



THE MSE NEWSLETTER



March 2000, Issue 1

Welcome to the first McGill School of Environment (MSE) Newsletter.

This newsletter is to help keep you informed of upcoming seminars, events, outings, and announcements with which the MSE is involved. We will also include articles from MSE students, notices of events taking place on the downtown and Macdonald campuses, and with information on upcoming seminars to be given by academics and professionals

Should you wish to contribute to the newsletter, please contact the editor, Louise Decelles by fax at (514) 398-1643 or via e-mail: louise@mse.mcgill.ca. The MSE newsletter can be accessed through our website at: www.mcgill.ca/mse.

This first issue includes a few words from the Director of the MSE, Peter G. Brown. It has highlights from our student, Jean-Martin Fortier, regarding a recent winter camping trip quite a few students took to Mont St Hilaire late in January (Brrrr!!!), and an article on "MESS" by student, Raissa Marks. We also have a wonderful article from student, Noella Gray, who is currently participating in the Panama Field Semester.

Bienvenue au premier bulletin de l'École d'Environnement de McGill (MSE).

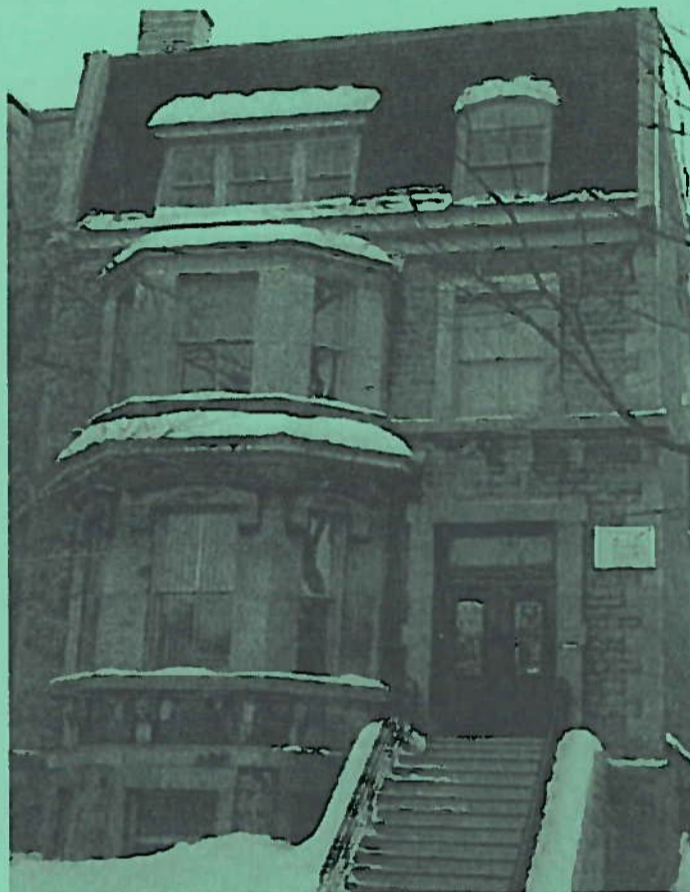
Ce bulletin est formé pour vous tenir au courant des événements, lectures, et annonces qui se passent à l'intérieur du MSE. Nous aurons des articles écrit par nos étudiants et professeurs, qui inclueront les événements sur les deux campus (centre-ville et Macdonald). Nous vous tiendrons au courant des séminars donnés par les académiques et professionnels.

Si vous désirez contribuer aux prochains bulletins, veuillez communiquer avec l'éditeur, Louise Decelles, par facsimilé au (514)398-1643, ou par courrier

électronique à: louise@mse.mcgill.ca. Vous pouvez visiter notre site web à www.mcgill.ca/mse.

Des petits mots du directeur du programme, Peter G. Brown, débiteraient cette publication. Nous avons aussi des étudiants qui ont passé un weekend de "camping" au Mont St-Hilaire en janvier passé (Brrrr!!!). Ce bulletin inclus un article sur le weekend par Jean-Martin Fortier et un autre de Raissa Marks sur le groupe "MESS". Nous avons aussi un article écrit par Noella Gray, étudiante présentement en immersion au Panama.

A very special thank you to everyone who made this newsletter possible; it could not have been done without your input, advice and patience. I hope you enjoy the articles.



A Message from the Director

Dear Friends and Members of the MSE Community:

Here is an update on some of the things that have happened at the MSE since we opened for classes in September of 1998. It reflects the dedication of students and faculty alike to build an institution that challenges the status quo, be a place where people care about the world around us and each other, and have some fun.

Many thanks to Louise Decelles for this excellent effort. Look for our next newsletter coming this spring.

Happy Spring,

*Peter G. Brown,
Director*



Raissa, Klara, Jean-Michel and Meaghan

Le camping à Mont Saint Hilaire par Jean-Martin Fortier

Notre fin de semaine au Mont Saint Hilaire fut vraiment extraordinaire! Comme une grosse famille nous avons, les vingt-six étudiants qui y étaient, fait du ski de de fond dans de la belle neige de montagne. Les "cook" designés avaient préparés de la bonne popotte et surtout des bonnes petites collations. Après le souper, nous sommes tous retournés jouer dehors, semblerait qu'il n'était pas permis d'aller jouer sur le lac (une histoire d'assurance), mais comme il n'y avait aucun adulte responsable avec nous (...) une intense partie de "Bulldog" c'est joué sur le lac. Sous la pleine lune certains se sont affirmés comme de très grand athletes! Finalement tout le monde c'est vraiment amusé ensemble, je crois que cette fin de semaine a vraiment permit aux étudiants de se connaître d'avantage entre-eux. De plus le manque de supervision a permis a certains de commencer une majestueuse guerre de bouffe, sans trop subir de réprimendes... Vraiment, ce fut une belle fin de semaine pour nous tous, à quand la prochaine?



The MESS takes McGill by Storm!
by Raissa Marks (U2 MSE student)

In its first year of existence, the McGill Environmental Students' Society (affectionately referred to as MESS) has done remarkable things. The MESS council is in place to coordinate activities, and to promote environmental awareness among its members. The MESS executive this year consisted of Klara Vodicka, Jean-Michel Cohalen, Mel Itzkovich, Jean-Martin Fortier, Meaghan Obee, and myself (Raissa Marks). The school year started off with a bang in the form of a samosa and punch party for faculty, staff, and students behind the MSE building at 3534 University Street. This gathering had two purposes: to meet all the new faces in the MSE, and to spread enthusiasm for the upcoming MESS events. The first of these events was an outing to Macdonald Campus. During this fun-filled day, MSE students walked through the woods on the campus, and got to visit a number of different points of interest there, while continuing to meet new friends in their program. The day finished off with a rousing game of soccer and lots of food. During the first semester, the MESS also organized a visit to the St. Michel Environmental Complex and a Holiday Potluck Party just before exams. Our second semester started off with the biggest MESS event of the year - a weekend on Mont Saint Hilaire. A great time was had by all, thanks to good food, good friends, and good outdoor fun! (Please see Jean-Martin's article above.) At the beginning of March, an outing to the Montreal Insectarium, Botanical Gardens, and Biodome took place. Also, a visit to a sugar shack is planned for late March. All in all, the MESS has succeeded in bringing together the students of McGill's newest program!



The Panama Field Study Semester: A Report from the Field
by Noella Gray

Dear Friends of the MSE,

We, the group of 25 students who are participating in the Panama Field Study Semester 2000, have now been here in "the field" for 10 weeks. Our time has been filled with a series of incredible experiences, both in and out of class - many seem to defy description, but I want to do my best to share them with you.

We spent the month of January learning about the ecology of Panama's many types of forests. After overcoming our initial fear of neurotoxic trees and biting insects, we became intimately acquainted with the joys and pains of working in tropical forests. Our experience with the wonders of biodiversity in the tropics ranged from the very smallest insects to the largest trees. One of the most interesting activities was our trip up the canopy crane at Fort Sherman, where we met a three-toed sloth face-to-face and encountered leafcutter ants dropping leaves to their friends on the forest floor over 50 m below. Also, like any good scientists, we dropped whatever we were doing for a monkey sighting!

Perhaps the most memorable part of the program to date was the trip at the end of January, to Kuna Yala, a self-governed indigenous territory. We had the incredible opportunity and privilege to live in the community of Ukupseni for three days, where the Dobbo Yala Foundation hosted a workshop for us on indigenous knowledge and resource management strategies. Culture shock took on entirely new meanings as we slept in hammocks in grass huts, used "washrooms" over the ocean, and tested unfamiliar cuisine. However this was quickly overcome as we participated in the community, playing with the children and learning a traditional Kuna dance. This community, where conservation is simultaneously a necessity and a luxury, certainly gave us a new outlook on the challenge of balancing human needs and environmental conservation.

In February we focused on human interactions with the environment, traveling to several different parts of Panama and a variety of sites, including farms, cattle ranches, health clinics, schools, factories, research stations and, of course, the canal. Peter Brown joined us for two days to visit several archaeological sites dating from the days of the Conquistadores back to 9000 BC. At the end of February we visited an area of Eastern Panama where deforestation, agriculture, and cattle ranching meet. Speaking

with local farmers and ranchers definitely added to our perspective on the complexities of these activities in the tropics.

Our most recent ventures involved a cultural experience of a different sort, as we took the week off to celebrate Carnaval. This crazy, country-wide party would require another report altogether - suffice it to say that we all took the week to unwind and are looking forward to whatever the next few weeks will offer. Hopefully everything is going well in Montreal, and we look forward to sharing stories with you when we get back in May.

Announcements

New Faculty:

We would like to take this opportunity to welcome Dr. Renée Sieber to the School of Environment. Renée received her PhD from Rutgers University in 1997 in Urban Planning. She joined us in September of 1999 and is an Assistant Professor in the Geography Department and the MSE. She teaches a course in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and her research, teaching and service agenda cover innovations in geographic information systems (GIS) and related information technologies (Its) as they apply to public policy. We wish her much success.



We would also like to announce the joint appointment of Dr. Joann Whalen, Assistant Professor in Natural Resource Science and the School of Environment. Joann received her PhD from Ohio State University in 1998. She will begin her duties at McGill on June 1, 2000. She has been broadly trained in soil fertility and nutrient cycling and has extensive experience addressing questions concerning the effects of management practices on nutrient cycling, soil and crop quality and environmental sustainability in terrestrial ecosystems. Her research experience includes both basic and applied research in soil fertility at scales ranging from the rhizosphere to the eco-system level.



Upcoming Seminars

Dr. Nigel Dower, Chair, Department of Philosophy, University of Aberdeen, a leader in Development Ethics, and author of "World Poverty, Challenge and Response" and "World Ethics: the New Agenda", will be giving a public lecture on Thursday, March 23rd, 2000 entitled, "Human Development: Friend or Foe to the Environment?" The lecture will begin at 5:30p.m. and will be held in the Stephen Leacock Building, Room L232. Admission is free and everyone is welcome to attend.



News from Macdonald Campus (Mac) by Dr. Joan Marshall

Students are becoming enthusiastic environmentalists at Mac if their initiatives "after-hours" are any indication. They have begun to organize special sessions in the evenings, to which professors and outside experts are being invited. On one occasion they watched a film, "Power of the Trees", followed by a discussion that was facilitated by Professor Joan Marshall in which they explored the different perspectives that relate to logging practices. The enthusiastic group of about fifteen stayed on until after 10:00 pm. Another afternoon, student organizer Frederic Pacquet invited several people to talk about their careers in areas related to the environment, including consulting for the pulp and paper industry, training falcons for airport security, animating environmental exhibits, and rehabilitating birds. It was an opportunity for students to consider both the variety of career possibilities that might be of interest to them, and also to receive input on the more general areas of communications skills, and other "how to" aspects of job hunting. There are lots of keen students at Mac, and the MSE through its new courses is offering many of them an interesting range of career opportunities.



Summer session at Macdonald Campus offers four field research courses in Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. The courses provide the skills and opportunity to apply knowledge from the classroom to environmental issues and to participate in supervised field research concerning flora and fauna not easily studied at other times of the year. The courses are 373-381 Field Research Methods; 373-382 Ecological Monitoring and Analysis; 373-383 Land Use; 373-384 Field Research Project. For more information, please contact McGill Admissions and Registrar's office (514) 398-3910 or visit their web site at www.aro.mcgill.ca.



In order to accommodate our ever-growing needs, the MSE offices located at beautiful Macdonald Campus will be re-locating to the Rowles House this summer. Staff and faculty members will most certainly enjoy their new surroundings.

The Rowles House is named after the husband and wife team of Mary Laura Chalk Rowles (1904-1996) and Professor Emeritus William Rowles (1899-1989), who were an integral part of life at Macdonald for more than five decades, serving as surrogate parents to generations of students.

The Rowleses both came to McGill as physics teachers. Laura Rowles was the first woman to obtain a PhD in physics from McGill. She subsequently spent a year in England doing research with Nobel laureate O.W. Richardson on thermoelectron emission. Upon returning to Montreal, she joined the Macdonald College (as it was then called) Physics staff. Her future husband was "already head of his department, and it seemed ordained that we were to be together again," she wrote in the collection of autobiographical essays by women associated with McGill.

"Bill" Rowles had grown up on a small farm in Manitoba. Before coming to McGill, he had graduated with distinction in physics from the University of Saskatchewan. During his McGill years, his research was focused mainly in spectroscopy and soil physics.

Five years after their June 1931 marriage, Laura wrote in 'Our Own Agendas', "McGill decreed that, because of the state of the economy, no wives could hold positions in their husbands' departments. So I lost my job and thereafter was employed only intermittently as needed." As Bill Rowles continued to teach at Macdonald for some four decades, Laura shared her husband's involvement in community activities both on and off campus. "My husband and I became a team in every way."

The couple lived in an apartment on campus. Being childless they were "free to take part in many of the students' activities, and we made friends with many of them. We spent countless nights at student formal dances, both as patrons and also as paying participants because we both like to dance."

In 1995, the student services building on Macdonald Campus was renamed Rowles House in honour of Laura and Bill. The generosity of the Rowleses continues to be felt at McGill. During their lifetime, they endowed the William Rowles Bursary. And Laura Rowles's will provided for the endowment of: two graduate fellowships to be known as the Chalk-Rowles Fellowships in Physics; the William and Laura Rowles Endowment Fund, which provides income for the Dean of the Faculty of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences to use for faculty priorities; and an annual visiting lectureship for the McGill Centre for Studies in Aging.



Rowles House

RESEARCH AND THE MSE: CHARTING THE FUTURE

ANNUAL MSE WORKSHOP
MONDAY, MAY 15TH, 2000

Set this day aside for discussions and brain-storming about where the McGill School of Environment hopes to move on a research agenda, and how to get there.

Open to all Associates of the MSE and other McGill faculty members interested in inter-disciplinary research in environment concerning the following themes:

*Health in a Changing Environment;
Ecosystems, Biodiversity and the Conservation of Community;
Stewardship of Global Systems;
Culture, Commerce and the Environment;
The Ethics of Civilization in Nature.*

If you are interested in attending this event, please contact:

*Louise Decelles
Telephone: (514) 398-2827
E-mail: louise@mse.mcgill.ca*

*As space to this event is limited,
please let us know if you can make it
by April 15th, 2000.*