



**Tropical Conservation and Development Program
2014 Alumni Survey Report**



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With special thanks to David Schweider⁴
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Cover image: Word cloud of countries where TCD alumni survey respondents did their master's and PhD research. The larger the word, the more people who studied there. This word cloud will look different in the future as TCD continues to broaden its reach to Africa, Asia and the Southern Cone of South America

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Introduction

In 2014, the University of Florida Tropical Conservation and Development Program conducted a survey of its alumni. Building on a similar survey conducted in 2008, the 2014 survey was designed to assess the state of the alumni body, to get graduates' feedback on the program, to elicit their suggestions for future directions, and to learn how they might be more actively involved in the program going forward.

We identified a total of 577 individuals who had graduated from TCD or a related program.¹ We conducted a web-based survey from February 23 to March 31, 2014 with 343 of these alumni, being those for whom we had at least one valid email address. We received 129 responses, for a response rate of 38%.

Alumni were queried on a total of 37 questions, several of which were multi-part questions. In addition to demographic, academic, career and contact information, the survey asked respondents to:

- Identify both their training and their career on the spectrum from biophysical to social scientist;
- Provide several items of program evaluation including three things they liked and disliked about the program, three ways they've used their graduate training in a professional setting, and what TCD could have done to better prepare them for post-UF life;
- Identify current issues in training and research that TCD should address;
- Provide suggestions as to how alumni could be better integrated into the program.

Although no compensation was provided for participating, the first five respondents each received a \$20 gift card to Amazon.com.

Overview of Results

The results of the alumni survey provide a wealth of demographic, student and career information about alumni (their ages, gender, and national origins; participation in TCD programs and UF departments; self-definition as biophysical or social scientists, or a mix of the two; current work), as well as their opinions on the program's past training and future priorities. In order to explore the different experiences of TCD alumni, the study compared results among alumni from different countries, different UF departments, participation in different programs, and self-definition along the interdisciplinary continuum.

The results provide a profile of TCD alumni. Respondents were divided evenly between male and female; almost 40 percent were between 45 and 55 years old. Respondents came from 15 countries, whose regional distribution largely reflects that of the TCD alumni as a whole, with

¹ Amazon Research and Training Program (ARTP), Program of Studies in Tropical Conservation (PSTC), Working Forests in the Tropics (WFT), Amazon Conservation Leadership Initiative (ACLI), Master's in Development Practice (MDP), and Southern Cone Leadership Initiative (SCLI). Throughout this survey report, when referring to TCD participation, participation in related programs is implied as well.

3% of respondents coming from Africa, 4% from Asia and Oceania, and 40% from Latin America. The majority of respondents were from the United States (49%). Brazil, Columbia and Peru had the next largest numbers of respondents, with 7 respondents (6%) each. See figure 1 for complete results.

Respondents came from 17 academic units, primarily the departments of Anthropology, Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, and Forest Resources and Conservation, as well as Latin American Studies and the School of Natural Resources and the Environment. Students from the US were more likely to come from Wildlife Ecology and Conservation (21%), SNRE (17%), Forest Resources (13%), and Anthropology (15%). This is in clear contrast to the 2008 survey, when students from the US were most likely to have been in Anthropology. In 2014, students from Latin America were most likely to be in Latin American Studies (29%). Students from Latin America and from the US showed very similar rates of degree achievement. Fifty-eight percent of TCD's Latin American alumni gained a PhD at UF, and 73% got their master's degree at UF. Of respondents from the US, 55% gained a PhD at UF, and 71% got their master's. US students benefitted most from research and practicum support, whereas Latin American students benefitted mainly from fellowships and assistantships. Following their graduation, alumni from both the US and Latin America were more likely to work in academia than in other sectors, with NGO and government work close behind.

The interdisciplinary profile of TCD alumni evolved over time. Biophysical and social sciences were evenly represented in their education, whereas in their careers, there was a clear trend toward partial or primary reliance on the social sciences. This trend is consistent with the 2008 findings.

This survey demonstrates strong support for the current direction of the TCD program as encapsulated in the professional competencies. This set of guidelines was developed by the TCD Curriculum Task Force in 2012 to guide programming and curriculum decisions that would ensure TCD graduates have the academic, professional, and leadership skills to fulfill the TCD mission. To this end, TCD students are expected to attain the following professional competencies upon graduation:

- Holistic understanding of integrated social, cultural and ecological systems, with the ability to discuss key concepts or problems from different perspectives.
- Ability to critically evaluate the scientific and other evidence resulting from work in biodiversity conservation, sustainable resource use, and human well-being in the tropics.
- Collaboration and communication skills and strategies needed to work with diverse actors and build partnerships, including the ability to work in multidisciplinary teams and effectively communicate in diverse ways with diverse audiences.
- Systematic and consistent reflection on one's own biases, beliefs, goals and activities for working toward conservation and sustainable development.

We queried survey participants on the first three of these competencies by first asking if they felt that they achieved each of them as part of their participation in TCD or related programs. In all three cases, over 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had achieved each of these competencies upon graduation from UF. Fewer than 7%, and as few as

2% for a given competency, felt that they had not mastered the relevant skills as part of their TCD participation.

Next, we asked survey participants how important each of these three competencies had been to their careers. In each case, 98-99% of respondents agreed that these competencies were important or very important in their work, with the resounding majority (69-75% of respondents) agreeing that they were very important.

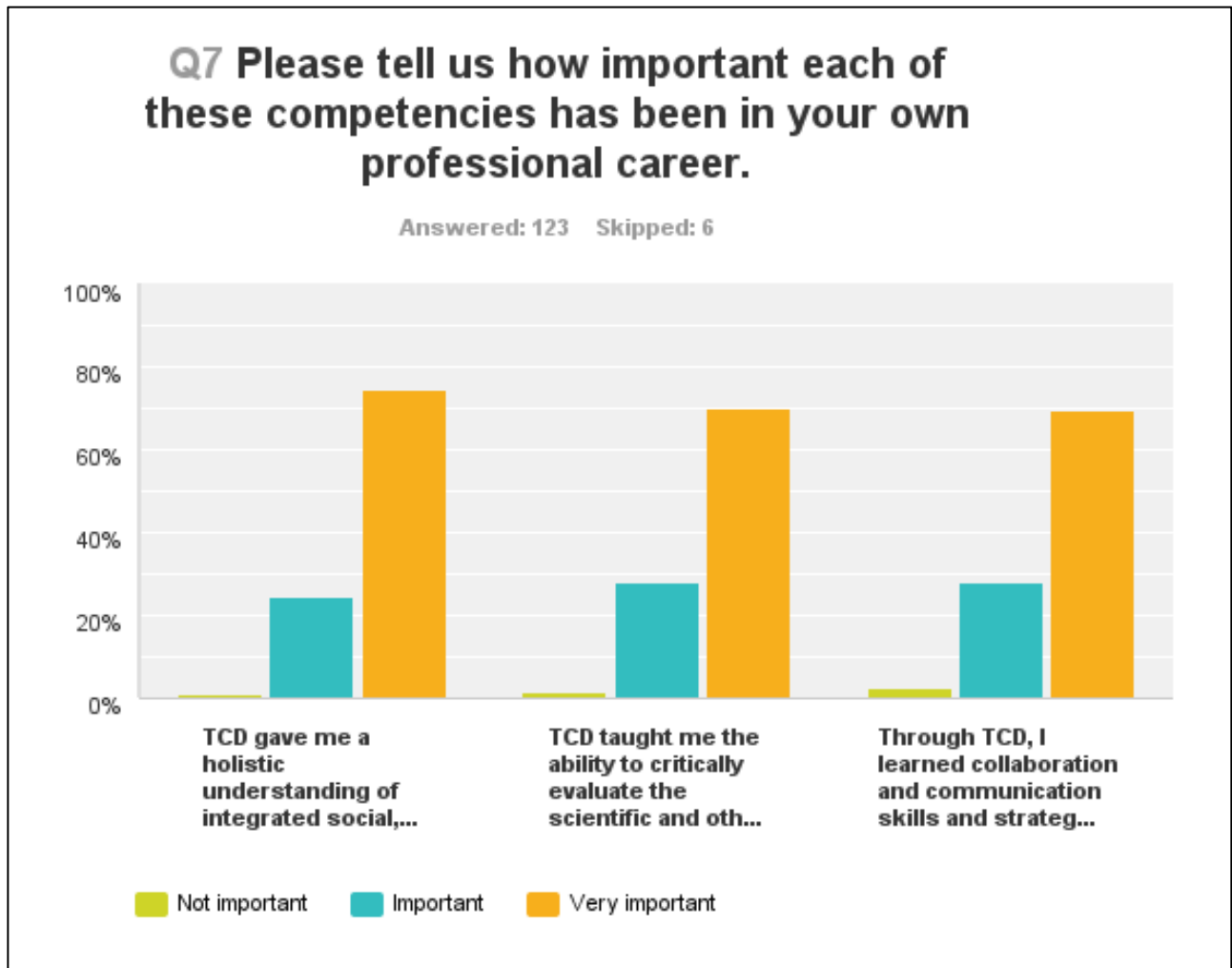


Figure 1. TCD Professional Competencies

Discussion and Recommendations

There are several outstanding findings that emerge from the results of this survey.

- The social sciences have continued to be more important in alumni careers, even when one's primary training was in biophysical sciences.
- While just over half our respondents claim a career as professors or researchers, a significant number have positions as program or project managers, executive directors and consultants, often in NGO, government and private sectors.
- In keeping with the strong placement of TCD alumni in applied settings, often in places where management skills and financial responsibility are critical factors, alumni have issued a strong call for better training in the business and management aspects of conservation and development practice through increased focus on professional skills and management training and attention to finance and economics.
- Climate change is the single most important issue facing the conservation and development field.

TCD alumni represent a large body of professionals working in applied and academic fields connected with tropical conservation and development. They are generally very happy with their experience in TCD and related programs. Furthermore, they overwhelmingly express strong feelings of loyalty to the program and a desire to stay connected, to continue contributing to the program, and to continue networking with faculty and staff, students and other alumni. It would behoove the current tenants of the TCD program to actively engage with their alumni community. Not only does the program stand to gain financially from alumni willingness to contribute, but students stand to benefit from their mentorship, and everyone stands to benefit from the networking opportunities represented by this internationally-constituted cohort.

How do we do this?

Based on alumni responses to the survey, here are a series of ideas for how to actively engage with alumni going forward, and to make good on their recommendations:

- Create an alumni fund as another source of financial support for student training and research. Over 50% said they were somewhat or very likely to contribute to such a fund.
- Create and manage an online registry of alumni. This would serve multiple purposes including:
 - Provide easy-access documentation of certification in the program.
 - Allow both alumni and students to contact one another for the purposes of networking, job search, information exchange and more.
- Fast-track the development of a course in climate change and corollary issues, with an emphasis on the research, development and financing of mitigation schemes.
- Solicit and coordinate opportunities for student-alumni mentorship, as well as research and practicum placements with alumni in the field.

- Solicit alumni as guest lecturers or co-instructors in the classroom, or perhaps Tropilunch or other events. With care, planning and practice, this can be done by Skype or other teleconferencing applications.
- Increase the presence of underrepresented departments that offer applied professional skills such as journalism and education, but especially economics and business management.
- Increase the visibility of, or create more offerings for, curriculum that offers training in practical professional skills as well as the hands-on application of this training.
- Create a TCD alumni blog through which alumni can update the network with news from the field, stories about their work, research ideas and proposals for students, and other current events.
- Engage alumni as members of an advisory board to guide TCD into the future.
- Solicit alumni to organize panels, symposia or social dinners at international conferences where TCD expects strong representation.

Following up

At the 2015 TCD conference “Envisioning a Sustainable Tropics,” held at the University of Florida in Gainesville, over 35 alumni gathered to discuss these results and to begin planning for increased alumni involvement in the program. An alumni committee was formed to take the next steps and explore whether an association might be formed, among other topics. Committee members include: Laura Kowler, Elena Bastides, Wendy Townsend, Santiago Espinosa, Karen Kainer, Connie Campbell and Shoana Humphries.

For more information please go to <http://www.tcd.ufl.edu/people/alumni>.

Results

Demographics

Gender

Our alumni respondents were almost perfectly divided between male and female; we added an “Other” category this year, which was selected by one person. The even gender balance is in keeping with results of the 2008 survey, in which respondents identified as 46% female and 53% male. However, as a function of time, the number of women participating in the program has increased over the decades to where they currently make up the majority of program participants (as reflected in survey responses).

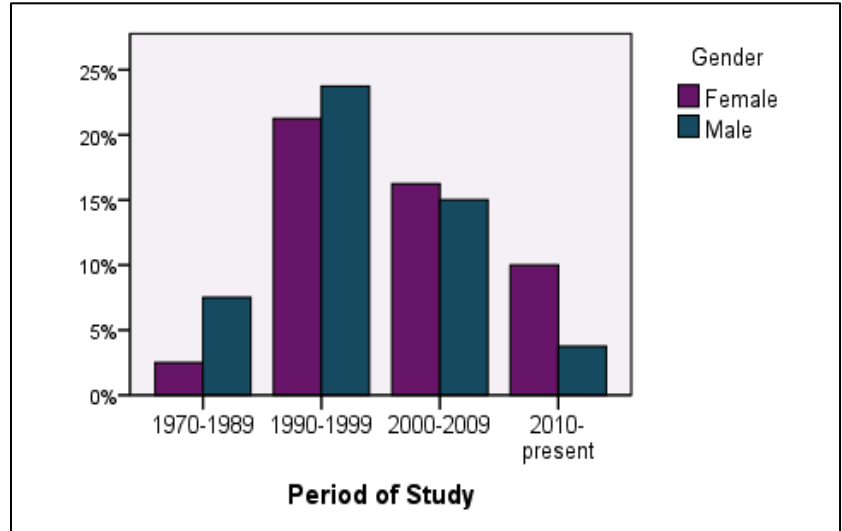


Figure 2. Period of study of survey respondents, based on final year of terminal degree, showing program participation and gender balance changes over time.

Age

All five 10-year age cohorts between 25 and 65 were well represented, with the largest number in the 45-54 range. Two respondents were over 65.

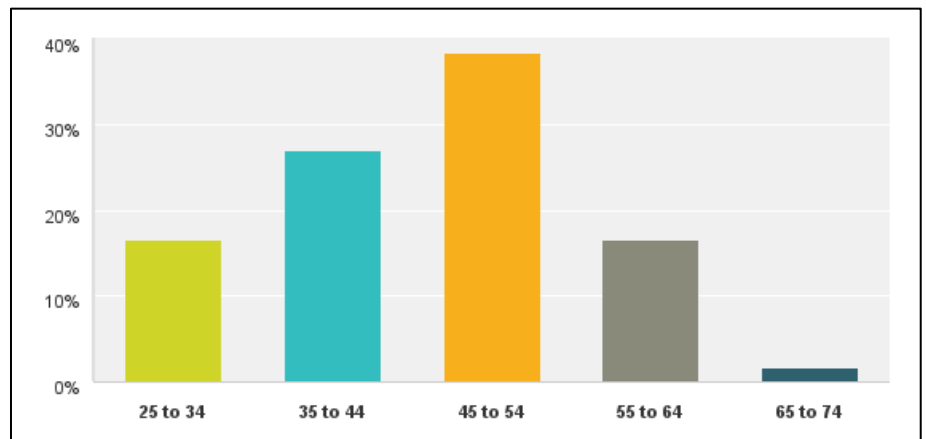


Figure 3. Age Range (115 respondents).

Country and region of origin

TCD alumni comprise a very international crowd, with 112 respondents from 24 nations. The US and Brazil are best represented, with 49% and 6% each. Regionally, 35% of respondents are from Latin America, 3% from Africa, and 4% from Asia and Oceania. According to departmental data, this represents accurately the number of alumni from Africa and Asia; actual percentage of Latin American alumni is 40% rather than the 35% reflected in survey respondents.

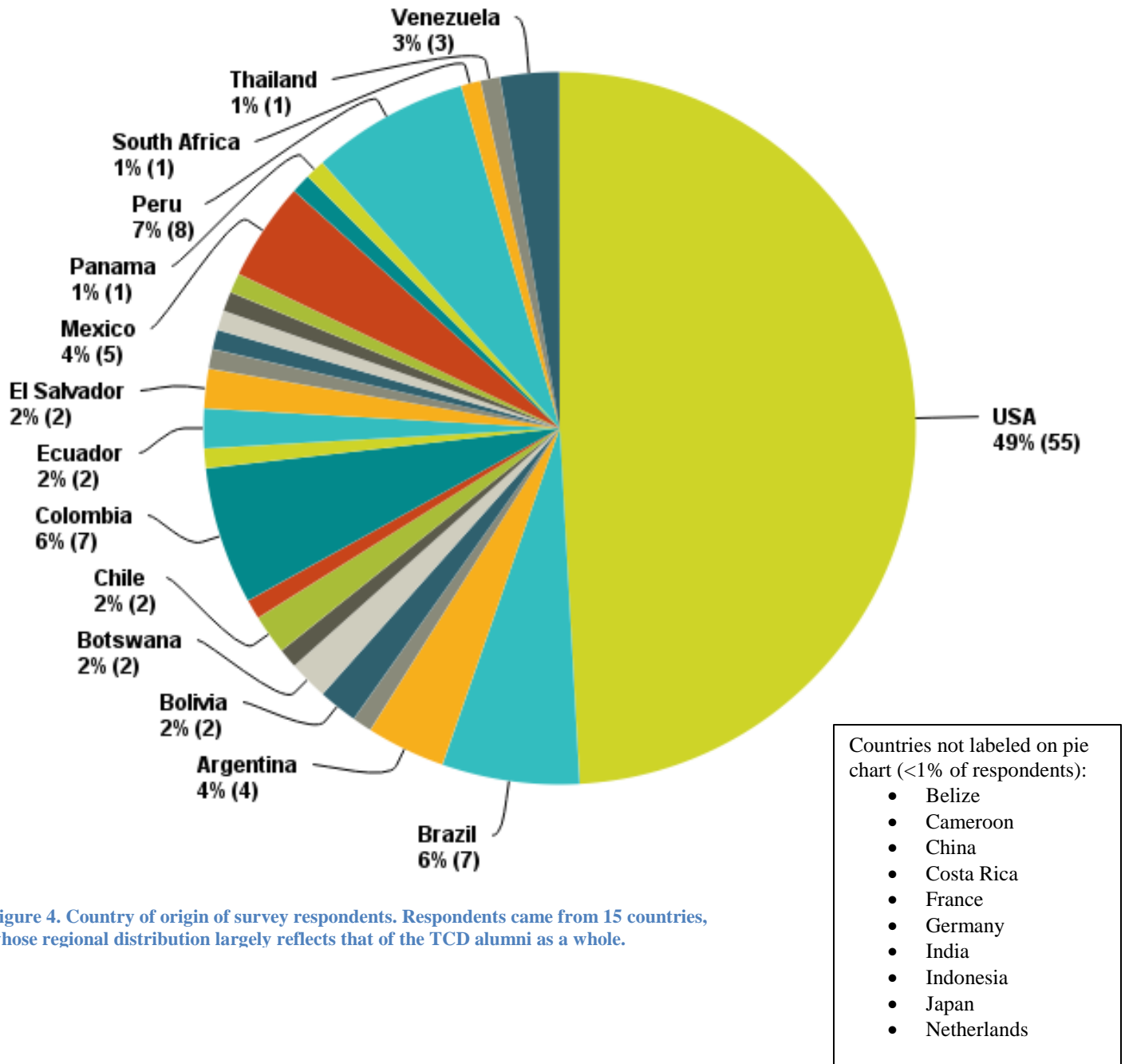


Figure 4. Country of origin of survey respondents. Respondents came from 15 countries, whose regional distribution largely reflects that of the TCD alumni as a whole.

Period of Study

The largest number of respondents to the survey studied at UF during the 1990's, calculated by their final year at UF. Overall results therefore reflect this time period most strongly. However, throughout the report, we calculate responses by time period so as to better gauge trends and changes in the program over time. For example, when we look at where TCD students have come from over the course of the program's history, we can discern a few trends. First, the regions of Africa, Asia/Oceania, and Europe have been the worst represented throughout the course of the program's history. During the 1990s, South America was well represented. Almost half our alumni respondents for that time period came from Brazil, Venezuela, Ecuador, Argentina, Bolivia, Peru or Colombia. In all decades, the United States has provided 40-60% of the students at TCD.

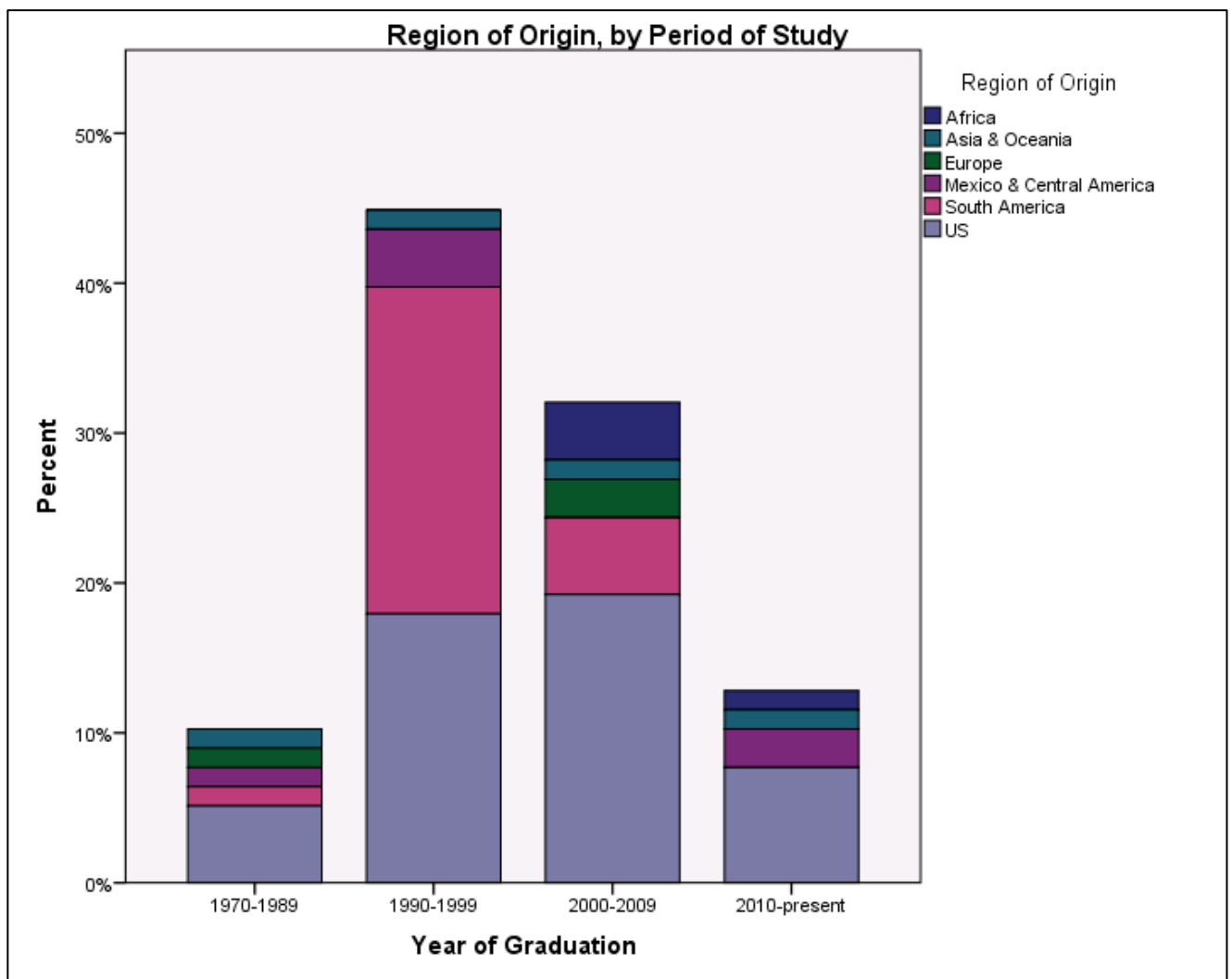


Figure 5. Number of respondents from each decade, and which region they come from.

Department of Study

Sixteen departments were represented in our alumni responses. SNRE, Latin American Studies, WEC, Anthropology, and Forest Resources and Conservation all hosted the greatest number of students. Two academic units are represented that are not currently formally affiliated with TCD: the College of Education and the College of Journalism and Communications. This indicates that there may be interest in TCD-type programming within these organizations. Education and journalism are both fields of applied practice that with direct applicability to many of the issues we face in TCD. This suggests that it may benefit TCD to foster greater connections with these academic and professional units.

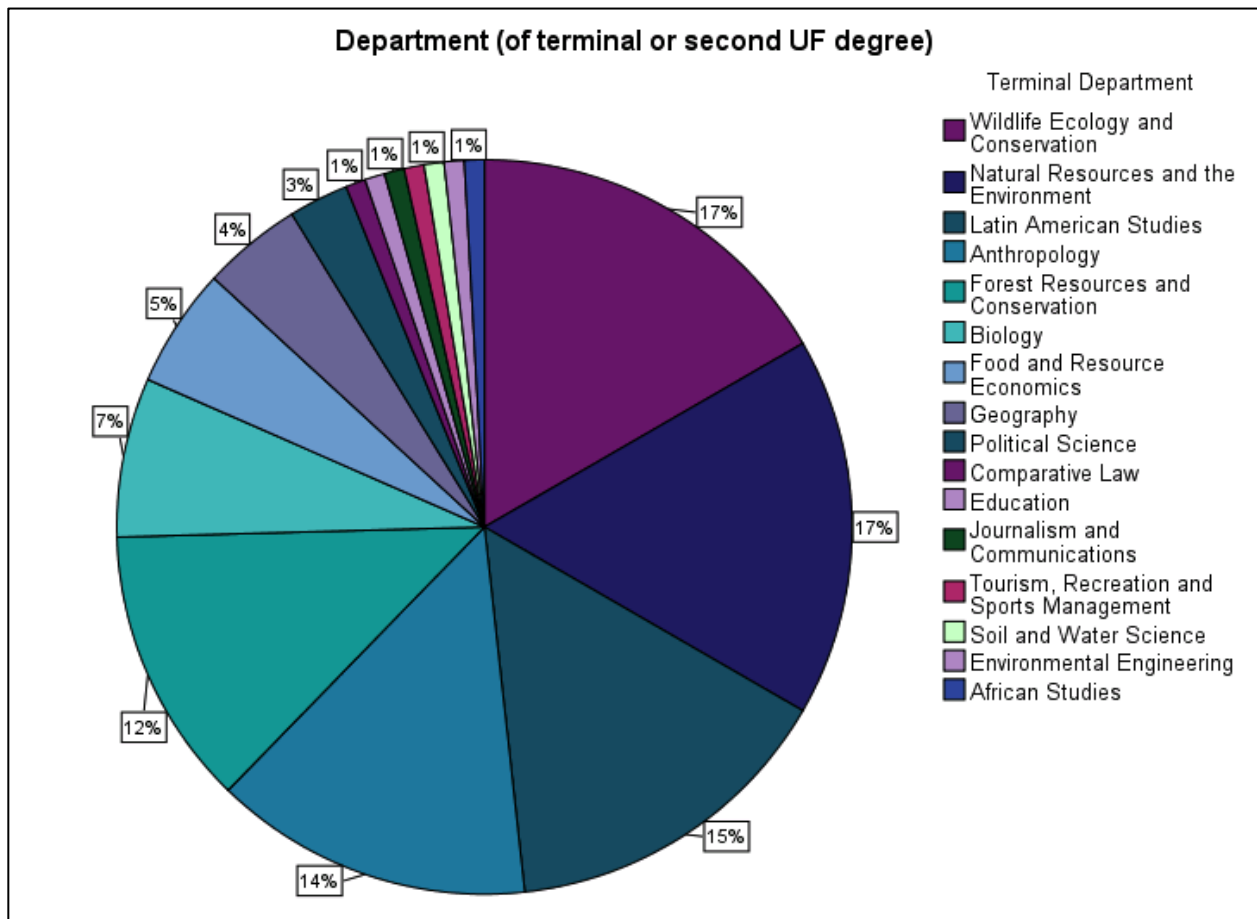


Figure 6. Departments represented within TCD.

Representation of departments over time and by gender

The relative representation of various departments has changed over time. In the 1970s and '80s, Latin American Studies, Forest Resources and Conservation, and Anthropology all played an equal role. In the '90s, WEC was the big player, with FRC, Biology and Anthropology close behind, and in the 2000s, SNRE sent the most students to TCD, followed closely by Anthropology. In recent years, Latin American Studies, particularly the Master's in Development Practice program, has been well represented, with almost half the respondents for those years coming from LAS.

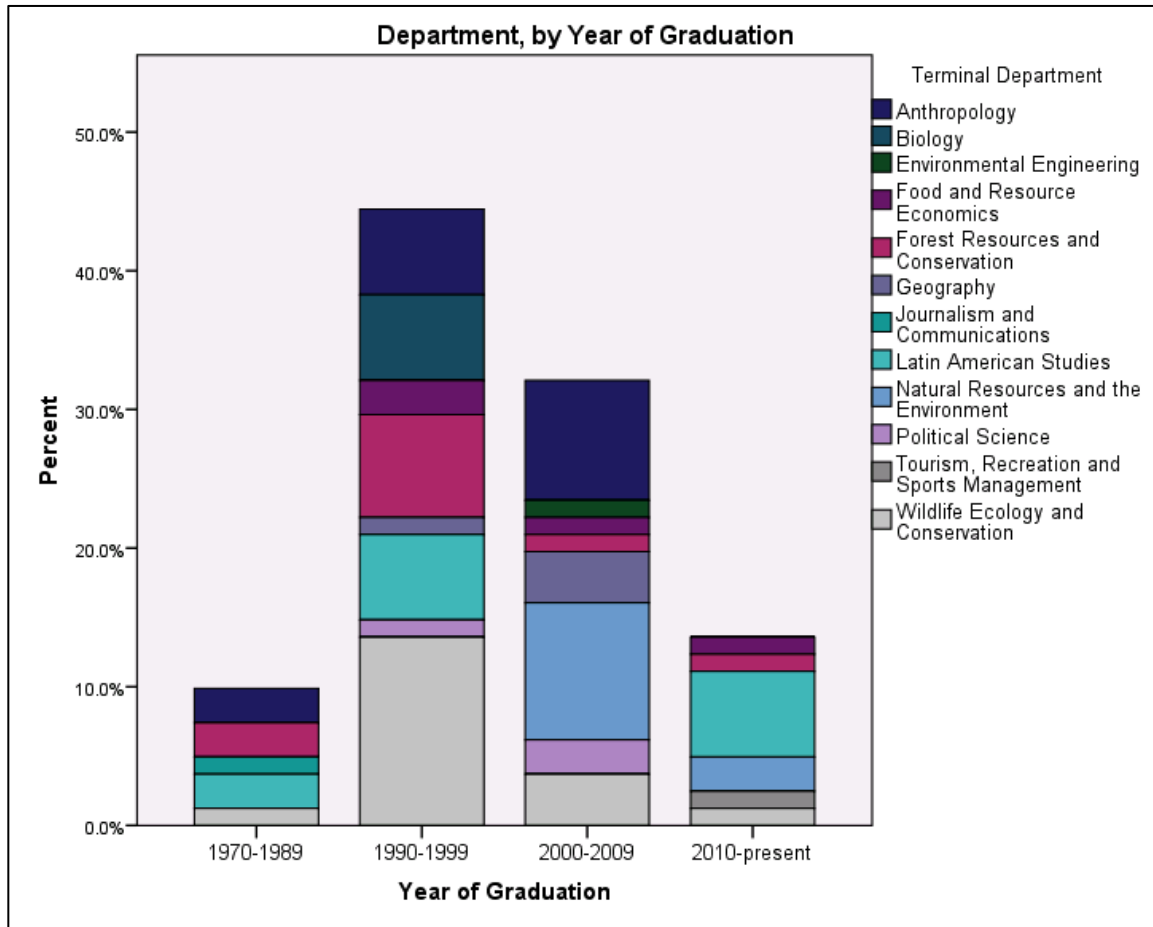


Figure 7. Year of graduation, showing alumni home departments.

Analysis of gender representation within departments is more evenly balanced. Most departments show a fairly even balance of men and women. The greatest imbalance was in WEC, but this only amounted to a difference in four individuals (11 men vs. 7 women). Similarly, even in those departments represented entirely by one gender, the numbers are too small to draw any conclusions regarding gender differentiation. Political science, for example, was represented entirely by 3 men. On the other hand, several departments were represented by only one woman.

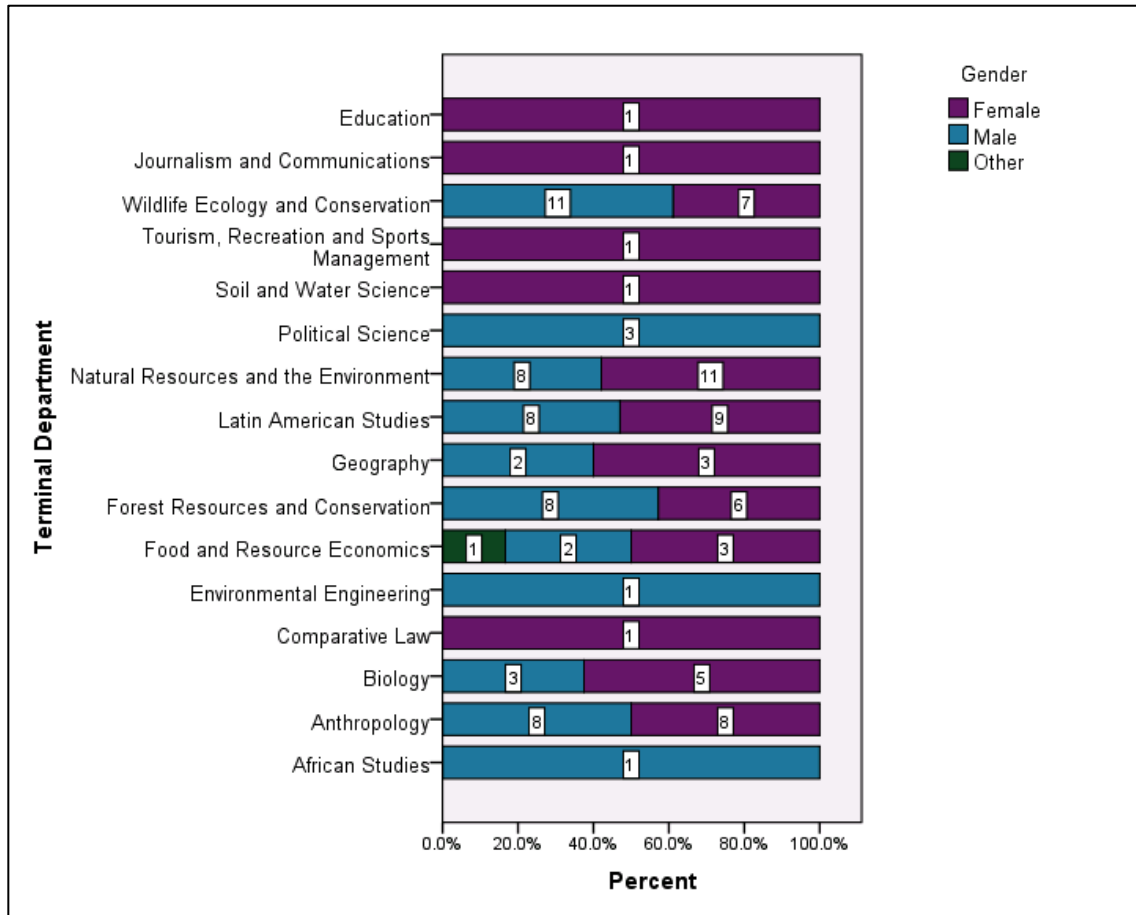


Figure 8. Gender balance within departments represented at TCD and related programs.

Analysis of department by region of origin shows which subjects alumni chose to study based on where they came from. In the 2008 survey, students from the US were more likely to study anthropology, forest resources and conservation or natural resources and the environment, whereas those from Latin America preferred to study Latin American Studies or wildlife ecology and conservation. However, in the current 2014 survey, US students made up 71% of the respondents from the School of Forest Resources and Conservation, whereas they comprised only 56% of the students coming to TCD from Anthropology. Students from Latin America were well represented in all the biggest departments, and particularly in Latin American Studies, with 59% of respondents in this category coming from Latin America. The only exception was SFRC, with only 14% of its students coming from Latin America, and these from the region that includes Mexico and Central America.

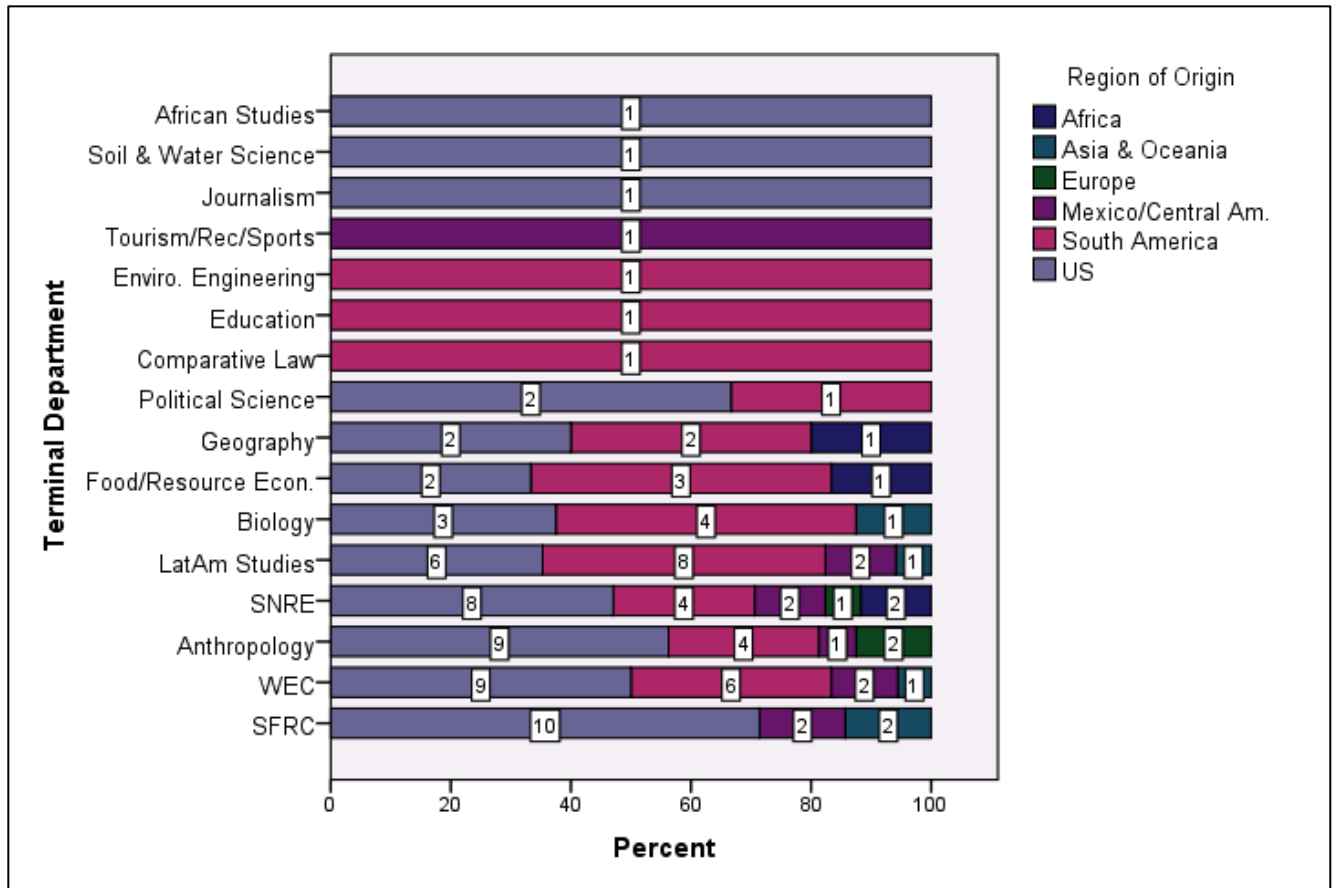


Figure 9. Region of origin as represented within departments. The numbers indicate how absolute numbers of respondents reporting from each region within each department.

Program participation and support

Respondents to the survey participated in the entire range of interdisciplinary conservation and development programs. The most populated program was TCD, with 99 alumni respondents. However, 21 respondents came from the Program of Studies in Tropical Conservation, 13 alumni were from the Working Forests in the Tropics Program, and from one to six alumni each represented the remainder of the programs.

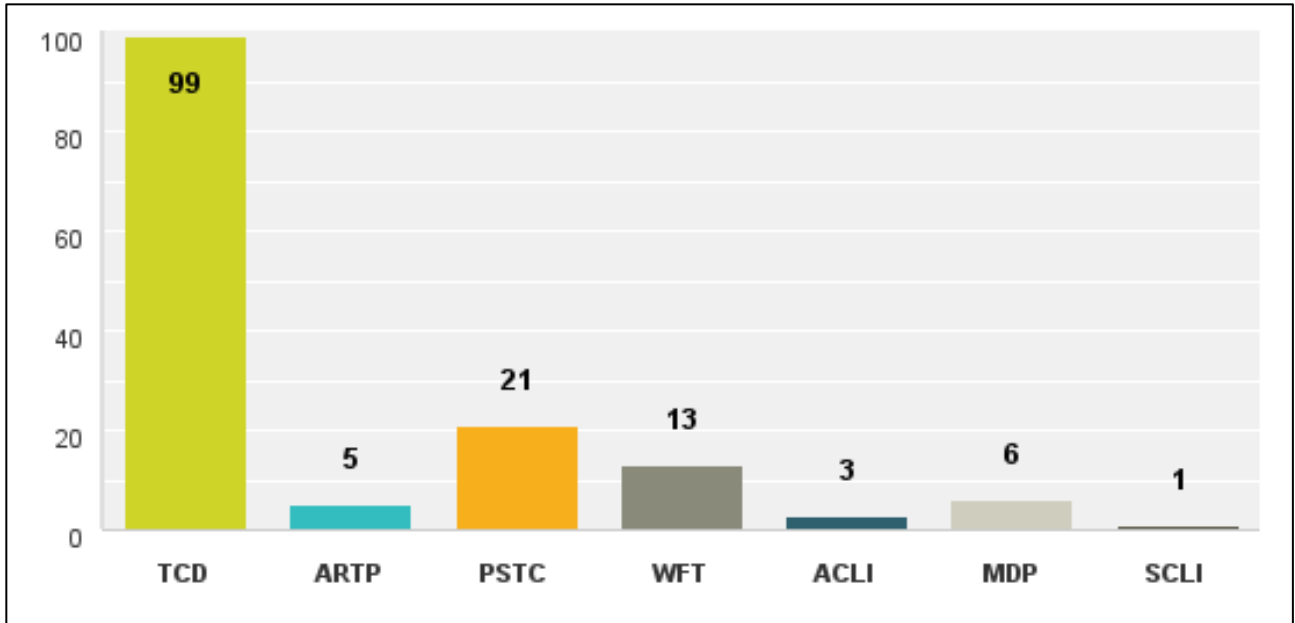


Figure 10. Participation in TCD and related programs. See page 1 for definition of acronyms.

Alumni also participated in a variety of elements of their selected programs. Over 60% received a certificate or concentration through TCD, and close to 90% took TCD classes. Of the non-curricular programs, Tropilunch and the Conservation Development Forums were most popular, with a combined 84% participation. Fifty-four percent of respondents participated in informal activities such as TCD Bingo, Taste of the Tropics, or other student group activities. Finally, 32% of respondents participated in a working group affiliated with TCD or one of the related programs.

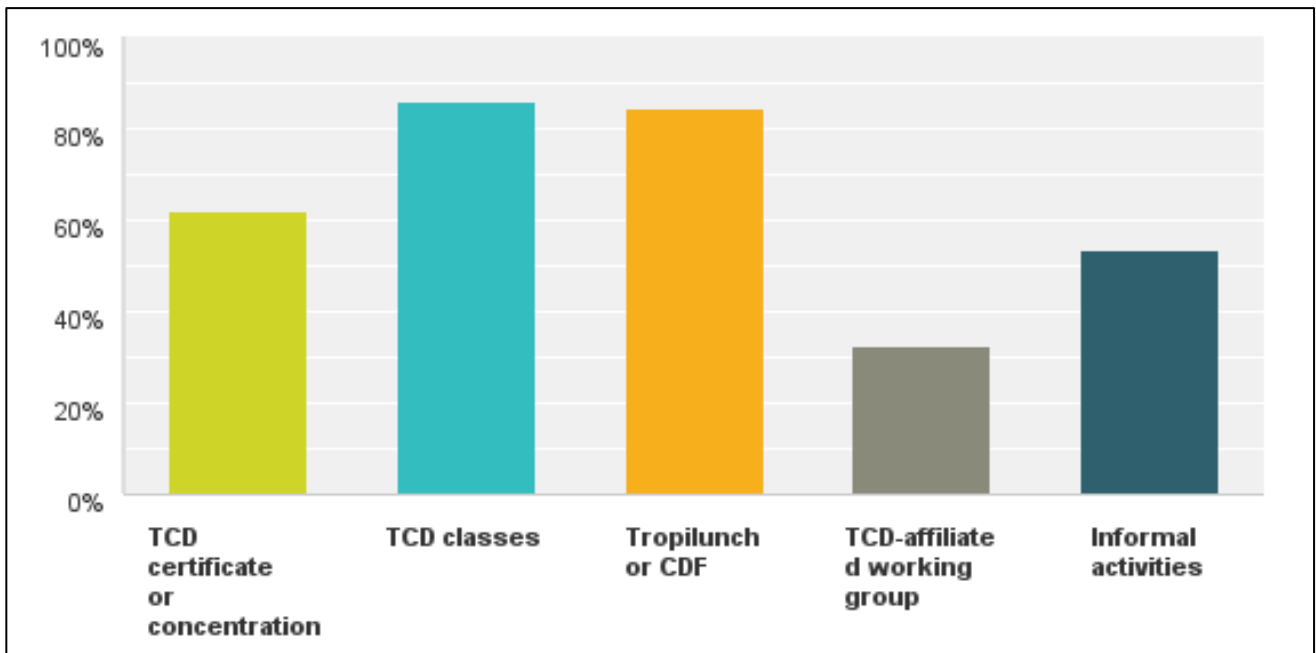


Figure 11. Participation in various curricular and extracurricular programs.

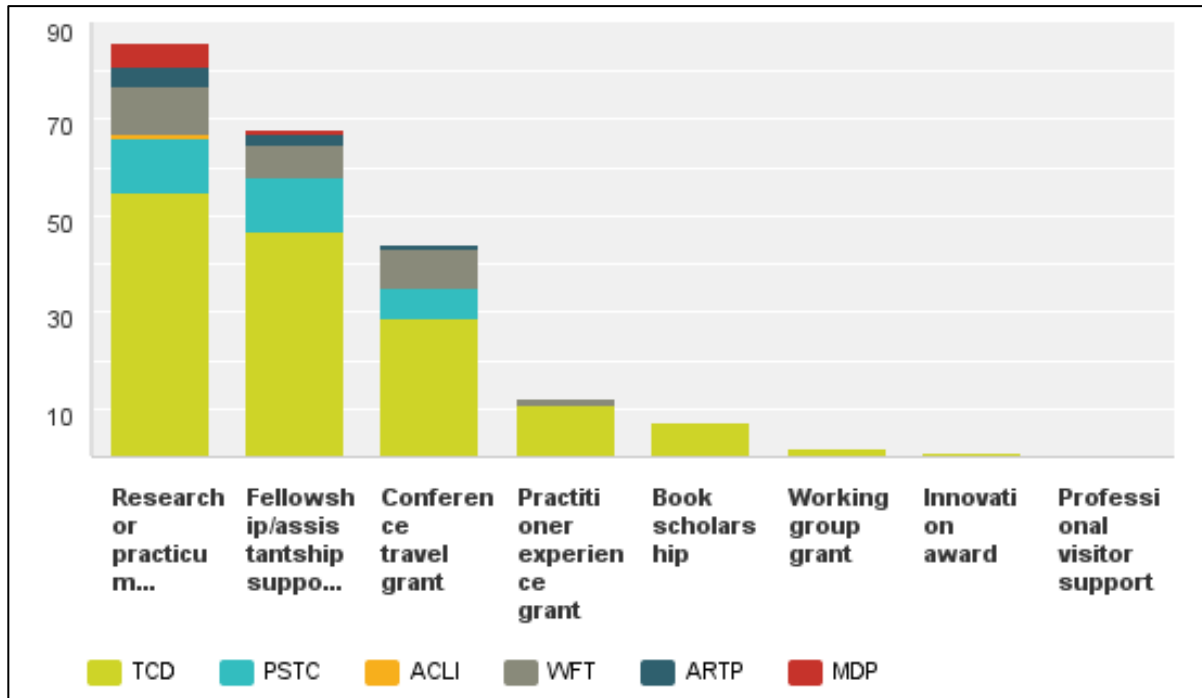


Figure 12. Types of funding received, as correlated with the program alumni were enrolled in (Y-axis shows number of individuals who received each type of funding).

In terms of support received by alumni, the most common type of funding overall came in the form of research grants or practicum support. Fellowships and assistantships were also common. However, the type of support received was differentiated based on region of origin. For example, alumni from Latin America were more likely to receive fellowship or assistantship support, whereas those from the US more frequently received research and practicum support. In fact, US alumni received research and practicum support almost 2 to 1 over Latin American alumni (45:25). The reverse disparity in fellowship and assistantship support was much less acute (32:27).

How Did We Do?

One of the primary aims of this survey was to gauge the success of the TCD program in terms of student recruitment, student support, and overall alumni satisfaction. In addition to their support for the professional and academic competencies, alumni expressed strong satisfaction with their experience in TCD and related programs. When asked whether TCD or related programs contributed to alumni decisions to attend UF, and whether the program contributed positively to their experience here, alumni overwhelmingly responded “agree” or “strongly agree.”

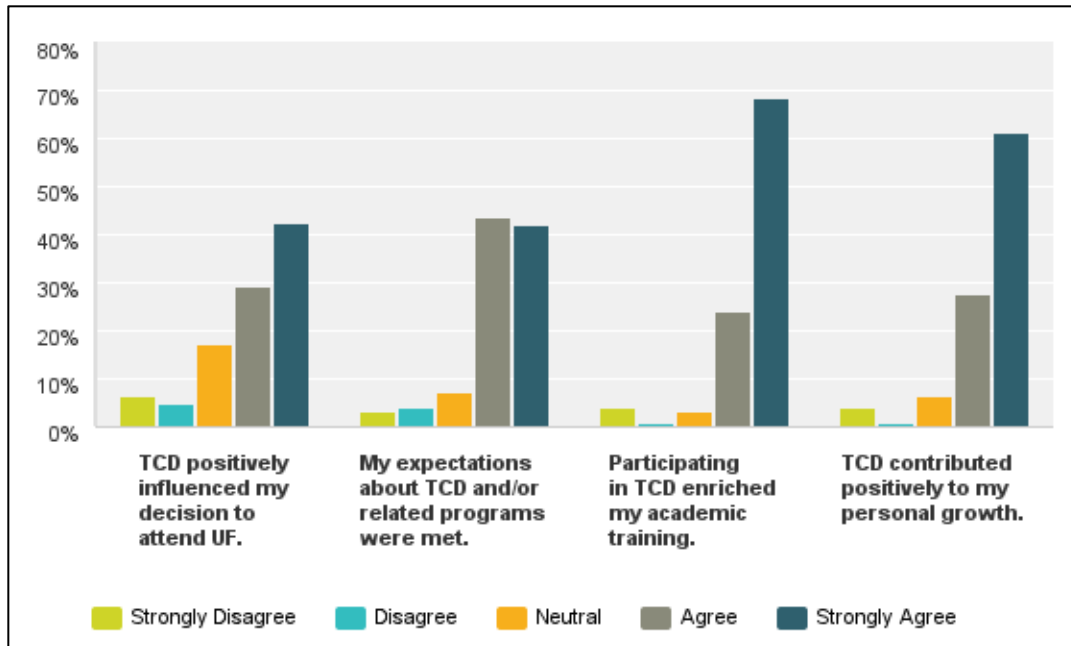


Figure 13. Alumni satisfaction with program experience.

What exactly did alumni like about TCD and related programs? We asked them to identify three things they liked and three they disliked. Out of 127 respondents, 57 mentioned they liked the diversity of the student and faculty community. Fifty-three mentioned the interdisciplinarity of the program; 49 liked the sense of community; 46 specifically liked the curriculum and programming; and 44 liked the applied and practical nature of the program.

On the contrary, we received far fewer responses to the question “Name three things you disliked.” Most of the responses tended to be idiosyncratic with few overarching themes. Seventeen respondents considered the geographic focus to be too limited, and 13 considered the financial support inadequate.

Another factor that we can use to gauge the success of TCD and related programs is the match between academic training and professional placement. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the programs and related professional fields, we asked alumni to gauge both their academic training and their professional careers on the spectrum from biophysical to social sciences. We found that in their graduate training, almost equal numbers of respondents (40%) cited either the biophysical or the social sciences, with a smaller number (22%) claiming an even balance between the two. In their careers, however, this balance shifted dramatically, with close to 50% of respondents saying that their work was weighted more heavily toward the social sciences, 27% claiming an equal mix of the two, and 26% saying that their work was primarily or entirely in the biophysical sciences. These results indicate that greater emphasis on social sciences and related skill sets may be beneficial in preparing students for successful careers in tropical conservation and development. These results are strongly reflected in alumni recommendations for how to better prepare future graduates.

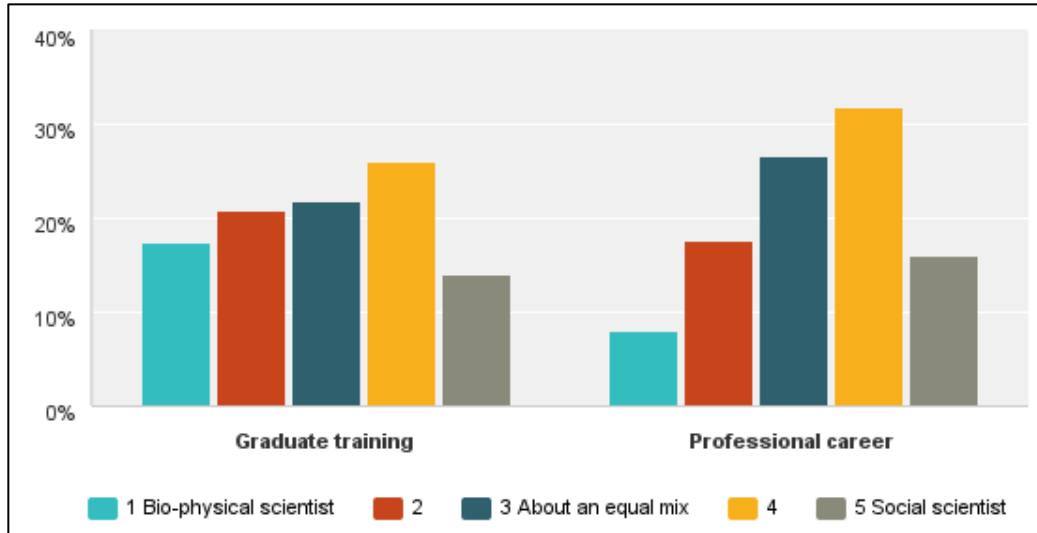


Figure 14. Training and career, on the spectrum from biophysical to social sciences.

Where did they go? Where are they now?

Patterns of alumni research and career.

Brazil remains the most frequently studied country by TCD graduates, with Peru, Bolivia, Mexico and the US close behind. The word cloud on the cover of this report shows all countries where alumni did student research as part of one or both of their degree programs at UF. The size of the word in the cloud reflects the frequency that this country appeared in the list. Alternatively, the pie chart at right shows where alumni have chosen to make their home. Over 56% currently live and work in the US, slightly more than the percentage who originated in the U.S., indicating that some

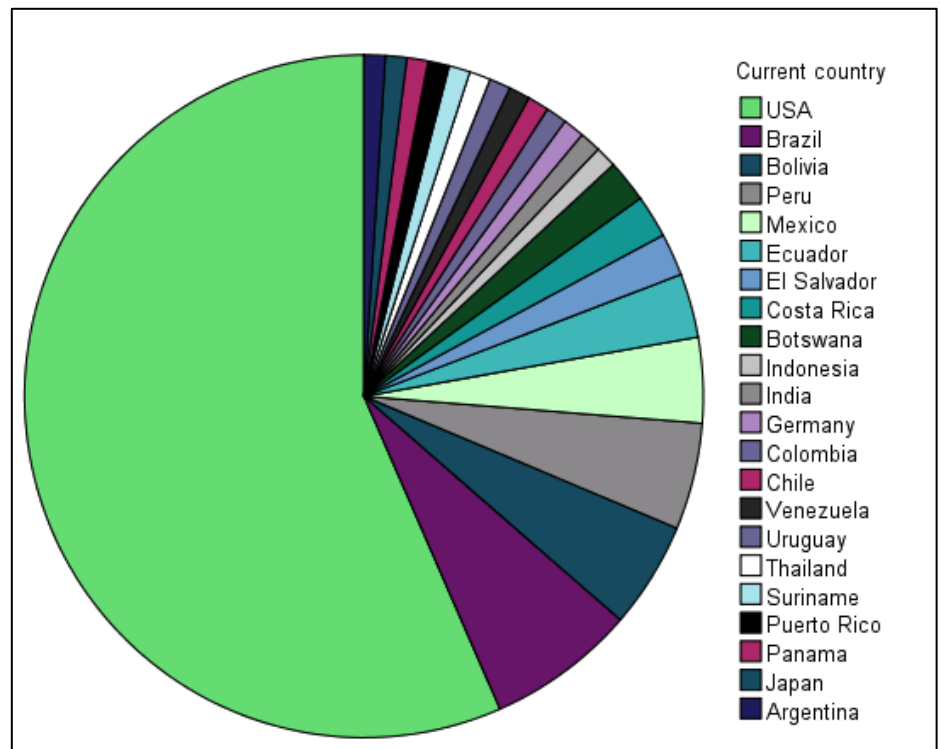


Figure 15. Current locations of alumni respondents.

international students have found work in the U.S. Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Mexico and Ecuador host the next largest shares of TCD alumni.

The largest number of alumni have continued on in academia since completing their degrees, while large numbers of others have gone into NGO and government work. Thirty percent of our graduates say that they are primarily scientists and researchers; about 25% say that their main job is professor. Another 25% work in program management of some sort, either as president or executive director of an organization, or as program director, manager or coordinator.

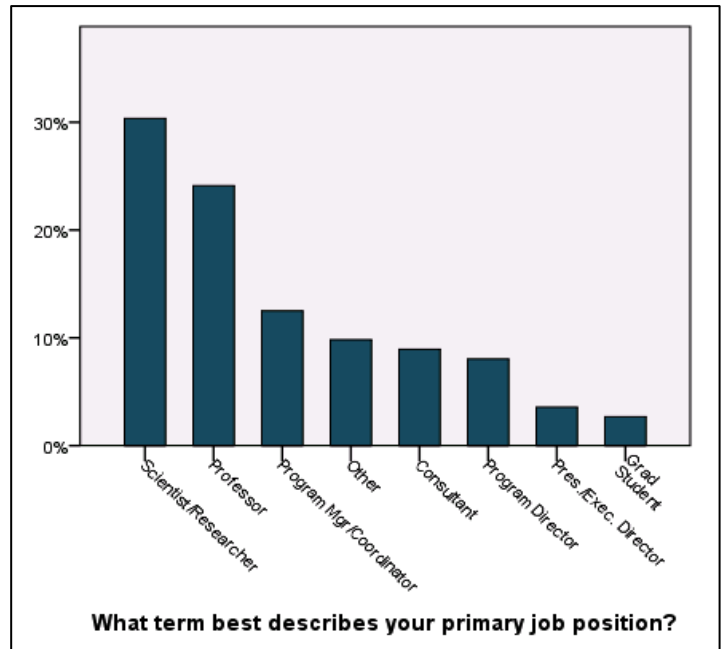
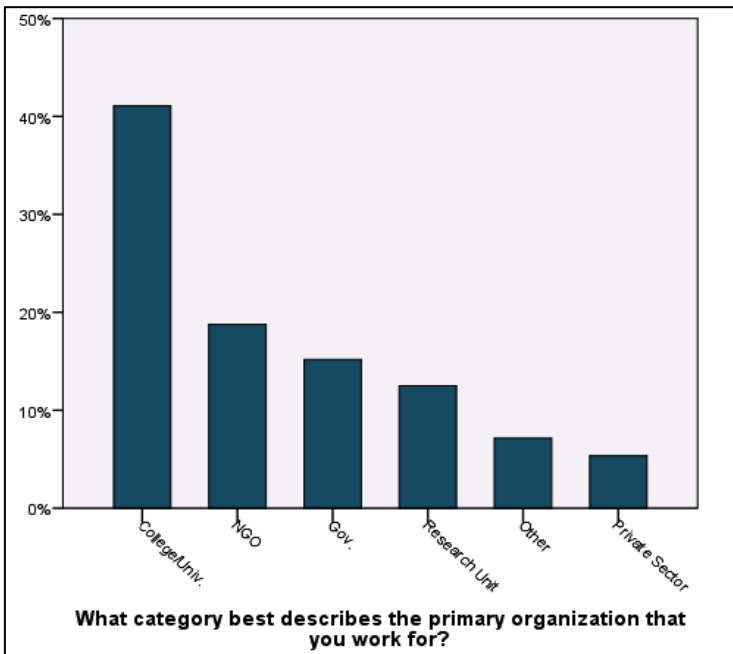


Figure 16a & b. Current careers (organization and position) of alumni respondents.

Years of experience

Alumni from UF's assorted conservation and development programs boast an impressive 1175 years of professional experience, based on 109 responses to this question. Graduates reported an average of 11 years of experience, with some boasting 30+ years of experience as conservation and development professionals.

Trends in the Field

With their many years of combined experience, our alumni represent a treasure trove of knowledge about current issues in the field of conservation and development. We asked them about these trends, with regards to both research and academic training.

What are the current issues in research that TCD needs to address to meet future challenges in the field?

Climate Change

Once again, our alumni responded with a resounding voice on this issue (32%). Alumni recommended the study of climate change in itself and in relation to its many subsidiary issues: species loss, adaptation, disaster-related impacts, water, desertification, mitigation, leadership, communication, ecosystem and agriculture resilience, disease ecology, ecological niche modeling, and social impacts.

No other issue came close to the importance of climate change in the responses to this question. The closest were economy (9 respondents or 11%), agriculture (8), and the engagement and empowerment of local people (7). Other themes that arose included Asia and China, data sharing and communication, interdisciplinarity, globalization and urbanization.

What are the current issues in academic and professional training that TCD needs to address to meet future challenges in the field of tropical conservation and development?

Finance, economics and business management

The most common theme in responses to this question was around both theoretical and practical issues of the economics and finance of conservation and development (20 out of 95 responses). This included various aspects of political economy, the environmental and social impacts of economic development, the importance of poverty alleviation, how to finance conservation initiatives, community-corporate partnerships in conservation, the macro- and micro-economics of conservation, and even business management and fundraising. The distribution of these answers along two spectra—from the benefits of development to the dangers of it, and from community to global-corporate— suggest that our alumni take a variety of stances on this issue. However, the prominence of these issues in our alumni responses indicate that money, and the skills to raise it and manage it well, are important, and perhaps overlooked, topics of training in the TCD field.

It is noteworthy that with regard to TCD's involvement in this field, the Department of Food and Resource Economics represents a steady but small percentage of TCD (as represented by our alumni respondents), and that the Business School is not represented at all. There is an active social entrepreneurship program in UF's Warrington College of Business Administration that has been advertising courses through the TCD listserv, but this program remains officially

unaffiliated with TCD, and the unique scheduling structure of the Warrington program may serve to preclude active involvement of students from other disciplines.

Climate change

Running a close second to financial issues, and a far more consistent response, was climate change. The phrase “climate change” was far and away the most frequently used phrase in the responses to this question. Respondents elaborated on this topic to include the science behind global warming as well as its many corollary issues: the science underlying climate initiatives such as carbon sequestration and biofuels; vulnerability and adaptation; sea-level rise; and assisted migration of species. The unanimity of voice with which our alumni spoke on this issue makes the clarion call a loud one.

Political economy and ecology

Closely related to and often overlapping issues of finance and economics was the call for training in issues of political economy and ecology (14 of 95 responses). Wrote one respondent, “There is a current trend to focus on large-scale market-driven processes, such as commodity markets and infrastructure and extractive investments. A broad understanding of these processes is necessary for all, and some should be able to focus deeper in understanding beef, soy, oil palm, hydrocarbon, mineral markets & value chains; infrastructure development standards & governance; government structures and decision-making processes behind infrastructure, extractives, and agribusiness.”

One unique and strongly worded answer reads thus: “TCD needs to do the opposite of what WWF is doing and move more strongly back to science-based conservation and development. Poverty needs to be addressed more fully because without poverty improvement there is zero possibility of conservation. Agriculture and the agricultural landscape needs to become the main biome of concern for TEC [TCD?] students because in the developing world it is the crux of where conservation and development happen. A stronger connection needs to be made between science and policy.”

And yet another voice that shouldn’t be overlooked: “[TCD] needs to take a look at ‘post-development’ in its approach to development & conservation. From what I understand, there is a re-emergence to human rights approach (right to food, right to land, etc.) in development. One can argue that this has always been a component of political ecology, but, this time around, it is quite different. Foreign aid (from the EU and other entities) and free enterprise investments are being held accountable to human rights standards in their pursuit of economic development. TCD as an entity needs to make its students aware of these ‘new global standards’ which affect conservation and development.”

Other

Other important themes reiterated much of what alumni said in their answers to other questions. These themes include communication, community outreach and collaboration, interdisciplinarity, professional skills, and collaboration and teamwork (11-12 respondents mentioned each of these categories). Other less common but emergent themes (6-8 respondents each) include funding, policy, data analysis and management skills, adaptation, and agriculture and food issues. Some interesting responses in these categories:

- “Leadership (that encompasses humility, collaboration, adaptability); commitment to knowledge exchange with local stakeholders at multiple scales; outcome mapping; evaluating the outcomes/impacts of research.”
- “Working with teams is more important than ever. Students should expect to share data, and should understand some of the issues behind data sharing online, including metadata standards and protocols, open journals, and big collaborative databases (GenBank, etc.).”
- “Global initiatives for example REDD or voluntary carbon markets and how to integrate them into local projects. Often TCD did a good job at looking at small projects but did not help students integrate them into global initiatives where funding is. A course on obtaining funding for NGOs and local projects from global funding sources would be great.”

Gender?

Reviewers of this and related documents noted the absence of “gender” as a theme in the survey results, either as a training priority or a pressing issue for future research. This omission is noteworthy because of the significant contributions to gender-related research made by core TCD faculty, as well as the historical significance of this topic in TCD training and research programs.

In fact, gender was explicitly mentioned nine times in the survey results, reflecting the interests of four individual respondents. Five of these nine instances reflect the current work or research interests of two respondents. Three people mentioned gender as an aspect of their TCD training that they liked or that they continue to use in their careers. Only one person mentioned gender as an ongoing priority for training in the TCD field, and no one explicitly named gender as a research priority. There are issues mentioned throughout the survey results that implicate gender as a central concern—overpopulation, social change, leadership style and communication, to name a few—and yet, the gender aspect of these multifaceted issues was not identified by respondents.

Assuming that gender has not ceased to be an issue of significance in the field, we pose several hypotheses for the dearth of attention to this important issue in our survey results:

- Gender continues to be a “ghetto-ized” subject; research and practice in this area continue to be defined as “women’s issues” and are relegated to women, women and development programs, and women’s studies departments. Masculinity as a topic of gender inquiry, and its importance in issues of culture and social organization, as well as social, environmental and economic change, are rarely investigated.
- The even gender balance of the TCD program, perhaps reflected more broadly in academia and in the conservation professions where most TCD alumni are employed, may mask the ongoing importance of gender as a topic of concern in the landscapes and communities where conservation and development programs play out.
- Gender theory, at least as perceived by the broader public, is dominated by activist models of inquiry and engagement that don’t articulate with the requirements of objective science nor with demands for culturally sensitive community engagement.

Given the validity of any and all of these hypotheses, it would seem that at least part of the problem stems from a failure of the curriculum to do several things:

- Integrate training in gender issues throughout the curriculum;

- Foreground gender as a suitable topic for research, and advance theoretical frameworks appropriate to its investigation;
- Promote an understanding of the ways in which a lack of explicit attention to gender in the design, practice and promotion of conservation and development schemes can contribute to the unwitting dissemination of Western forms of gendered action and male privilege;
- Problematize gender as an issue pertaining to both men and women—masculinity as well as femininity.

How do we get there from here?

In order to get a sense of what works, and what doesn't, in the current and past program, we asked alumni two questions:

1. Please describe three ways that you have used your TCD training in your professional career.
2. What could the TCD program have done to better prepare you for your post-UF life?

What works

The answers that we received to the first question addressed it in a variety of ways. Some people mentioned an aspect of the TCD curriculum that they subsequently used, some people mentioned an aspect of their current lives which makes use of their training here, and some answers bridged both the UF and post-graduate worlds. In answer to the first question, the most common themes we derived were interdisciplinarity (38 responses or 14%) and participation in the TCD network (30 responses or 11%).

Professional Skills

Taking a step back to look at broader themes, one very clear picture that emerges is the importance of hands-on skills-based training. In particular, alumni favored those interpersonal skills such as conflict management and collaboration that are not only part of the classroom curriculum—many respondents did mention Jon Dain by name—but that are built in to the TCD experience. These skills include collaboration, communication, conflict management, facilitation, leadership, teamwork, cultural competency, and adult education and trainers' training skills. Combined, these categories netted a whopping 57 responses (21% of all responses to this question).

Responses indicated that alumni are actively using these skills in their careers. "I use hands-on/experiential learning approaches which were utilized in many TCD courses in the university courses I teach and in the trainings I do for community health workers who collaborate with me in research," wrote one respondent. Said another, "Ice-breakers! TCD's approach to group sessions and workshops have been useful in the workshops I run (although not part of my formal training...)." Cultural competency, in particular, is a skill that many students gain through their interactions with the diverse TCD community. "I felt confident to interact with researchers/professionals from diverse backgrounds after such a positive experience with the TCD group," wrote one person.

Many alumni are using these skills directly, for example, in facilitating meetings and dealing with conflicts in the field, while others are passing this knowledge on through trainings with various agency partners, as well as in the classroom. Other hands-on skills were mentioned as well, for example, the ability to give a presentation, to write a proposal, and to raise funds.

Holism and Interdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinarity is a theme that tops the list again and again throughout the survey as an aspect of the TCD program that alumni value, as well as an ongoing priority in training and research. In response to the question at hand, it garnered 38 responses. If you include those who mentioned TCD's holistic social and environmental approach, the number jumps to 51 (19% of responses to this question).

"TCD has helped me view environmental problems from a wider point of view rather than from a limited quantitative mechanistic view," wrote one alum. "I work with land use change and TCD has made it easier for me to integrate social variables into this topic." Another: "Most importantly, as a natural scientist, I continue to engage with and learn from rigorously trained social scientists." Another said that their training gave them the "ability to work with people from multiple disciplines, cultures, backgrounds, professional arenas (academic and non-academic)."

Networking

Another of the most common threads running throughout survey responses is the importance of networking, both within the broader TCD network but also beyond, using TCD relationships as a platform. This was the third most common response we received to the question "How are you using your TCD training in your career?" "TCD alumni provide a ready base of contacts in many international conservation organizations," wrote one alum. "I made lifelong contacts that have helped me for decades now," wrote another. "I continue to rely on the network of people I went through the program with for information and expertise." "Network of faculty and alumni are EVERYWHERE in my field."

Walking the Talk

As to how they've put their training into practice, most respondents mentioned teaching (28). Given how many of our alumni are employed in academia, it makes sense that they are using their training in their own teaching careers.

Second to teaching, the forum that alumni are using their TCD education in the most is in program or project development and management. Fifteen alumni responses mentioned that they are using their training to develop new initiatives and new programs, often based on the TCD model or on the collaborative and participatory approaches that are espoused at TCD. One respondent reported having created a similar multi-disciplinary program at their own university; another "developed a similar TCD conceptual structure in a USAID-HED funded project in Peru." Others built or helped create and implement ecosystem conservation strategies, research programs, cooperative agreements, and conservation programs.

What can be improved

“What could the TCD program have done to better prepare you for your post-UF life?”

Answers to this question were very instructive. We coded 90 responses into 29 categories, many of which were somewhat idiosyncratic but all of which held suggestions that were specific and actionable.

The most common themes to arise from these answers were: professional skills training, career counseling, networking opportunities and more alumni inclusion.

Professional skills training: Finance and economics, management training, negotiation and project design

Eighteen respondents (out of 90) mentioned some variation on the need for better training in non-academic professional skills, and more hands-on practice of such skills. We found seven sub-themes under this heading: finance and accounting, funding, hands-on skills training, management training, negotiation, and project design.

One alum called for “more management preparation. I went straight from the sheltered academic world of UF to a conservation management position at an NGO, and I was ill prepared for management decisions. More training about fundraising beyond writing proposals, such as comprehensive fundraising campaigns, donor relationships and cultivation, etc.”

This call for training in financial management beyond simple grant writing was echoed by others who called for training in conservation finance, project finance, basic accounting, and micro-enterprise development. Wrote one alum, “If at all possible in an academic environment, it would have been neat to have more exposure to project design and budget preparation, as well as to an overview of types of donors & donor requirements (maybe not enough for a full course, but a couple of workshops?).”

One of these responses overlapped with a call for training in ethics—arguably yet another professional skill demanded in this particular marketplace: “Even more practical skills training, e.g. application of the skills we learned in a real life setting, e.g. a Florida community. Also perhaps something about professional ethics: an oil company asks you to do a social impact assessment in an indigenous community. You know they do not care about the community and just want to move forward, and hence need the SIA completed. If you do it you contribute to the company moving into the community; if you do not do it they will hire someone else and you do not have any opportunity to try make things better.”

Career Counseling

Those responses that fell under the category “career counseling” (13 responses or 13% of responses to this question) were fairly consistent in the call for assistance in developing a career plan, contacts, and skills specific to different sectors. One person suggested that the program could have “offered a course in professional development where students focused on preparing for their career. This could include determining what sector is right for the student—academic, industry, government—and preparing job application materials appropriate for that sector.”

Another “model” answer incorporated many themes: “I think an entry-level, comprehensive course on conservation professional skills in the field would have been very helpful for me. A course that gives a sweeping (not necessarily deep) overview of the processes and skills involved in project initiation (e.g., funding acquisition, initiating collaboration with field sites), project management, leadership role, conflict resolution, etc. For most of us who do field research, substantial field leadership and project management skills are an essential

building block of our success in dissertation research and beyond, but I felt I went through this challenging process by self learning and self-reliant trial and error. A platform to prepare new students who may have had limited experience in being a crew leader and project manager may be very helpful.” Answers like this (and there are many) are instructive not only in the content of the answer and the specificity of the suggestion, but in the commitment to the program indicated by the fact that alumni took the time to consider the questions and develop thoughtful and insightful answers.

Related to this theme is the category “professional landscape,” in which several alumni expressed an interest in seeing a greater exploration of how various agencies work—and how they work together—or not. This theme emerged from some very clear suggestions:

- “It might be interesting to have seminars/workshops discussing differences in professional interactions/work environments/communication styles between countries/cultures (e.g. some places are more hierarchical, some are more relaxed, preferred presentation styles can be succinct or detailed).”
- “It would have been useful to see how agencies, NGOs, donors, and others interact and cooperate to set conservation priorities and implement projects.”
- “Prepare students to deal with the business mentality of organizations outside the university and how to convince NGO and Private management that doing things the right way may take more time but is worth it.”

Networking Skills and Opportunities

Thirteen percent of respondents suggested that TCD should provide some training in networking, as well as greater opportunities for such, in order to ease the transition from student to professional life and, for some, the return to their home country in Latin America. This is considered a core skill to some of our alumni: “Anyone working in the field of tropical conservation and development should probably have some training in fundraising and networking,” wrote one.

More Alumni Inclusion

Many alumni would like to see more alumni inclusion in the program, suggesting that they have much to offer current students, or that they themselves would benefit from continued contact either socially or professionally. Some suggested more alumni involvement in classes, offering internships or other research or training opportunities. Some of these answers overlapped with “networking” and “career counseling” issues. Wrote one respondent, “Career hunting is harder and harder. I know that word of mouth and peer-to-peer networking is a good source of jobs. But I wonder if creating some sort of register of TCD alums might be a good way to help some graduates continue to network. Maybe a space to post resumes and be able to contact people would be good. This may be possible through platforms like LinkedIn.” Another person wrote, “An informal course on discussion of the workings and politics in NGOs nationally and internationally, inviting people from the field to talk of their experiences would be useful. Also, bringing in people who came from the TCD program to talk about their experiences (early, middle, and late) would have been useful.” One alum suggested that surveys and newsletters do not constitute sufficient outreach. “For instance,” this person wrote, “I sent an e-mail offering a grant for a TCD student to come to field work in my country and I never got a reply.” Oops.

Most succinctly put, from the point of view of this paper’s student author, was the suggestion “to better connect students with alumni and practitioners in the field in order to make connections for careers or experience to be successful post-TCD program.”

Which Means...

Alumni expressed an abundant interest in becoming more involved in the TCD program—as donors, mentors, guest lecturers, and advisors. First we asked if our alumni would be willing to give a talk at UF on current issues in conservation and development related to their work. 110 of our sample of 129 answered this question, and of those, 82% said “yes.”

Next, we asked if alumni would be more or less likely to:

- Submit to a TCD blog
- Host a TCD reception or symposium at a future conference
- Serve on a TCD alumni advisory board
- Contribute to an alumni fund to support TCD students
- Supervise a TCD student as an intern in their organization
- Host a TCD student as a researcher in their organization
- Serve on TCD faculty selection committees.

The results were strongly positive. Almost 75% of respondents would be somewhat or very likely to serve on a TCD advisory board. Over 60% were interested in supervising a TCD student intern, hosting a student researcher, or submitting to an alumni blog. Almost half (over 46%) were likely or very likely to contribute to a student support fund, and 48% would be somewhat or very likely to serve on a faculty selection committee. The following table details the responses to this series of questions.

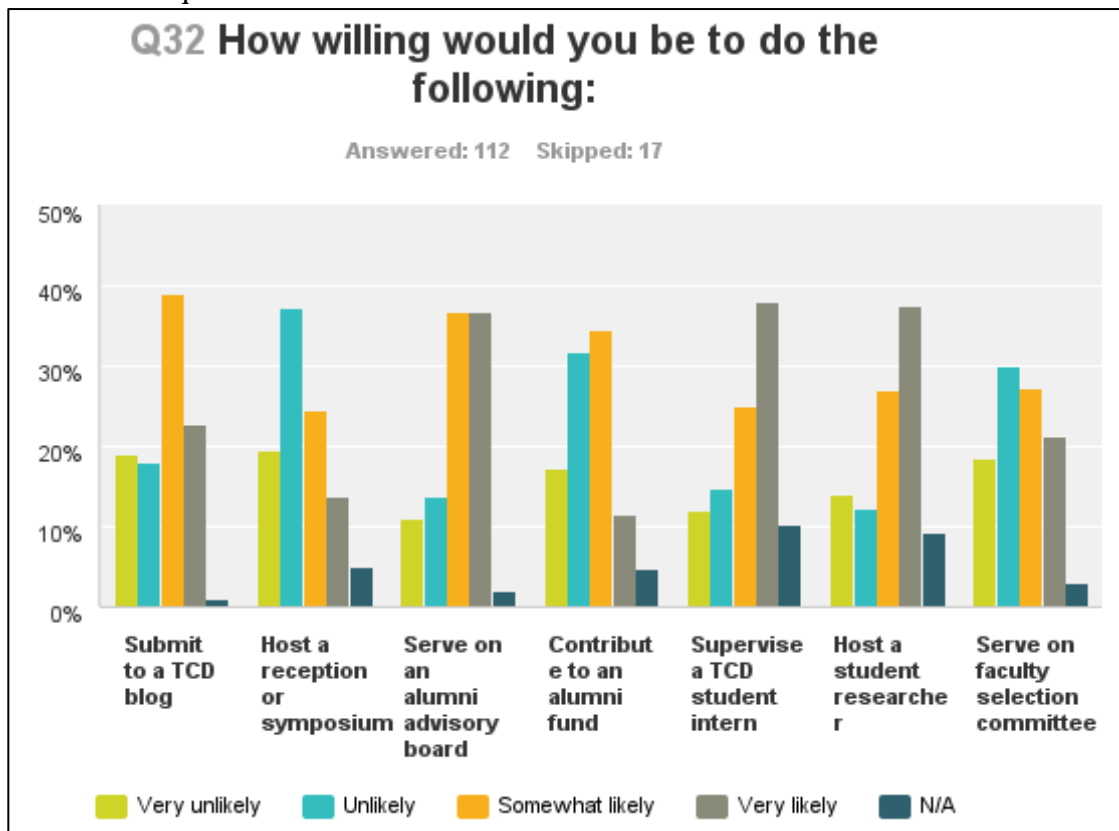


Figure 17. Alumni willingness to engage with TCD in several ways.

Finally, we asked alumni to suggest how they might like to be involved in TCD going forward. In keeping with earlier responses about the importance of networking, and specifically the value of the TCD network, almost 30% of respondents to this question suggested some variation on the establishment and maintenance of a stronger network or exchange of information, ideas, and contacts. One respondent suggested, “An alumni directory by country and organization/agency might be helpful for job seekers or those looking to obtain information about a particular country/topic.” Another creative idea: “Expand a network to TCD alumni exchange programs. Alumni from Brazil exchanging ideas/students/visits with alumni from Uganda, Chile, Mexico, Venezuela, etc. Joint training/research projects among TCD alumni, much more...” One respondent noted that their organizational policy prohibiting favoritism precludes them from supervising or hosting a TCD student. “However, I think that alumni can help give advice to students via email or web forum or over the phone, and I would be happy to do this. I think it would be great to have a section of the website for alumni to be able to network with each other and current students. This would be helpful for me and other alumni (i.e. to network with other alumni) and also helpful for the current students.”

And again, another “model” answer elaborated with care and insight: “Suggesting research topics to incoming students (especially master's students who have less time to develop a topic and have typically less research experience/perspective). This could be done by adding a ‘submission box’ on your website. Then TCD could advertise this. The box would allow either anonymous suggestions or the submitter could identify themselves and other possible contacts/resources to support the research. Another suggestion is to use the network of alumni, like myself, who aren't working in the tropics at present to help formulate and design comparative research frameworks. I work for a US public agency and have actually been *SHOCKED* at how many parallels there are and to learn that we have just as many challenges/constraints/opportunities but the balance & drivers may be different. So I am constantly reminded of how rich ‘exchanges’ and ‘comparisons’ can be. TCD could make better use of its network by pairing students from the tropics (many of whom go back to serve in high-level science/policy positions within their governments) with those of us in similar North American positions. I think it would be mutually beneficial and provide a different type of support, perspective to graduate students from tropical countries.”

Other suggestions for future involvement were to meet or represent TCD at conferences; to mentor or advise students; to help recruit new students for TCD; and to help teach courses.

Conclusion

There are several outstanding findings that emerge from the results of this survey.

- The social sciences have continued to be more important in alumni careers, even when alumni's primary training was in biophysical sciences.
- While just over half our respondents claim a career as professors or researchers, a significant number have positions as program or project managers, executive directors and consultants, often in NGO, government and private sectors.
- In keeping with the strong placement of TCD alumni in applied settings, often in places where management skills and financial responsibility are critical factors, alumni have issued a strong call for better training in the business and management aspects of

conservation and development practice through increased focus on professional skills and management training and attention to finance and economics.

- Climate change is the single most important issue facing the conservation and development field.

TCD alumni represent a large body of professionals working in applied and academic fields connected with tropical conservation and development. They are generally very happy with their experience in TCD and related programs. Furthermore, they overwhelmingly express strong feelings of loyalty to the program and a desire to stay connected, to continue contributing to the program, and to continue networking with faculty and staff, students and other alumni. It would behoove the current tenants of the TCD program to actively engage with their alumni community. Not only does the program stand to gain financially from alumni willingness to contribute, but students stand to benefit from their mentorship, and everyone stands to benefit from the networking opportunities represented by this internationally-constituted cohort.

How do we do this?

Based on alumni responses to the survey, here are a series of ideas for how to actively engage with alumni going forward, and to make good on their recommendations:

- Create an alumni fund as another source of financial support for student training and research. Over 50% said they were somewhat or very likely to contribute to such a fund.
- Create and manage an online registry of alumni. This would serve multiple purposes including:
 - Provide easy-access documentation of certification in the program.
 - Allow both alumni and students to contact one another for the purposes of networking, job search, information exchange and more.
- Fast-track the development of a course in climate change and corollary issues, with an emphasis on the research, development and financing of mitigation schemes.
- Solicit and coordinate opportunities for student-alumni mentorship, as well as research and practicum placements with alumni in the field.
- Solicit alumni as guest lecturers or co-instructors in the classroom, or perhaps Tropilunch or other events. With care, planning and practice, this can be done by Skype or other tele-conferencing applications.
- Increase the presence of underrepresented departments that offer applied professional skills such as journalism and education, but especially economics and business management.
- Increase the visibility of, or create more offerings for, curriculum that offers training in practical professional skills as well as the hands-on application of this training.
- Create a TCD alumni blog through which alumni can update the network with news from the field, stories about their work, research ideas and proposals for students, and other current events.
- Engage alumni as members of an advisory board to guide TCD into the future.
- Solicit alumni to organize panels, symposia or social dinners at international conferences where TCD expects strong representation.