

## **Can We Stop the Decline of Forest Products Education in the Era of Edu-Business?**

<sup>1</sup>Yoon Soo KIM and <sup>2</sup>Andrew H.H. WONG

<sup>1</sup>Department of Wood Science & Engineering, Chonnam National University,  
Gwangju 500-757, Korea (South)  
Corresponding author: kimys@chonnam.ac.kr

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Resource Science & Technology  
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak  
94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia

One of the most significant aspects occurred in the field of forest products in the Northern hemisphere last 30 years, is the decline of forest products education programme in parallel with those industries. Forest products education (= wood science programmes) at university level in the western hemisphere where developed countries are clustered, has a relatively short history dating back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, unlike forestry science education programmes with a relatively long history. Traditional wood science programs have been curtailed and/or merged into other programs at many universities particularly in English speaking countries such as, the USA, Canada and UK during the last three decades. Many of research-oriented universities in the USA which emphasized a strong research and doctoral education has excluded forest products programmes. Examples of well-known universities such as UC Berkeley, Harvard, Yale, Oxford, Imperial College (UK) or Australian National universities, which in the past had well-recognized forestry and/or wood science programmes, stopped such programmes in their schools while many other universities changed the name of Dept. of Forest Products and/or Wood Science and Technology into “Biomaterials”, “Sustainable Materials”, “Renewable Materials”, etc. where this has often resulted in limited teaching in forestry and wood science subjects within.

The word “wood” or “forest products” was deleted in the list of their university brochures. Nevertheless, student enrolment at forest products programmes has decreased considerably. Some universities have eliminated the curricula of “Forest Products” and substantially altered the programmes to meet the needs of students and industries. Such a trend is also true in other countries in the Western Hemisphere. Universities and research institutions related to wood science and/or forest products in Germany, Sweden are also under pressure for restructuring. Forest products education programme in Japan was separated from the Department of Forestry Sciences in 60’s and established as “Forest Products” or “Wood Science” programme. However, almost all those programs were merged again into Department of Forestry at the end of the 90’ but this is rare in most universities around the world.

It is not certain whether this declining interest in the programme in the western world would be a temporal or cyclical or even spread to the universities in the developing countries. Most probably the declining trend would not be restored to its previous position in the near future as long as the current socio-economic situations and changing expectations about the forest resources continue. Diverse factors, such as education systems, socioeconomic and cultural factors, change student and public perceptions to wood science programmes, while environmental pressures on forest product industries, would also be responsible for the current decline in forest products education. In this presentation, changed conception of a university's role as an institution of higher learning, as well as changed educational environments affecting the forest products education programme are deliberated. The mission of university education will be reviewed