

MESSAGE FROM PROVOST QUACKENBUSH

Monday, November 10, 2025

Greetings. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Lindi Quackenbush and I have the honor of serving as Interim Provost and Vice President of Research. I am also a faculty member, and former chair, in the Department of Environmental Resources Engineering.

ESF is a vibrant, impactful, and innovative institution. It is also a space poised for important growth, and I want to share some facts, clarify some narratives, and speak to the broader future of ESF. Specifically the status and future of our undergraduate and graduate programs.

Let's start with our undergraduate offerings. ESF has 27 undergraduate programs across eight departments and divisions. Each program has its storied success and strength. Campus-wide, we are back above our pre-Covid enrollment levels. Our job placement numbers are incredibly promising—The First Destination Survey that came out this summer shows that 97% of our students were employed or continued their studies upon graduation.

One of the many reasons we do so well at placing our mighty oaks in effective and well-paying jobs is that departments do important work in reviewing curriculum. This entails engaging with employers to ensure we are delivering programs that are needed, and pivoting when outcomes change with the culture at large. Curriculum review keeps graduate placement—both in the work force and in continuing education—at a very high level.

So how do we stay on top of these relevant and significant metrics?

With the encouragement and help of SUNY, we have been reviewing our undergraduate programs in three specific ways: looking at enrollment, graduation rates, and job placement. Through this review we've found, overwhelmingly, that our programs are strong based on those metrics.

But we did identify one program—renewable material science—that we will sunset. The RMS program has historically had low enrollment, averaging less than one graduate per year. Sunsetting this program is not abrupt. It involves notifying SUNY of the intent to discontinue the program (we did this in August); to stop accepting students into the program (which we have done); and over the next three years, we will work with students in the program to move them through degree requirements. It helps that 90% of the coursework in the program overlaps with other majors and some of the remaining 10% has equivalents at Syracuse University. We are working with the two students in the program to move them forward toward degree completion.

The growth of ESF also involves growing our graduate program. I'd like to highlight a few ways we're acting on this.

First, there is a natural growth and evolution in graduate programs and we should continue to review and revise our own. This includes looking at how audiences perceive the names of what we offer. For example, Environmental and Forest Biology was renamed to Environmental Biology. Environmental Biology is also renaming their MPS ecological restoration to better reflect areas of strength in department as well as demand in industry.

Secondly, we have streamlined graduate program offerings to ensure our numbers are aligned with our goals and our support systems. For example, programs in the department of Chemical Engineering underwent changes such as disaggregation into several new programs, but we never removed old programs. We have now removed empty programs, but while we will ultimately show fewer graduate programs moving forward we have preserved research areas.

Third, we are working to create a more accessible master's program. This involves:

- Identifying primary professional paths through each department
- Documenting recommended coursework sequence while still providing flexibility to support completion of a master's program in 12–18 months for projects that aren't reliant on a field season
- And adding non-thesis options as a culminating experience for MS degrees to provide greater flexibility and better connection to professional demand

As we seek to create new opportunities for graduate students at ESF, we also need to look at how our Graduate Assistants, who are integral to so much of who we are, are getting the best interaction and value. We will continue to use GA positions to recruit and support students and provide valued service to course delivery. However, as an integral part of our fiscal stability plan, we've reduced GA numbers and we will continue to see smaller numbers in the upcoming year. As it has been for many years, our focus for offering GA appointments will continue to be on PhD students. This does not mean we won't support master's students, but we will be offering more 10-hour GA appointments to create more opportunities while reducing spend.

Changing the structure of how we operate is not easy, but keeping our research going has, and will continue to be, significant. We have seen much productivity in this realm. In the 24-25 fiscal Year, expenditures showed an increase of 21% over the prior year. And due to the many challenges involved in funding, we are encouraging exploration and expansion of areas of alternative modes of support, such as private companies and foundations.

Promoting our potential for growth is a priority for ESF. As we continue to support students through research projects, we are actively targeting new markets for ESF, in both undergrad and grad. This includes marketing campaigns aimed at enrolling undergraduate students in areas that can accommodate growth. It also means drawing attention to our

Master of Professional Studies and other professional degree programs and working with select agencies to promote these programs.

Considering our fiscal stability plan, which has its focus as balancing our budget, growing enrollment, and aligning our teaching allocations to reflect the support of our growth, many people have reached out asking how they can help. The answer is quite simple, but I want to offer a few suggestions.

One: continue to reiterate the value of our degree programs. Our graduates are highly employable, engaged in true change across reputable industries, and they are at the forefront of impactful, interdisciplinary research.

Two: know that our focus is on improving our world, and this means sharing stories about how that's possible. Do not hesitate to share good news with our Office of Communications and Marketing.

Third: Please share this message with those who have questions. You can share it alongside other wonderful visual representations of who we are, like the television episode The College Tour produced, which highlights ten of our students and does a great job promoting who we are to prospective students.

And Lastly: please know that ESF is thriving, and we need our community to help focus on strengthening our programs and their growth.

Thank you.