

## **What ESSE 21 Has Meant to Me**

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*My ESS experience has been central to my career trajectory*



When I first became involved with ESSE, as part of the first cadre at Utah State University (1990-1995) and then later at Westminster College of Salt Lake City (1995-2000), I found that adding the higher-tech tools, concepts, and learning strategies of ESS fit in well with what I had learned in the 1980s. ESSE brought me into the “digital age” via use of the Internet and geospatial science, and it introduced me to “systems science” and methods and tools that strengthened what I was doing already. While in Utah, I also became engaged in teacher training, and again found that the ESS approach—teaching with a strong “real-world” engagement in the field, e.g. studying the Great Salt Lake Basin—was the most effective method for helping teachers at the K-12 level and enabling undergraduate students to discover the joys of field-based science, as well as the responsibilities of being “citizens of the

world” (see the Great Salt Lake Learning module that is still being used by teachers in Utah and around the world).

Throughout my career, and particularly since joining the ESSE community, I have found myself within applied science departments and schools (Natural Resources, Public Health, Social Policy and Social Ecology), and for a while I even worked in a government agency (USAID) in Washington, DC. In all these situations, I found myself in high demand because I was able to apply a wide range of integrative tools, concepts, and datasets at multiple spatial scales to analyze difficult global issues and local sustainability problems that were truly trans-disciplinary. In hindsight, I can categorically state that my ESS experience has been central to my career trajectory. It also linked me to similar paradigms such as HDGC (Human Dimensions of Global Change) and Sustainability Science, both of which have served me well in my academic and applied careers.



For example, it was really the vision of ESS and its tools which prepared me while I was in federal service to lead a major Inter-Agency Working Group (IWG) which became a major player at the 2002 World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD). This project, known as Geographic Information for Sustainable Development (GISD), focused on taking the concepts, networks, tools, and organizations I had come to know via my ESSE experience and applying them to global sustainable development policy-making, environmental monitoring and mitigation, and global governance.



I am now back in academia, at Loma Linda University, developing new ESS-type programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Again, the ESS tools, concepts, and experiences of the last fifteen years continue to shape my career and give me a vision and excitement that provide me the capacity to be effective on issues, global to local, in ways I never achieved in purely disciplinary endeavors! I hope to help other students find their own ways

through life. In all cases, I believe that the ESSE way can be an essential approach to workforce development that is just right for the future of Planet Earth.

Great Salt Lake Learning Module

<http://resweb.llu.edu/rford/docs/VGD/GSLVT/index.html>

Geographic Information for Sustainable Development

<http://www.state.gov/g/oes/rls/fs/2002/15618.htm>

<http://www.eis-africa.org/EIS-Africa/GISD>

Robert Ford's home page

<http://resweb.llu.edu/rford>

ESSE at Loma Linda University

<http://resweb.llu.edu/rford/ESSE21/>