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Boston College to develop urban environmental science curriculum for use in urban high schools

Project supported by \$2.1 million NSF grant

CHESTNUT HILL, MA (10-31-06) -- The National Science Foundation (NSF) has awarded a three-year, \$2.1 million grant to an interdisciplinary group of Boston College faculty members to develop an urban environmental science curriculum, text book and multimedia system for use in America's urban high schools.

At least 50 high school science teachers and 5000 students also will be involved in the project over the life of the grant. A unique feature of this program is that the team includes Person Education as corporate partners, who will serve to publish and sustain the project after the grant is complete.

In addition, specialists from the Center for Applied Special Technology in Wakefield, Mass. will help to craft the curriculum so that it is accessible by the widest range of students possible.

The Boston College faculty team consists of Environmental Studies Director and Urban Ecology Institute Science Director Prof. Eric Strauss, Urban Ecology Inst. Executive Director Charles Lord, Lynch School of Education faculty members Assoc. Prof. Mike Barnett and Asst. Prof. Katherine McNeill, as well as collaborators from institutions across the country.

This grant will allow the team to build on the strength of their two previous NSF grants.

"During the three years of this grant, the team will build on the theme of urban field-based science education pioneered by the Urban Ecology Institute," said Strauss who added that the team will work closely with teachers in partner schools across the country to implement and evaluate the curriculum and then later scale the materials across the nation.

"The team is particularly excited about the opportunity to bring the fruits of this interdisciplinary Boston College partnership, which has transformed science education in Boston, to the national scale," said Strauss.

The mission of the BC Urban Ecology Institute is to promote the stewardship of healthy urban ecosystems by improving science and civic education for middle and high school youth and by working with urban communities to protect and transform natural resources.

The Institute consists of are scientists, educators and attorneys who research urban ecosystems, provide information to urban residents and policymakers, and work with the public schools to protect and restore urban natural resources.

The Urban Ecology Institute currently manages three key programs:

Urban Ecology Field Studies: UEI studies engage students from urban public schools in the scientific process by combining the immediate relevancy of urban backyards with basic scientific research. Built upon the educational process of inquiry, each study is framed around the question: What is the Health of Boston's Urban Ecosystem? In the end, this synthesis of science, education and urban ecosystems creates interesting, relevant studies for students to conduct.

In a partnership with the BC Environmental Studies Program, the UEI sponsors an ongoing study on the behavior of eastern coyotes in suburban areas including Revere, Newton and Barnstable, Mass. The study has provided a wealth of previously unknown information about how these creatures move, socialize and live peacefully in ecosystems dominated by humans.

The Natural Cities Program: The Natural Cities Program is conducting the first inventory of the urban ecosystem surrounding Boston – its trees, rivers, wildlife and open spaces – to help urban residents and policymakers better understand and protect the area's threatened natural resources.

Community Forest Partnership: A healthy urban forest can transform neglected communities into

vibrant communities, serve as a catalyst for restoring community social networks, provide significant environmental and public health benefits, and provide open spaces for recreation. The Community Forest Partnership provides opportunities for residents and community organizations in and around Boston to take advantage of these benefits by serving as stewards of their urban forest.

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For more information on the Urban Ecology Institute see <http://www.bc.edu/urbanecology>

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