

Communicating forest ethics: online course “ethical approaches to forest management”

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Why a course in forest ethics?

The teaching of forest ethics should be an integral part of forestry curriculum (Coufal & Spuches 1995). Reasons include changes in way that public views the forests (Bengston 1994), and the existence of overlapping values and conflicting end uses regarding the forests (Mikkilä 2006).

Why an online course?

The Faculty of Forest Sciences, University of Joensuu, has offered a classroom based forest ethics course since 2004. Primarily offered to Erasmus Mundus MSc European Forestry students. The value of the ethics course offered by the Faculty has, for example, been highlighted in a Quality Assurance assessment conducted by the Association for European Life Sciences Universities (ICA) which viewed the course as a positive inclusion in an MSc as a core subject.

The limitations of a classroom can be discarded through putting the course online which encourages raised awareness and shared understanding of the global and local issues that affect forest management. It allows students from around the world to work together pooling experiences and knowledge.

Who are the audience?

Primarily students studying for a MSc in Forestry. Additionally valid resource for further learning, for example, for company and government employees. Diversity of those taking the course will enrich its value.

What is the course structure?

- 1) Pre-course assignment.
- 2) Introduction (online presentations & written material)
 - a. Introduction to the role of forest ethics.
 - b. Introduction to forest conflicts (causes, types and intensity).
 - c. Introduction to differing roles of forests throughout the world.
- 3) Forest conflicts database

The database (Db) would encourage students to explore the conflicts enabling them, for example, to determine common features to the conflicts, such as conflict hotspots.

The db will have links to an online portal (Fig 1) hosting maps detailing the conflicts covered and illustrating their geographical nature. The portal will also host video and testimony from various stakeholders to selected conflicts.
- 4) Problem oriented assignment (group work)

Students are tasked with proposing a method of resolution for a conflict. This will be facilitated through access to testimony of different stakeholders to the conflict, as well as the Db, in addition to drawing on their knowledge and experiences from their home country and the knowledge and understanding they have accumulated in the course.
- 5) Concluding lectures & individual final assignment.

Course outcomes

- 1) The students will develop an understanding of the complexity of ethical forest management, as well as providing them with resources for achieving this. This will be drawn from theory as well as from practical examples, for instance the exchanging of experiences from the students' countries.
- 2) Students would have a better understanding of the causes of forest conflicts. This would be both on a theoretical and practical level; through their exploration of the Db, including the material accumulated for the focus conflicts. The students would thereby gain an understanding of the different voices, interests and values that are the foundations and drivers of the conflict.
- 3) Course would provide platform for students of different backgrounds to communicate and develop understanding of different roles that forests play throughout the world.
The exchange of knowledge would also be an integral part of the Db in understanding how forest conflicts are resolved, in other words taking lessons learnt from one country and determining its practical uses in another.
- 4) The Db will have benefits beyond the lecture room; not just for adding to the skills of the future forest and company managers, but also will be a tool beneficial to the different stakeholders.

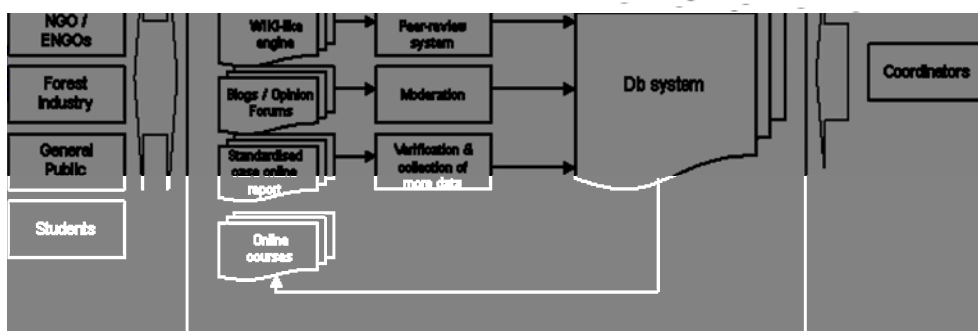


Figure 1. Planned structure of forest conflicts portal

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