

UGA to open nation's first School of Ecology July 1; John Gittleman named dean

Writer: Larry B. Dendy, 706/542-8078, ldendy@uga.edu

Contact: John Gittleman, 706/583-5547, jlg@uga.edu

Jun 22, 2007, 14:00Athens, Ga. –

The nation's first stand-alone academic school devoted specifically to the study of ecology will begin operation July 1 when the University of Georgia opens the Eugene P. Odum School of Ecology on its Athens campus.

Named for the late pioneering UGA professor known as the "father of modern ecology," the school will be the university's 16th academic school or college and will further cement UGA's reputation as a world-class center for research and teaching on ecological principles and processes.

The school is being created by reorganizing UGA's Institute of Ecology, which Odum founded in the 1950s and is internationally recognized for its holistic, interdisciplinary approach to ecosystem studies as championed by Odum.

John L. Gittleman, who has been director of the Institute of Ecology since last July, has been named dean of the school. Gittleman, whose expertise in global ecology includes species extinction, emerging diseases and conservation, came to UGA last year from the University of Virginia. He earned a D. Phil. degree in biology (equivalent to a Ph.D.) at the University of Sussex in England and is a Fellow of the Zoological Society of London.

"The creation of the School of Ecology is a historic commitment by the university to this essential field of study," said UGA President Michael F. Adams. "Environmental issues are key as we think about economic success and sustainability for our children and grandchildren.

"I'm extremely pleased that we were able to attract here from the University of Virginia someone of the capability of John Gittleman to lead the school," Adams added. "He will be a superb dean and will, through his and his faculty's efforts, further the unequalled work of Eugene Odum."

Arnett Mace, senior vice president for academic affairs and provost, said Gittleman "brings an impeccable scholarly record to this new position. This coupled with his administrative skills will enable him to provide leadership to build on the reputation of the Institute of Ecology to significantly advance the new school, the first in the United States."

In 2001, the Institute of Ecology was merged with UGA's School of Environmental Design to form the College of Environment and Design. Though part of the larger college, the faculties of both the institute and the environmental design school remained intact and this year both faculties agreed that the institute withdraw from the college and become a stand-alone school.

Expenses for starting the school will be minimal since it will be headquartered in the ecology building on UGA's south campus and use existing facilities and equipment for teaching and

research. The school will incorporate the institute's faculty, which includes 17 tenured faculty members, six non-tenure-track faculty, four faculty with joint appointments in other units and seven adjunct faculty members.

Gittleman said the Odum School will immediately be recognized as one of the nation's top research programs in ecological sciences based on the strength of its faculty and international stature. The National Research Council has ranked UGA among the top five institutions in ecological research and a survey by the Ecological Society of America also tabbed UGA as one of the country's top five universities in ecology. UGA was one of the first universities to offer undergraduate degrees in ecology.

The school also will be one-of-a-kind in America, Gittleman said. While many universities have departments of ecology, and some have schools that focus on the broader field of environmental studies, no other university has an independent, stand-alone school devoted specifically to ecology.

The school will maintain the Institute of Ecology's research focus on understanding fundamental scientific patterns and processes of ecology including such areas as species diversity, disease transmission, ecosystem structure, aquatic ecology and global environmental change. In addition to its undergraduate and graduate degrees in ecology, the school will provide undergraduate courses for other schools and colleges and will conduct public service work, primarily through its River Basin Center.

Odum, the school's namesake, was associated with UGA for more than 60 years prior to his death in 2002 at age 88. He wrote a dozen books, including *Fundamentals of Ecology*, considered a landmark in the field, and more than 200 scientific publications. Elected to the National Academy of Sciences, he was president of the Ecological Society of America and received the world's top prizes for ecological research.

Gittleman said the school will adhere to Odum's doctrine of a holistic approach to ecological studies, while strengthening and expanding in key areas such as community, evolutionary and ecosystem studies.

This means the school will continue to emphasize an interdisciplinary, collaborative approach to teaching, research and service by integrating expertise and resources from UGA's other schools and colleges including units not usually associated with ecology such as law, economics, anthropology and medical sciences, as well as public service units such as The Fanning Institute and the Carl Vinson Institute of Government.

The school also will work closely with the Academy of the Environment, a collection of more than 300 faculty members from throughout the university who share an interest in ecological and environmental issues.

The school will help expand UGA's international presence through research programs in other countries, especially research in tropical ecology conducted in rain forests in Costa Rica, Ecuador and Panama, Gittleman said.

For more information on the School of Ecology, see <http://www.ecology.uga.edu/>.