International Commission on Education for Sustainable Development Practice

Master’s in Development Practice Programs

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
Earth Institute, Columbia University

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL:

Steps and Criteria for Applying for Assistance to Launch Master’s in Development Practice (MDP) Academic Programs

October 30, 2008

The International Commission on Education for Sustainable Development Practice, supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, was established in early 2007. The aim of the Commission was to identify the core disciplines and areas of expertise needed to help professionals address the complex challenges of sustainable development. Comprised of 20 eminent sustainable development experts and practitioners, the Commission produced a report with recommendations for new, cross-disciplinary training for aspiring practitioners in the field of sustainable development practice. The report is available at http://mdp.ei.columbia.edu

The new Global Master’s in Development Practice (MDP) program is one of the Commission’s key recommendations. The two-year, graduate level program has been designed to develop a new generation of “generalist” practitioners able to diagnose and address priorities for sustainable development. The proposed curriculum challenges students to seek integrated approaches to development drawing on the health sciences, natural sciences, social sciences and management, as well as two intensive field training experiences. MDP students participate in courses across fields such as agronomy, climate science, public health, economics and management. An open-source curriculum will allow universities in developed and developing countries to enhance their offerings in the cross-disciplinary field of sustainable development, while at the same time engaging in interactive learning through global, online courses.

As a result of the Commission’s findings and recommendations, the MacArthur Foundation has committed $15 million to help support new Master’s in Development Practice programs at universities worldwide. The first such program will begin in the fall of 2009 at Columbia University in New York. Based on the recommendations of the International Commission, the Global Master’s in Development Practice Program Secretariat, based at Columbia University’s Earth Institute, and the Foundation seek to identify additional global centers of academic excellence to jointly launch Global Masters in Development Practice (MDP) programs.
A MacArthur investment of up to $1.1 million is available for up to 12 institutions seeking seed support for similar programs at universities around the world within the next three years. Universities seeking substantially less than $1.1 million over three years are encouraged to apply as well. MacArthur support is intended to create a critical mass of new MDP programs at universities to launch this new field. At least two to three programs are expected to be established at universities in North America and Europe, with the remainder focused in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

**Background**

Current training for development practitioners at the Master’s level, which generally lasts from one to two years and focuses almost exclusively on social sciences such as economics, policy analysis, and organizational management, does not adequately prepare individuals to address the complex challenge of development, particularly extreme poverty. Poverty in much of the developing world results from the interplay of multiple, complex factors, from low agricultural productivity to high disease incidence (including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria), environmental decline, poor governance, and lack of educational opportunities, to name just a few. Yet the typical development practitioner lacks even basic knowledge in each of these areas.

The pervasive gap between development-oriented disciplines and institutions contrasts starkly with the recognized need for integrated policy solutions to help the poorest of the poor. Macroeconomists and health specialists must work closely together to tackle the crises of AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis. Likewise, tackling hunger in Africa requires an understanding of agriculture, which in turn requires an understanding of water systems, which in turn requires an understanding of climate patterns, which in turn requires an understanding of global energy systems. Understanding the fundamentals of each discipline, and how they relate, is necessary in order to manage integrated policy solutions and to know when more specialized knowledge is required. Yet no academic programs are in place to provide development professionals with an integrated knowledge base across the core issues of both natural science and social science that are relevant to sustainable economic development, broadly defined. And very few programs require training in a developing country, working hands-on to solve key issues of development.

The Commission identified the absence of practical, multi-disciplinary graduate level educational programs for aspiring development practitioners as a major gap in global educational systems. A cadre of generalist development professionals requires rigorous training across the core disciplines of health sciences, natural sciences, social sciences, engineering, information technology and management to develop the knowledge and skills required for understanding the multi-dimensional causes of poverty and for promoting integrated problem-solving for sustainable development.
Program Goal and Objectives

The Masters of Development Practice program is designed to train highly skilled “generalist” practitioners prepared to confront complex sustainable development challenges. Integrating core disciplines of health sciences, natural sciences, social sciences and management, the program will provide students with substantive knowledge required to analyze and diagnose multi-dimensional problems such as malnutrition, extreme poverty, climate change and infectious disease control. At the same time, the program will develop practical skills through two summers of field training to provide hands on, problem-solving experience for students within a developing country. By acquiring inter-disciplinary knowledge and practical skills, students will prepare to work across different fields to design and manage integrated development interventions and to implement appropriate policies to support sustainable development.

Profile of MDP Program

The course should provide rigorous, interdisciplinary training through an innovative blend of locally taught academic programs including practical case studies, multi-disciplinary projects and investigations of local development issues, as well as globally supported programs including interactive, global classes, on-line curriculum, practical learning activities and simulations, international field training programs, virtual conferences, and student and faculty exchanges.

MDP programs should integrate the recommendations of the International Commission on Education for Sustainable Development Practice report into their proposal. Visit http://mdp.ei.columbia.edu for a copy of the report. At a minimum, MDP programs would require full-time enrolment of graduate-level students for the duration of 22-27 months, and should include the following core disciplines:

- **Health Sciences**- nutrition, basic epidemiology of infectious and non-infectious disease, health policy, and health system design and management

- **Natural Sciences**- agriculture, forestry and fishery management, water management, energy, engineering, environment and climate science, information management systems and design

- **Social Sciences**- anthropology, economics, education, politics and international political economies, statistics

- **Management**- project design and management, budget planning and financial management, commodities management, communication and negotiations, critical self-reflection, geographic information systems and decision making tools, institutional resource and human resource management, monitoring and evaluation
Eligibility requirements for academic institutions

Academic institutions interested in launching a Masters in Development Practice degree, must demonstrate, in no order of importance, the following minimum standards:

- **Strong institutional support.** Endorsement for the establishment of an MDP program from the senior university management, board of directors, and government education officials

- **MDP philosophy.** Integration in the proposed program of the MDP philosophy on sustainable development practice as discussed in the Commission’s report ([http://mdp.ei.columbia.edu](http://mdp.ei.columbia.edu))

- **High academic standards.** Reputable and well-established graduate-level academic departments in four of the core MDP disciplines (health sciences, natural sciences, social sciences, and management). In cases where an institution does not house strong academic departments in the core disciplines, the institution must clearly identify a strategy for ensuring that students receive an exceptional education across the broad range of MDP core competencies.

- **Significant geographic representation.** Demonstrated potential of the academic institution to draw students from within the region and to serve as a regional MDP center, and potential of the institution’s location to contribute to an expanded geographic distribution of MDP programs world-wide

- **Sufficient institutional capacity.** University administration and staff with experience administering masters degree programs and experience managing grants and budgets with transparency and efficiency

- **Supportive institutional “home.”** Identified institutional base of the MDP program, within a particular academic department, school, or university center

- **Established infrastructure.** Basic infrastructure including available classrooms, labs, computer resource centers, and internet connections that would provide students and faculty with regular access to the global MDP resources.

- **Dedicated faculty “champion” for MDP.** Senior faculty member to guide and lead the local development of the MDP program

- **Substantial development experience.** Faculty members with experience working in development-focused projects or organizations locally as well as internationally

- **Dedicated personnel.** Motivated faculty members and supportive staff, able to work across disciplines to support the MDP program
- **Practical training opportunities.** Development-focused organizations, government agencies, and private sector organizations working in the local area of the institution with demonstrated interest in engaging students in research, internships, and field studies.

- **Student demand.** Sufficient student demand for an MDP curriculum and degree, with a minimum of 20 students enrolled each year. Demand could be demonstrated through enrollment in existing programs on development, enrollment in areas of the MDP curriculum that focus on development in other departments, or surveys of prospective students.

- **Financial commitment** – Universities must demonstrate commitment of internal resources and/or outside fundraising in addition to MacArthur seed funding. They should present a well developed business plan, including how an MDP program would be sustained over time.

### Consideration Process

Academic institutions are encouraged to apply, provided they meet the minimum eligibility requirements. All applicants will be asked to indicate the timetable on which they would like to launch MDP programs. Universities aiming to launch programs in 2010 will be considered “Group 1” institutions. Those aiming to launch in 2011 or later will be considered “Group 2” institutions. Group 2 institutions may wish to apply for support in a second round of funding, through an RFP that will be issued during mid-2009.

All applications will be assessed by an outside review committee convened by MacArthur. The MacArthur Foundation will make the final selection of funding recipients. Assessments will be based on overall strength of the application including interest and potential to meet or exceed the basic eligibility requirements outlined above, including financial sustainability over the long-term.

Institutions applying for support are asked to submit a Letter of Intent by December 1, 2008, to the Global MDP Secretariat. The Letter of Intent should briefly (in one to three pages) outline the goals of the proposed program, and the departments and resources of the institutions that it will draw upon. It should include full contact details for the institution including a person designated as the principal contact. The Secretariat will provide assistance to interested applicants preparing full proposals upon receipt of the Letter of Intent.
For questions regarding the MDP program and application process, please contact the Global MDP Secretariat at the Earth Institute at MDP-info@ei.columbia.edu

Letters of Intent and final proposals should be submitted, preferably in electronic format, to:

Global MDP Program Secretariat
The Earth Institute at Columbia University
2910 Broadway, Hogan Hall MC 3277
New York, NY 10025
MDP-info@ei.columbia.edu

The process for institutions that (1) aim to launch MDPs and (2) meet the eligibility requirements at the time of proposal submission, includes:

**Timeline**

**2008**

October 30  RFP made public on MacArthur, Global Secretariat and Earth Institute web sites

December 1  Letter of Intent due to Secretariat (with full contact info)

**2009**

February 2  Final Proposal due to Secretariat

June 17  MacArthur Board Meeting and funding decision

June 18  Recipient institutions notified by MacArthur Foundation

June – August  Funds dispersed for 2010 MDP Programs

September  First MDP program launched at Columbia University with MacArthur funding

**2010**

September  At least 4 to 6 new MDP programs launched

A second round RFP will be initiated in 2009 for programs seeking to launch in 2011.
A completed application in the form of a final proposal should include the following documentation:

1. Letter from the senior faculty member who will be leading the program, expressing their interest in the MDP program and the eligibility of the institution, as outlined above, and signed by the authority responsible for approving academic programs.

2. Institutional profile including degrees offered, organizational structure, relevant courses available, affiliated research centers, university partnerships and major grants received.

3. Detailed description of proposed MDP program including available infrastructure and personnel, identified opportunities for research projects or field studies, proposed course schedule that reflects the curriculum recommended by the Commission, faculty that will teach the courses, and relevant academic resources such as libraries, field sites, etc.

4. Proposed plan to involve local development organizations, government agencies, and private sector organizations to support student scholarships and training, to foster cross-institutional learning, and to work towards building a financially self-sustaining MDP program within three to six years of the program launch if possible.

5. Timetable for program development and activities

6. Budget (5 year plan), including financing needs and sources of financial support