity loss; (ADRO)
b. A stellar seminar program is an important ingredient in a vibrant research community – we will examine the needs of our seminar series, including annual budget, selection policy, schedule and frequency. Network with UGA and Provost's Lecture Series; (Seminar Committee).

2. Increase faculty support

We will enhance and recognize faculty research by:

a. Forming awards committee (to recognize faculty research/teaching/service) with administrative support to increase internal and external awards; (Dean)
b. Facilitating faculty effectiveness in research via initiating a peer grant proposal review program, introducing science communication training, and instituting a formal faculty leave program; (Dean & Executive Committee)
c. Informing faculty of training and development opportunities and support with annual budget; (ADRO)
d. Initiating a pre-tenure instructional release policy, working with Provost and Faculty Affairs; (Dean)
e. Examining models of faculty mentoring and assessing current mentoring model for assistant professors and non-tenure track faculty; (ADAA)
f. Assessing and fostering excellence in teaching via peer mentoring and utilizing on-campus resources. (ADAA)
g. Assess and address administrative needs for research and instructional support (Dean's Advisory Committee)

3. Strategically recruit new faculty

Our School has a distinguished history of interdisciplinary hires with numerous units at UGA – we see a continuation of these collaborative hires to complement our existing strengths and offer novel disciplinary perspectives as important.

a. Implement our new hiring policy (ADAA)
b. Annually evaluate previously identified areas of strength (Faculty)

Based on our stated goal of increasing *connectedness* among research foci within the School and ensuring *excellence* in select research areas, we have adopted a conceptual framework for devising a rational and strategic recruitment plan. The School's established areas of strength include ecosystem ecology, aquatic ecology and infectious disease ecology. In addition to these areas of strength, we have also identified priority integrative areas, that will allow for new synergies that build on those existing strengths. Our aim is to recruit faculty who would

enhance connections between these existing strengths and these broad areas we have identified as priorities. This can potentially be done by combining multiple strength and/or priority areas.

Strengths: Ecosystem ecology, aquatic ecology, disease ecology
Priority integrative areas: Community ecology, climate change, microbial ecology, terrestrial ecology, evolutionary ecology

C. Enhancing the Undergraduate Experience

1. Support program growth

a. To facilitate recruitment, advising, orientation and communication across our growing undergraduate program, we will seek to recruit an additional advisor (either full time or part time). (APC & AFD)

2. Promote experiential learning

We will support translational and interdisciplinary undergraduate research and internships

a. Systematically curate and advertise student research and internship experiences with increased communication to faculty and graduate students, networking with practitioners, and networking with alumni; (Undergraduate Coordinator?)
b. Expand internal funding for undergraduates to pursue research, and to allow more students to take advantage of study away courses; (ADRO & ADAA)
c. Promote research opportunities at School field sites, supported by competitively awarded funding (e.g., "Horseshoe Bend Summer Fellowship"). (ADRO)

3.Diversify course offerings and promote state-of-the-art transferable skills

We will Evaluate existing curricula and develop new courses

a. Evaluate existing courses and curricula to be updated with innovative concepts, methods, and technology and assessed for opportunities to include diverse perspectives, DEI content, inclusive teaching practices; (Undergraduate Committee)
b. Develop new courses in research methods in field, experimental and computational ecology to expose students to research and cutting-edge methods earlier in their undergraduate careers; (Undergraduate Committee)
c. Develop an undergraduate environmental policy course to meet the needs of AB students who have a policy focus; (Undergraduate Committee)
d. Promote opportunities for undergraduate research experience within the School, to increase the proportion of our graduates with significant research credentials. (Undergraduate Committee, APC).

4.Foster exposure to novel perspectives

a. Promote student international perspectives in coursework and through increased access to study abroad programs and other international experiences; (Undergraduate Coordinator + Development)
b. Explore avenues for greater graduate student engagement with undergraduates including, for example, mentoring opportunities. (Undergraduate & Graduate Committees)

D. Training the Next Generation of Ecologists

1. Develop and enhance the curriculum

We will develop and/or enhance curricula that instills in-depth understanding of ecological principles and their applications and that embraces innovative research, interdisciplinary perspectives, and active learning strategies.

a. Evaluate and implement an innovative graduate curriculum to embrace new concepts and diverse perspectives; (Faculty)
b. Evaluate course offerings aimed at training of graduate students in quantitative skills. (Graduate committee)

2. Increase opportunities for training and professional development

We will provide training, resources, and professional development opportunities to nurture our students and promote excellence in scientific research, communication, and education.

a. Increase advertisement of and opportunities for professional development, internships and translational ecology training; (Graduate advisor & committee)
b. Develop an enhanced CESD program that provides opportunities for graduate-level training in translational ecology, interdisciplinary research; (Graduate committee)
c. Provide annual workshop to enhance effective student-mentor relationships; (Graduate committee)
d. Explore avenues for assessment of graduate faculty practices and introduce faculty to best-practices in mentoring; (Graduate committee)
e. Provide cutting edge courses and networking opportunities (at conference, workshops, or working groups) to enhance teaching and research skills; (Graduate advisor, graduate committee, faculty)
f. Facilitate access to non-academic career information by organizing resources for non-academic career connections, internships, and opportunities; (Graduate advisor)

3. **Increase financial support**

We will focus on access and affordability to increase recruitment and retention of students throughout their degree program.

a. Pursue funding for all enrolled graduate students, via external gifts, graduate school assistantships, teaching assistantships, internships and fellowships – including for stipends, fees and research and travel support; (APC+Dean)
b. Increase access to information and resources at UGA providing mental health services; (Graduate Advisor)

E. Engaging the Broader Community

1. **Increase engagement at UGA, the surrounding communities, and region**
    a. Increase OSE support for the EcoReach program by providing financial and logistical support, dedicated storage space for equipment, as well as formalizing administrative assistance for promotion, marketing, and finance management. Explore similar forms of support for STEMzone; (Dean + ADRO, Communications Coordinator)
    b. Provide a dedicated RA line for an EcoReach coordinator position, partially funded via collaboration with the Mary Frances Early School of Education. (Dean & ADAA

2. **Provide training in science communication skills**
    a. Provide regular communications training for graduate students and OSE faculty, through courses and workshops and effective advertising of opportunities at the University; (Communications Coordinator)

3. **Maintain expertise in ecological policy**
    a. Reinforce expertise in ecological problem solving by recruiting a faculty member in environmental policy who would also serve as the Director of Policy for the River Basin Center. (Dean)

4. **Explore new connections**
    a. Develop a translational ecology internship program available to graduate students, in which they are placed in non-academic organizations to identify and address critical environmental problems; (Graduate committee)
    b. Curate list of successful IDEAS and other internships for future reference. (Graduate advisor)

F. Ensuring Effective and Efficient Future Operations

1. **Improve space to support and enhance School functions**
   a. Work with UGA facilities, University architects and the Provost's Space Committee to develop a long-term space plan, including a building that houses all ecology faculty; (Dean, ADRO)
   b. Expand office space to meet faculty, staff and graduate student needs; (Facilities Committee)
   c. Prioritize identification of spaces for collaboration and interaction within or adjacent to the Ecology building; (ADRO)
   d. Evaluate current use of space and identify opportunities for more effective space use. (ADRO)

2. **Ensure support for research and administrative staff and that School staffing needs are met**
   a. Consider recruitment of pre-award grant support personnel. (AFD)
   b. Evaluate staffing capacity for research operations. (ADRO)
   c. Ensure faculty/student/staff have adequate training for all aspects of their duties. (AFD)
   d. Improve orientation activities for faculty, students, and staff. (AFD)
   e. Create a 5-year staffing plan (AFD)
   f. Facilitate access to training and development opportunities for all staff (ADRO, AFD, Faculty)

3. **Improve research facilities**
   a. Improve off site facilities to provide experiential learning opportunities for undergraduates, including Odum cabin and Horseshoe Bend experimental area; (ADRO)
   b. Improve research facilities for faculty including computing and wet lab infrastructure, vehicles for research activities, and dedicate funds for the upkeep and improvement of research facilities; (ADRO & Facilities Committee)
   c. Renovate the grad student carrel space and adjoining computer lab/plotter room into an attractive and functional space, lounge and meeting area; (Facilities & Graduate Committees)
   d. Dedicate a pool of funding from indirect returns for recurring costs and maintenance of shared research equipment; (Dean, ADRO)
   e. Appoint and compensate an individual to be in charge of oversight of the use and maintenance of the shared research equipment in the Ecology Annex (Dean, ADRO, AFD)

4. **Advance strategic fundraising**
   a. Develop a strategic funding plan for the School, including facilities and infrastructure improvements; (Dean, Development and Alumni Relations Coordinator)
   b. Increase connections to and communication with our alumni, parents, donors and friends of Ecology. (Development and Alumni Relations Coordinator)

5. **Develop comprehensive communications plans**

a. Develop a strategic communications plan for the school, including identifying target audiences, appropriate media channels, messaging, branding, social media, digital, print, events, trainings; (Dean, Communications Coordinator)
b. Identify priorities in messaging the School's accomplishments and vision once a term in faculty meetings. (Faculty, ADAA, Communications Coordinator)

6.Optimize School events for engagement and environmental sustainability

a. Assess efficacy (reach, environmental sustainability, impact) of current approaches to the organization of School events, including communications, development, and administrative support. (AFD, Communications Coordinator, Development Coordinator, Faculty, GSO)