

B&C PROFESSORS' CORNER



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What is a Boone and Crockett Professor?

The rapid development of the Boone and Crockett university programs has generated spirited discussions regarding the Club's role in conservation education and research. Members have engaged in passionate debates about the appropriate relationship between

the Club and its professors. We propose using the next three "B&C Professors' Corner" columns to join in that conversation.

As professors, we accept a responsibility to conduct and disseminate high-quality research. As B&C Professors, we are committed to research that makes a difference. We are equally responsible for teaching the students who will become tomorrow's wildlife professionals. We integrate these two responsibilities by involving both graduate and undergraduate students in research.

As individuals, our approaches differ, largely due to our diverse backgrounds and expertise. For example, while Paul Krausman and Bill Porter's core areas of expertise come from natural sciences, my core areas of expertise come from social sciences. My students and I study the intersection between science, law and policy, and we focus on communication as the process that integrates these social functions. Krausman and his students study large mammals and the mechanisms that may be used to enhance and maintain their habitats. Porter and his students study population dynamics and the behavior of wildlife in relation to habitat.

I'll begin our series with a brief discussion of our academic research, focusing on how it may link to contemporary conservation issues. Professor Porter will follow with a discussion of how we make that link through mentoring and teaching. Professor Krausman will close the circle by discussing how conservation policy both grows out of and influences our research and teaching. We'll each rely primarily on examples from our own programs because we naturally have the greatest familiarity there.

Unlike some professors, our research programs are directly linked to socially

significant and potentially controversial issues. Such research is now labeled as "transdisciplinary," or research that actively seeks to solve societal problems through using a wide range of academic approaches and making connections both within and outside of academia. This means that, in our efforts to improve wildlife management, all of us push beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries and across multiple sectors.

For example, Krausman and his students are studying suburban and exurban influences on wildlife policy. This requires them to include cultural, economic, and political dimensions of human society in their

Yellowstone grizzly delisting, to assessment of public acceptance for geological storage of anthropogenic CO₂.

Each project presents a unique set of challenges associated with its transdisciplinarity. We often refer to negotiating these challenges as dancing; although there are basic steps that help us avoid tripping over our own feet, every dance is slightly different. As you might guess, rhetorical analysis of a set of texts posted on the internet is a relatively simple negotiation. Of course, that is largely because our analysis does not pose an immediate threat to anyone's agenda. Our work on energy, however, requires constant

negotiation between diverse groups as few topics are more controversial than energy. Our entire infrastructure depends on it, wildlife habitat is directly impacted by its development, and the policy and regulatory frameworks in states that have not been traditional energy producers are in a state of flux.

Our primary responsibility with this project is to provide information about public understanding of the science and technology associated with carbon capture and storage to appropriate groups at the U.S. Department of Energy and participating companies from the energy industry. We also have a responsibility to produce, disseminate, and evaluate science education materials

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research. Porter and his students are studying wolf restoration in the U.S. This requires them to include cultural, economic, and political dimensions of human stewardship in their research. My students and I are studying a variety of community-based conservation initiatives. Depending on the initiative, this requires us to include biological, chemical and/or geological aspects of conservation in our research. Further, all of us partner with individuals from environmental nongovernment organizations, government agencies, and the private sector.

My students and I conduct engaged, problem-centered research that responds to needs expressed by individuals representing a wide variety of groups. We self-identify as researchers, rather than as consultants, and try to produce knowledge that has both practical and theoretical applications. Individual projects vary widely, ranging from a rhetorical analysis of the persuasive strategies used by participants from all sides in the debate over

on the topics of energy and climate change (in general), and carbon capture and storage (specifically). Everyone wants to dance with us on this project. The coal industry frequently asks us to change the wording in educational materials; they would like us to talk about "clean coal" instead of "carbon capture and storage." Environmental nongovernmental organizations (ENGOS) make the same requests for changes, suggesting that we should focus more on wind and solar power. Property rights groups tell us our research is contributing to corporate control of the world.

Some of our professional colleagues claim it's impossible to conduct credible research on such a controversial topic, especially when the research is jointly funded by the Department of Energy and the fossil fuel industry. We see this as an opportunity to improve understanding of how communication influences formulation and implementation of natural resource

The B&C Professors are a key element of the Club's Conservation Program. Currently three of these endowed professorships are in place including:

Dr. Paul Krausman,
University of Montana

Dr. Tarla Peterson,
Texas A&M University

Dr. William Porter,
Michigan State University

Plans are underway to expand the program to additional selected universities.

policy at the state, federal, and international levels. It also provides an opportunity for learning how to develop more effective conservation partnerships between the public and private sectors.

Other projects continue this theme. We are eager to help when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wants to experiment with involving the public in management of

endangered species on private lands. If the Environmental Defense Fund wants an assessment of participant satisfaction regarding its Safe Harbor program for ocelots on private lands in South Texas, we provide the assessment. If Naturvårdsverket (the Swedish nature management agency, sometimes translated as Swedish EPA) wants to know the social implications of enhancing the genetic diversity of their recovering wolf population by importing wolves from Finland, we summarize the relevant social research, and offer a set of policy recommendations grounded in it. In every case, we hear from both supporters and detractors; and that interest indicates our research has strong potential to influence wildlife conservation.

As Boone and Crockett Professors, we conduct research that includes critical examination of both process and connections. We want to understand the processes (both social and biological) that contribute to various conservation outcomes. We also want to create and strengthen connections with other scholars and sectors who are interested in wildlife conservation. And we make an effort to disseminate our research to both public and professional audiences. In

some ways, our research is no different than research conducted by any professor; yet, it differs in very important ways. Research findings take on significant capacity for making a difference when the research itself is connected to practitioners, whether they are decision makers in agencies tasked with natural resource management or members of ENGOs. Our research has the potential to inform the choices they make today and in the future.

The approach I have described is both an orientation to research and a skill that can be cultivated. We encourage cultivation of that skill by helping our students become comfortable sharing concepts and methods from their own disciplines, while simultaneously learning from scholars with other disciplinary backgrounds. We also encourage them to develop the confidence and curiosity needed to engage in mutual learning with people from multiple other sectors, such as government and civil society groups. In our next installment, Bill Porter will expand on our teaching and mentoring efforts. ■

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