

The Water Resources Initiative (WRI) at Skidmore College

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The Water Resources Initiative (WRI) at Skidmore College is administered by the interdepartmental Environmental Studies (ES) Program and integrates coursework, team based research, and engagement with local, regional, national, and international concerns for water resources. The availability and quality of water resources continues to shape our communities, form the basis for our economies, dictate many human health concerns, and influence our political agendas. There is no other natural resource that touches the very core of what it means to be human as does water, and its availability, distribution, quality and use is of growing concern. Because of the interrelated complexities of society, culture, economics, policy, and water quality and quantity, a rich exploration of water resources requires a genuine integration of the knowledge and methods from many disciplines.



Karen Kellogg

Launched in 2004, WRI builds on interdisciplinary natural and social science water related courses and pulls on courses in Geographic Information Systems and statistics to prepare students for research. Interdisciplinary, community-based research is a major emphasis of the initiative, and the research focus is currently the local Saratoga Lake watershed. The Saratoga Lake watershed is large and encompasses many land use patterns (e.g., rural and urban housing development, logging, mining, industry) and ecologies, and Saratoga Lake has been a controversial, potential new drinking water source for the growing community.



Michael Ennis-McMillan

Water Resources Initiative research is conducted through summer collaborative research, independent studies during the academic year, and is the heart of the ES capstone course – ES 375, *Case Studies in Environmental Sustainability*. Student and faculty have conducted over 40 collaborative research projects (a comprehensive listing of these projects is available at <http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/wri/projects.htm>). Students and faculty from over 10 disciplinary departments and interdisciplinary programs have together built WRI through the community based research projects. Skidmore has partnered with several community organizations to build the collective knowledge of the Saratoga Lake watershed and Skidmore faculty and students have contributed valuable data to the ongoing community discussion and the debate



Judith Halstead

over water.

Annual assessments consist largely of both quantitative and qualitative surveys and interviews of our graduating majors regarding how the ES program in general and ES 375 in particular are meeting learning objectives of the program. In addition to student surveys, ES faculty members discuss the quality of the ES 375 final research presentations.

In terms of basic concepts, at the end of their time at Skidmore, students should be able to:

(a) Understand ways that the social world and the natural world function as well as how they influence and are influenced by environmental issues.

(b) Understand the utility of an interdisciplinary perspective for studying interrelationships between humans and their environment and the issues that result.

(c) Appreciate the complexity and importance of environmental issues across time and space. Specifically, students should be able to appreciate contemporary, historical and future environmental issues as well as the interrelationships of local, regional, national, international and global environmental issues.

(d) Understand various intended and unintended consequences of human responses to environmental issues.

(e) Appreciate environmental issues and personal responsibilities as a member of a community, which includes the Skidmore campus community and beyond.



Kyle Nichols



Robert Turner