

PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP IN EDUCATION

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The study of fungi has traditionally been concentrated in universities. Few formal courses have been taught outside educational institutions. The financial pressure on higher education has meant that areas of study that are less popular have been removed from curricula and staff specifically trained to teach them have not been replaced. Mycology is now taught in few universities in Australia; when taught it is usually as part of plant pathology. Mycology is in danger of disappearing as an independent area of study. An additional approach to the study of the fungi is required to ensure that appropriate material is readily available, in an appropriate form, to whoever wishes to study these diverse and valuable organisms.

At the annual general meeting of the Australasian Mycological Society, brief mention was made of the establishment of special interest groups within the Society. During the dinner that followed the meeting, I discussed a proposal to establish a special interest group in tertiary education with several members who are still employed in universities in academic positions. They gave support in principle to the proposal. I propose the establishment of a special interest group with the specific goal of developing a course in mycology that will become available over the internet.

The course would have introductory material with clear links to microbiology and other appropriate subjects. The curriculum would include taxonomy and biology of fungi. The various topics could be written for people who are attending tertiary institutions, for people with a general interest in mycology, and for people with specific questions to ask about fungi. Use of the internet will enable access to anyone with a modem and the skills to follow a simple package. In other words, we would construct a resource document and a teaching tool.

The use of the internet is deliberate. The cost to the user is minor. Access is available to anyone who wishes to use the material. The flexibility of the internet allows people to download relevant components in whatever order they choose. They may learn the program at whatever rate is appropriate. In particular, the internet will provide the means to interest and inspire school children, for the youngest internet users of today may be the mycologists of tomorrow. Finally, the material may be upgraded and revised whenever it becomes outdated.

The program has a secondary function. It will provide a package to which all members of the Society can contribute. We will, for example, require photographs, videos, information and feedback. We can include matters directly relevant to the Society and we can provide examples that are appropriate for Australians. Links to the Society are important as they provide one area where we may all contribute, and which may serve as a link to a wider Australasian and international audience.

If you are prepared to join a special interest group in education with the Society, would you please contact one of the following:

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