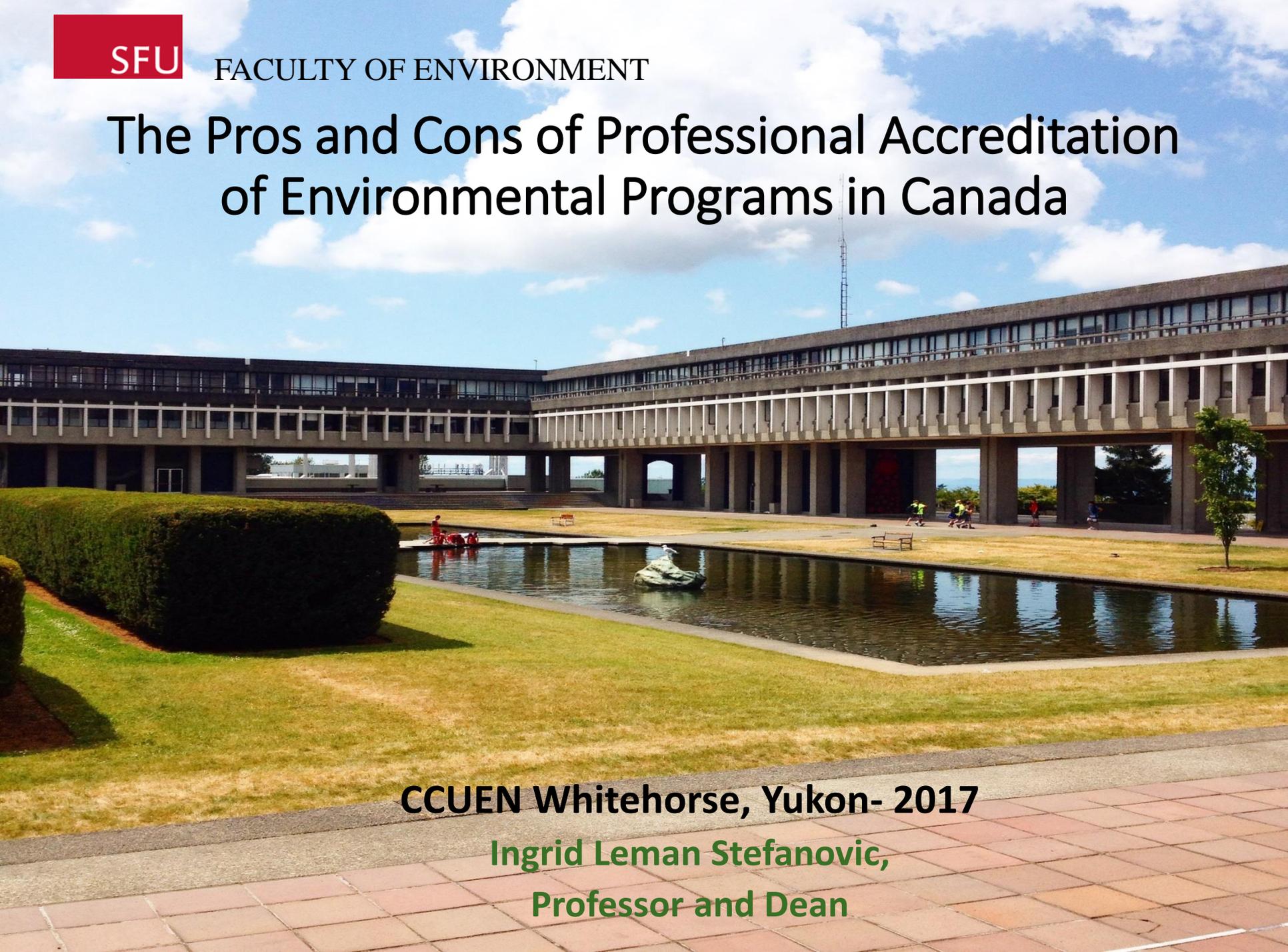


The SFU logo consists of the letters 'SFU' in white, bold, sans-serif font, centered within a solid red square.

FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENT

The Pros and Cons of Professional Accreditation of Environmental Programs in Canada

A wide-angle photograph of a modern university building with a long, low profile and a series of white columns supporting an upper level. In the foreground, there is a large, rectangular pond with a small rock in the center. The grass is green and well-maintained. A paved walkway is visible in the bottom foreground.

CCUEN Whitehorse, Yukon- 2017

**Ingrid Lemán Stefanovic,
Professor and Dean**



1. Context: SSHRC-funded Research Project
2. Findings regarding Accreditation
3. Discussion

1. The Current SSHRC-funded Research

- Universities/units update inventory
- Qualitative Investigation of curriculum shifts (archival research)
- Survey of key university environmental leaders (to 100 people with >35% response rate)
- Interviews (approx. 20)
- Industry survey (79)



<http://www.sfu.ca/interdisciplinary-environ.html>

SFU SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
ENGAGING THE WORLD

Interdisciplinary Environmental Education

Interdisciplinary environmental education: A Canadian perspective

This research project explores the nature of interdisciplinary, environmental programming in universities across Canada.

Surveys and interviews with university leaders across Canada were carried out to identify strengths and weaknesses of current, as well as historical, interdisciplinary approaches to environmental research and curriculum development.

A separate analysis of a cross-section of university-level environmental courses and programs has identified pedagogical paradigm shifts from the 1960s to present day. An up-to-date inventory of Canadian, post-secondary interdisciplinary environmental units is also provided.

The research will be of interest to universities, environmental NGOs (non-governmental organizations), policy analysts and the broader community in showing how values and paradigms of interdisciplinarity affect the development of best practices in environmental education and research.



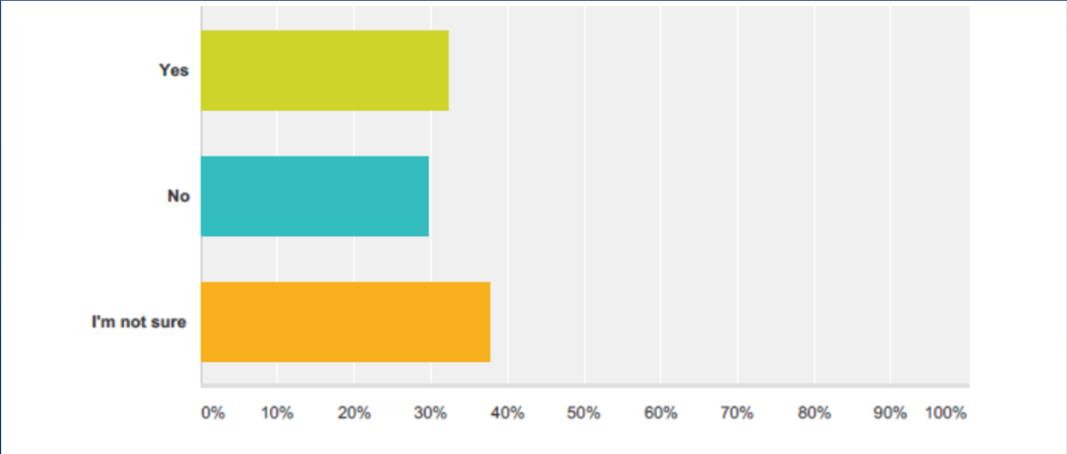
Findings re: Accreditation

Administrators Survey

38 university environmental administrators/academics
from 30 different universities (38% response rate)



Question 28: ECO Canada provides the opportunity for environmental programs at Canadian universities to become accredited. Do you think that the accreditation of university-level environmental programming ought to be supported?



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	32.43% 12
No	29.73% 11
I'm not sure	37.84% 14
Total	37

Some Positive Comments... (32.43%)

Stronger perception of credibility: *“It would lend increased credibility to programs...”*

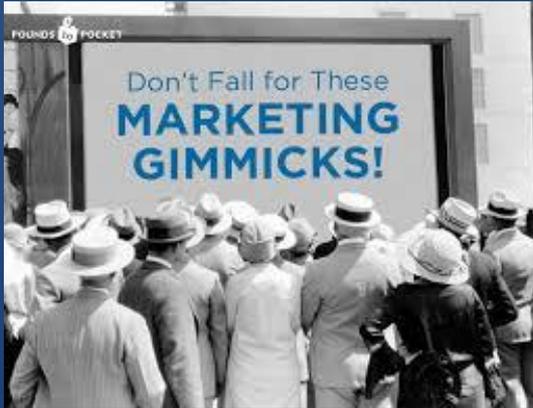
Brings attention: *“...would oblige university administrators to be concerned with the administrative longevity of programs...”*

Helps students: *“I think it will help the employment prospects of our graduates and advance the professional standing of Environmental specialists.”*

Some were skeptical (29.7%)

- **Taxes limited resources:** *“..quickly becomes an administrative nightmare that consumes the time of too many people...”*
- **Externalizes and limits program control:** *“The question to ask here is ‘who wants to control whom and why...’”*
- **Privileges some institutions:** *“...another layer of paperwork that privileges some institutions with deeper pockets and staffing resources...”*
- **Privileges some students over others:** *“Talented graduates of unaccredited programs will find themselves at a disadvantage if employers begin requiring certification...”*
- **Reduces quality and diversity of programs:** *“Accreditation standardizes and reduces diversity...detracts from creativity, innovation, breadth....”*

More concerns...



- *Concerns around for-profit company control: “It’s not a terrible idea but it has evolved as a profit or even rent-seeking model with no real benefits...”*
- *Gimmicky: “I think it’s a gimmick...If a university has in place strong academic quality checks, I do not see the need of external accreditation....”*

Some not so sure.... “It depends”... (37.84%)

*“It depends on **the model** used...”*

*“It depends on how **criteria** are developed and applied...”*

*“**What matters is that students have the knowledge** requirements and skills to be responsible environmental professionals...”*

*“**If required by industry, then ‘yes’**. If not, the value of such an accreditation is questionable.”*

*“The **alternative model** is that graduates get accredited, not the program... If people desire accreditation, let them seek it outside of their degree programs...”*

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS:

Some spontaneous commentaries...

- “Everyone wants this stamp or that stamp. Yet it doesn’t say anything about the quality...”
- “...it seems that weaker programs feel that they have to undergo the certification to get recognition that they’re a good university...”
- “...there’s not evidence whatsoever of students demanding certification by some independent third party who, in our opinion, has no legitimacy certifying these programs to begin with...”
- “...there has to be independence of programs...We’re not judged by ECO Canada, we’re judged by the quality of our grads...”

On the other hand...

- “...There was a guy who worked for Environment Canada who said “when I send out a job description, if potential employees have some kind of accreditation, they get to the top of the pile...”
- In planning programs, “accreditation became very important, based on the curriculum standard we established...”
- “...it is useful if you can identify how your program addresses occupational standards...There are some basic occupational standards – numeracy, literacy – and there are particular standards...”
- “I think ECO Canada is doing a really good job in trying to identify employment opportunities and the kinds of jobs people get from these kinds of degrees...”

Sample
Industry
Interviews:
very few
comments
recorded

- *“I’d much rather ECO work with universities to say ‘let’s offer professional placement courses’ as opposed to ‘we’ll just give you an accreditation like an engineer or a lawyer. To me, that would be much more valuable as an employer...”*
- *“How important is the accreditation of the environmental program? Can I be honest? Minimally... Our pool of staff tend to come from people who have interned for us...”*



Industry Survey (79 respondents)

ECO Canada provides the opportunity for post-secondary environmental programs to become accredited. Accreditation indicates that an environmental program has met a certain set of national standards...Would a candidate's having graduated from an accredited university-level program positively influence your decision to hire?

Considerably	Moderately	Somewhat	Not at all	I'm not sure	Total	Weighted Average
35.29%	33.82%	7.35%	14.71%	8.82%		
24	23	5	10	6	68	1.98

Comments...

- *“...a requirement for full time employment...”*
- *“...a necessity to be hired as an indeterminate employee...”*
- *“We consider a wide variety of degree/certificate programs/designations combinations for satisfying our recruitment needs....”*

- *“I don’t think the current standards are strong enough to have much value...”*

- *“Accreditation to me seems pointless since ecology programs (and most science programs) have very similar requirements across Canada...”*
- *“I look for designers that [sic] understand financial basics...”*

A final thought:
If accreditation is to succeed, ECO Canada
must build...



- Trust
- Credibility (E.g. PMI)
- Clear value to students and programs
- Simple processes

Thank-you! Time for Discussion! (What do YOU think about all of this?....?!)

