Joint Agreement: Tuskegee Institute and ISU

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Professional careers in the management and use of our nation's forests have not been considered by many black Americans. In a recent survey it was discovered that only one black student indicated forestry as an intended field out of a group of 330,000 black students who had taken the SAT, Scholastic Aptitude Test. Less than 100 blacks are included in approximately 19,500 undergraduate students in some 50 forestry schools in the United States. Out of a membership of almost 20,000, the Society of American Foresters has less than 10 black members.

Why are there so few blacks interested in the challenge offered by careers in the management and use of this important renewable natural resource? Actually there is a composite of reasons. The black forestry student has no one to emulate or with whom to relate. The image of forestry has not been an attractive one to the blacks. The career in forestry has been related to the black's experience in pulpwood cutting and other menial tasks related to timber. He often does not see a career in forestry as a means of improving the status of blacks in our society.

To break through this barrier Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama established a preforestry program in 1968 in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service. The Forest Service provides a full-time staff member and about half of the support of a second staff member. They have also provided many summer jobs for students. In 1972 the Weyerhaeuser Company Foundation awarded a 5-year grant of $200,000 to Tuskegee Institute for student scholarships. Later St. Regis Paper Company and Georgia-Pacific Corporation provided annual scholarships of $1,000 each. Tuskegee Institute provides support for one full-time staff member and part of a second. As a result, there are three full-time forestry staff members at Tuskegee.
A major recruitment program was started soon after the establishment of the preforestry program. A brochure was published and many high schools were contacted. Summer jobs were provided for potential preforestry students. For example, in 1975 some 74 summer jobs were provided for potential and current preforestry students. These jobs were mostly with the U.S. Forest Service. To further combat the poor image of forestry among Southern black students, recruitment should begin in the seventh grade or earlier. This is a slow but effective way to change a concept. Recruitment should also be extended to other states where blacks do not have as strong a preconceived idea of forestry.

Students came to Tuskegee for preforestry. They were scheduled in general background courses, but to stimulate interest in forestry three courses were developed: Dendrology, Introduction to Forestry, and Natural Resource Ecology. Several guest lecturers were invited to the campus to be involved in these courses. I had the privilege of presenting lectures for one week for four consecutive years. This brought me in direct contact with many black preforestry students, which was a delightful and enlightening experience. On some of the trips I was accompanied by Ron Taplin, a black student advisor at Iowa State University. Ron was of immense help in giving me a better understanding of the problem.

The Tuskegee forestry staff soon recognized that over half of their preforestry students were deficient in mathematics and chemistry. Some were deficient in English and biology. Further study revealed that most of the students had majored in vocational agriculture in high school and as a result were not ready for college. In most cases the high school Vo-Ed instructor was the major recruiting contact through his elementary farm forestry course. Many preforestry students transferring to other universities were experiencing difficulty due to lack of background in basic sciences. As time went on, the universities receiving Tuskegee preforestry students reported their difficulties to the Tuskegee staff. I, representing Iowa State University, related to the Tuskegee staff our transfer requirement and the scholastic difficulties encountered.

Two major conferences were held at Tuskegee. The first one was February 24–27, 1975 and was "A Workshop on Entry of Minorities into Natural Resource Careers." Dr. Henry Webster represented Iowa State University at that conference. The second conference was April 18–19, 1977 and dealt with an in-depth look at the Tuskegee Institute preforestry program. I was asked to speak on "Transfer Requirements and Problems." My comments would apply to any transfer student entering Iowa State University and particularly forestry. First, the student needs a strong background in mathematics, chemistry, and biological sciences. Transfer students would be more successful if they had mathematics up to or through a beginning course in calculus. Basic inorganic chemistry is needed and a course in organic chemistry would be an advantage. A course in "Study Skills" is highly recommended because many students have very serious problems in budgeting their time. They have yet to succeed in "value clarification" and establishing their life goals. The transfer student should be prepared to make up deficiencies that may include lower level courses, and to work very hard right at the start. If a student is not successful scholastically it is difficult to avoid the development of a self-defeating behavior.

The transfer student will face stiff scholastic competition and, if black, he or she will be surrounded by white faces. This is not a disadvantage but an advantage because the student will be able to contribute to a better understanding between blacks and whites. And, after all, in the profession of forestry these are the people with whom he or she will work. The black students need to socialize with all other students, and in their careers, work with all groups regardless of race or color. This is, however, a two-way street and the black and white students must work equally for a better racial understanding. Often black students are asked to do more in this respect than their studies will permit.

A milestone in the relationship of Iowa State University and Tuskegee Institute occurred on March 29, 1976 during Dean B. D. Mayberry's visit to our campus. A joint agreement between Tuskegee Institute and Iowa State University concerning "Education for Careers in Forestry, Forest Products and Forest Recreation" was signed. Signatures obtained that day were: B. D. Mayberry, Dean of the School of Applied Sciences at Tuskegee; George W. Thomson, Chairman, Iowa State University Forestry Department; Lewis M. Thompson, Associate Dean, Iowa State University College of Agriculture; and Lee R. Kolmer, Dean Iowa State University College of Agriculture. Later the signatures of M. A. Maloney, Jr., Head, Department of Agricultural Science at Tuskegee, Tuskegee President L. M. Foster, and Iowa State University President W. Robert Parks were added.

Several very important developments have occurred. At the last conference, a "Tuskegee Institute Forestry and Renewable Natural Resource Council" was organized. There were 61 representatives from industry, U.S. Forest Service,
The Tuskegee forestry staff at the meeting included Dr. Earl P. Stephens, Coordinator-Preforestry, Mr. Du Viet Le, Instructor-Preforestry, and Mr. Robert M. Lillie, Forester-U.S. Forest Service. Fortunately, this Council has grown rapidly in the months that followed and has increased Tuskegee’s preforestry support at a time when Weyerhaeuser’s original grant was terminating.

Tuskegee staff members have taken a new look at their recruitment and now are concentrating on students with strong basic science backgrounds. The program stresses equally the discipline requirements and the benefits of forestry as a profession. They have modified their curriculum to include whatever background courses the student needs and have made the program either two or three years. Better students take two years and deficient students three years. Increased emphasis on cooperative programs with the U.S. Forest Services and other government agencies and with private industry has been a major development.

Progress in terms of the number of graduate black foresters has been slow. In the 1975-76 Tuskegee Preforestry Annual Report an accumulated total of seven Tuskegee students had graduated from four-year Forestry schools. Among those was John Yancy, who graduated from Iowa State University. John has been successful in progressing up the career ladder in the U.S. Forest Service. It has been a great pleasure to me to receive Christmas cards and an occasional letter from John.

During the past year we have had four Tuskegee preforestry students in forestry at Iowa State University: Earl Bradley, Gladstone Innis, Thomarikka Hollins, and Elaine Ward. We also have Jerome Thomas, who received his Masters degree in Plant Science at Tuskegee, working toward a Ph.D. degree in Forest Biology and doing a very fine job. Financial assistance is available to all qualified black students and tutorial services are provided if needed. Also black students have available the Black Cultural Center and other social activities.

The Tuskegee students at Iowa State University are among the finest individuals I have ever had the privilege of advising. They are friendly, considerate, and most cooperative. They will all make very fine professional foresters. Some have had scholastic difficulty, but they keep working on toward their career objectives. With encouragement and hard work I am sure they will succeed.

We would all do well to listen to a nationally-known black minister from Chicago, Jessie Jackson. We live in a privileged country and can attend any university or seek any career. We must discipline our lives to meet this challenge. As Dean Mayberry said when he spoke at our Iowa State University game banquet, “things don’t just happen, you have to make them happen.”

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