HEALTHY PEOPLE ON A HEALTHY PLANET

If I had my druthers, I would design a program to fit the traditional slot of Human Health and Behavior, but with a strongly ecological theme. We would tackle the complex interrelated problems of saving the earth from ecological disaster coupled with improving the health and living standards of the world's people. To put the situation bluntly (and a bit naively, perhaps), it is easy to see our current situation as a battle in which powerful economic forces, largely in the hands of multinational corporations, are pitched against the vast majority of the world's people. As the corporations rape the earth for short-term profits, they are not only destroying its diverse ecosystems; they are putting vast amounts of toxic materials into the air, water and food that silently undermine everyone's health--even ignoring minor health disasters such as the tobacco industry. Furthermore, modern corporate life, fueled by exponentially increasing population and the pressures of crowding, creates an increasingly frenetic, harried pace of living, thus adding to people's stress and undermining their psychological (and spiritual, if you will) well-being; and meanwhile, the opportunities are constantly diminishing to get away from urban life, into natural places where one can re-create oneself in silence and solitude. Thus, ecological, economic, and health issues are intimately tied together and may be seen as a vast, interconnected problem.

$(HP)^2$ would try to address these issues. It would have to attract students who are highly motivated to study the problems but (1) are able to go well beyond naive sloganeering and (2) will not be unduly frustrated by a program that--in nine months--can only begin to understand the issues and will undoubtedly find few solutions.

If I could find appropriate people to work with me, I would be willing to be the biologist on the team. I think the program could use a good economist who is interested in these issues, and probably is not wedded to classical economics. The program could use someone who is very knowledgeable about public health issues, ideally someone who knows about health in third-world countries. The right kind of psychologist or sociologist might fit into the program well. It's hard to know who would work. But I wouldn't want to try to the program unless we could get a good mix of people--I wouldn't want to patch it together with band-aids just for the sake of having a program.

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