



Smithsonian Conservation  
Biology Institute

## Smithsonian-Mason Global Conservation Studies Program



August 2, 2011

Dear AASHE STARS Project Team:

This letter is being submitted in support of George Mason University's STARS documentation for an innovation credit for the **Smithsonian-Mason Undergraduate Semester in Conservation Studies**.

The Smithsonian Institution and George Mason University (Mason) have partnered to form the Smithsonian-Mason Global Conservation Studies Program, which provides unique conservation scholarship experiences for undergraduates, graduates, and professionals. A highlight of this collaboration is the Smithsonian-Mason Undergraduate Semester in Conservation Studies, conducted at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute (SCBI) in Front Royal, Virginia. This innovative program provides students unparalleled interactions with the scientists, researchers, and resource managers of SCBI, as well as Mason faculty serving as guest lecturers. During this immersive semester-long program, undergraduates engage in an experiential, hands-on, and interdisciplinary set of classes designed to train tomorrow's conservation leaders. The curriculum, which consists of 16 credit hours, introduces the students to the nuances and challenges associated with biodiversity conservation in the context of sustainability of humanity and other forms of life.

As a conservation practitioner in the field of wildlife biology and wildlife epidemiology for over 25 years, an executive member of NOAA Oceans and Human Health Initiative, and a reviewer of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, I understand the importance of working with valued partners such as the Smithsonian Institution to train and develop tomorrow's conservation leaders with real life challenges and experiences. In fact, this exceptional undergraduate semester experience was one of the key factors that attracted me to Virginia earlier this year in order to lead the Smithsonian-Mason Global Conservation Studies Program, a truly unique partnership.

Thank you for your consideration of the Smithsonian-Mason Undergraduate Semester in Conservation Studies as an innovation credit for the university's 2011 STARS assessment.

Sincerely yours,

Alonso Aguirre, D.V.M., Ph.D.

Executive Director