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School Adopts New Shield

By Dr. Herbert Winer, Lecturer in Forestry and Environmental Studies and Fellow of Berkeley College

Modern turf wars within universities are fought by faculty committees and by administrators armed with spreadsheets, but academic heraldry still reminds us of the medieval origins of the western university and the armorial bearings or coats of arms that once enabled warriors to distinguish a friend’s shield from a foe’s. A new School banner, bearing a newly designed shield, was unfurled to the eyes of the expectant world on the Old Campus at this year’s commencement. Some words of explanation are in order.

Since the 1950s, the School banner carried at commencement had reflected Elihu Yale and the forest, symbolized by a gnarled stylized oak tree in a design created by Mary Lou Reifsnyder, the late wife of Professor Emeritus William E. Reifsnyder. This familiar shield, which appeared regularly on the cover of the Yale Forest School News, required modification. (See a picture of the retired shield on page 13.) Aesthetically, the shield became crowded and lost detail when it was reduced to a small size, as on commencement programs. Symbolically, the shield required a change to reflect the extension of School concerns to include environmental studies.

Responding to the clear need to bridge this Shield and Banner Gap, Dean Cohon commissioned an ad hoc interdisciplinary task force. Combining their skills and judgement were Roland Hoover, printer to the University and Poursuivant at Arms; John McCrillis, retired Typographer and Calligrapher for the Yale University Press, who prepared the drawings; Frank Tierney, graphic Designer at the Yale University Printing Service; Lois Jameson, editor of the Yale University Bulletin series; Nancy Rabbott, the School’s Registrar; Nerija Orentas, MFS ’94, who had searched the heraldic resources of Yale’s libraries of Sterling, Mudd, Art and Architecture, and the Center for British Art, and who carried the new banner at this year’s commencement; and Herbert Winer, who earned an ambiguous accolade from the Dean: he should have been born three hundred years ago, when he might have made a better living doing academic heraldry.

After considering more than a score of possible symbols and arrangements, the task force developed the new design, which was approved by the Secretary and other University officers earlier this year. In traditional heraldic terms (a mixture of English and Norman French), the blazon (technical description) for the new shield reads:

Argent, on a pale Azure a sun Or between two oak leaves Vert and two acorns Or, in a chief ermine, a saltire Gules,

which means:

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is the amount of debt that they are incurring. Situations like my own are not all that uncommon, and while it is a little frightening to go into so much debt, one of my friends reflected on the issue with this comment: "I could probably buy a Mercedes with the amount of money I will be paying in monthly student loan payments, but a car can be taken away from me. My education cannot."

So now, here it is, the second semester of my last year. School is nearly over. Prospective students have been calling to ask me the very same questions I had asked of former F&ESers two years earlier: "Did you make the right decision? Was it worth it to take out all those loans?" The answer is definitely "yes", but with one qualification. Now that I am about to place myself on the job market and have been spending some time in the Career Office looking through employment opportunities, I have noticed that my loan keeps getting in the way of what I really want to do. While I went into the environmental field knowing full well that it is not one of the most lucrative, my idealism is starting to hit the hard, hard wall of reality.

Here is my dilemma: while my heart may be at the "grassroots level", my student loan is at the "World Bank" level of compensation. I have come across many interesting jobs in the career office which I have had to ignore because I knew that the salary would not be enough to both live on and make my monthly loan payments. In addition, many of the interesting job postings state explicitly that unless you have a Ph.D. and five years experience you need not apply. Huh? I was under the assumption that a Master's degree was the minimum requirement for employment at most environmental organizations (if you have a BS, you might as well go and flip burgers). Had the minimum requirements been bumped up to a Ph.D. while I was in school working on the Master's? If I go back for my Ph.D., will it be moved up to a Post-Doc? Where will it end? OK. OK. Stop whining, you say. I will. And I have. I realize that I am not the only one facing this situation. But I guess that is part of the problem. Am I now competing against people with Ph.D.s for jobs that formerly went to people with a Master's degree? Are the requirements for employment being bumped up consciously, or is it just by default, because there are a lot of Ph.D.s out there looking for employment in the same organizations as myself? I guess that is a "chicken-and-egg" type question that can never really be answered.

Aside from the uncertainty over employment, am I happy with the education I received from F&ES? Yes. Yale gave me the freedom to explore the full range of issues possible within my given area of interest. It has contributed to my growth, not only academically and professionally, but also personally - through having the opportunity to share this time and this place with peers whom I can like and respect.

So, as graduation looms nearer, I remain hopeful that my worry over jobs and the contents of that manila loan folder will be short-lived, and that my Master's of Environmental Studies degree from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies will open the door to exciting opportunities, the likes of which I have not yet even dreamed.