

**Self-Study Proposal**  
**Department of Environmental Studies**  
**DRAFT -December 19, 2007**

The Department of Environmental Studies has decided to choose Option C: Focused Inquiry, as described on pp. 8-9 of the "Program Review Process Experiment" document as the model for its self-study.

Following the Option C format, our Self-Study will include three main sections:

**I. "General information about the program, e.g., data on students, faculty, staff, facilities, etc. (most of which is supplied by Office of Institutional Research)"**

The Office of Institutional Research has already provided the Department with a hardcopy of the relevant *Factbook* (also available electronically at the OIR website---

<http://www.oir.csus.edu/aadc/Departmental%20Factbooks/SSIS/EnvironmentalStudies07.pdf>

The Department will contact OIR as our data needs become clearer during the self-study process.

**II. "A statement of intended student learning outcomes at the program level; methods for assessing them, including the use of direct measures; assessment results to date; and documentation of the use of assessment results in efforts to achieve program improvement (assistance with the preparation of which is available from the University Assessment Coordinator)"**

Our department adopted its current Assessment Plan in May, 2004. Since that time, while some of the plan's directives have been implemented, a number have not. Since 2004, the terrain of assessment at the University has shifted in both scale and importance. Our recent efforts to prepare assessment plans for GE Areas A3, B2, and D2 reviews revealed the scope of the task before us and the need to develop a more manageable and meaningful system for evaluating our programs' educational effectiveness. Especially in light of the Program Review Process Experiment and the opportunities it affords to devote focused attention to assessment we plan to make significant improvement in this arena the primary task of this Self-Study. As a matter of fact, preparing for this process has already led the Department to refine its learning goals. We have also identified sets of both general and discipline-specific learning goals (see Appendix). One of the tasks before us is to examine the overlaps and disconnects among these three statements of our programmatic intentions and to decide how to discover how well we are meeting these goals. We look forward to the advice offered through the rest of the Program Review process and welcome the opportunity to improve both our conceptualizations and our process of program assessment.

We acknowledge the importance of the components of our program which are not attached to General Education—including courses numbered 120, 121, 122, 128, 130, 138, 165, 171, 175, 186B, 190, 194, 195, 196, 198, and 199.

III. "The results of a *focused* inquiry addressing issues of particular interest/concern to the program itself, in the context of what is currently important to the college and university."

The Environmental Studies Department is effectively in a re-build mode with the addition of two new faculty—a 100% addition for the fall semester and 150% in the spring semester. Closely related to our primary task of establishing an effective, meaningful assessment plan and a consistent process, the Department of Environmental Studies wishes to undertake a thorough curricular review, and to make plans for revisions as suggested in light of consideration of our mission statement and learning goals. As part of this review, we wish to examine a broad array of undergraduate Environmental Studies programs across North America. In this regard, we are guided by paragraph C. of section I ("Program Introduction/History") of Option A:

What major state and national trends (new developments in theory, research, and pedagogy) are occurring in your discipline? How does your curriculum structure and course offerings compare to those of similar programs in your discipline? What responses to changes in the discipline is your department planning and/or implementing?

By way of responding to these questions, we plan to work towards identifying redundancies and deficiencies or gaps in our curriculum. This review should serve to define some parameters for the next stage of our ongoing examination of curriculum, as called for in Recommendations 5 and 6 of our 2001 Program Review:

5. The Department should reassess its curricular offerings to reduce similarity and possible duplication.
6. The Department should reassess the electives majors may take, i.e., the structure of the concentrations.

The Department's mission statement -IN REVISION--provides the basis of the focused inquiry we propose:

The Department of Environmental Studies has a vital two-fold mission within the University Community. First and foremost, through general education courses the Department provides the foundation for undergraduate students' interdisciplinary understanding of environmental issues and the science and value issues behind them. Second, within its undergraduate major, the Department strives to facilitate the following student goals: 1) achievement of a basic mastery of the key environmental literature, 2) familiarity with critical issues in the major environmental issues, 3) grounding in the organization and activities of governmental agencies charged with environmental management, and 4) mastery of the basic research tools necessary to acquire and use more sophisticated knowledge about specific topics and issues.

Given our department's strong curricular emphasis on General Education, we wish to examine the alignment between our departmental learning goals and program objectives (see appendix below) and the GE Area A3, B2 and D2 Learning Goals. Furthermore, we plan to expand this examination to include consideration of the University's Baccalaureate Learning Goals. The Department's mission and its commitment of resources reflect a relationship to

the General Education Program, and to the University's goals of liberal learning, that is both fiscally and philosophically significant. We believe that focusing on GE Area D2 and considering the ramifications of our centrality to that component of the University's curriculum will lead us to ask and answer meaningful questions about the teaching and learning that characterizes our undergraduate programs.

Another major objective of this curricular review will be to continue improving our curriculum's ability to fulfill both our GE demands and to provide a quality Environmental Studies major.

The Department plans to complete the Self-Study by the end of the spring 2008 semester.

## **APPENDIX: Departmental materials pertinent to this Self-Study proposal**

### A1. (Specific) Learning Objectives

#### 1. Analytical reading and expository writing skills

Students in Environmental Studies courses will develop and demonstrate the ability to examine complex issues and write about them in clear, purposeful analytical prose essays which summarize, evaluate, and integrate texts outside their own experience and use appropriate structure, development, usage, and reference sources.

#### 2. Critical reasoning skills

Students taking Environmental Studies courses will develop and demonstrate the ability to examine complex ideas and issues through evaluating evidence, making appropriate inferences, and understanding the relationships between premises and conclusions.

#### 3. Formal analysis skills

Students taking Environmental Studies courses will build on previous General Education courses in critical thinking to develop and demonstrate their ability to use critical reasoning skills and a variety of critical methodologies to formally analyze environmental systems within interdisciplinary, historical and cultural contexts.

#### 4. Science appreciation

Students taking Environmental Studies courses will be able to use a variety of critical methodologies to identify, systematically and insightfully analyze, and effectively communicate an understanding and appreciation of changing perspectives on scientific knowledge and the limitations of that knowledge.

#### 5. Respect for cultural diversity

Students taking Environmental Studies courses will demonstrate an appreciation of diverse cultures and will cultivate an attitude of tolerance and respect for cultures other than their own in the context of environmental issues and conflicting strategies for dealing with them.

#### 6. Understanding of global economic and political systems in terms of environmental impacts

Students taking Environmental Studies courses will develop an historical/contextual understanding of various global environmental issues and their social, political, cultural, and religious dimensions in scales ranging from the individual to the global.

## A2. Environmental Studies Disciplinary Competencies

- Make meaningful comparisons among scientific and cultural perspectives on natural resources and environment in diverse societies
- Develop sophisticated understandings of historical contexts affecting patterns of dependence and valuation of environments and natural resources
- Engage in critical analysis of texts and arguments and identify central themes and concepts
- Display critical reasoning skills
- Ability to write expository/analytical papers
- Command of standard English
- Demonstrate superior ability to articulate logically structured thesis
- Demonstrate superior reading skills—evidenced by retention of salient facts and key ideas
- Information literacy/computer skills

## A3. Academic Program Goals/Student Outcomes from the 2001 Environmental Studies Department Self-Study

A3.1 Academic program goals: These have been addressed in the first section of this report, in the program plan submitted to the Dean, in the outcomes memo to the Dean, and in the newly adopted Environmental Studies Assessment Outcomes Plan (Attachment F.) Below are the goals as presented in the December 10, 1996 memo to the Dean, with modifications to fit present circumstances indicated in parentheses:

\*Continue to prepare a modest number of well-prepared majors for graduation, fewer than at present. (Numbers are now at a level we can deal with and we plan to increase them somewhat.)

\*Play a larger role in the General Education Program, educating a citizenry and professionals outside the environmental field more deeply about environmental matters. (Recent unsuccessful efforts to qualify Environmental Studies 111 for critical thinking requirements and assessment of Environmental Studies 112 for the race and ethnicity requirement have necessarily reduced our expectations in this regard.)

\*Seek over the long term a greater incorporation of Environmental Studies courses into other academic majors and minors where appropriate. (As discussed above, new courses are to be incorporated into the graduate programs in Public Policy and Administration, International Affairs, and Liberal Studies.)

\*Develop a wider array of courses available to majors and non-majors in new or previously neglected environmental areas. (We cooperated with history in their cross-listing of an American Environmental History course, cross-list a course in environmental Law with the Government Department, offered a course in environmental issues in biotechnology, and developed graduate courses for Public Policy and Administration, International Affairs and Liberal Arts.)

\*Streamline our minor, making it more attractive and useful to students in other majors. (This has been done.)

\*Seek the cooperation of the university in widening the choices available to students in the Environmental Studies major through the development of concentrations and advisor-approved course sequences to substitute for the required minor. (Some exploration needs to be followed up by more work on the matter, about which the Environmental Studies faculty still have some reservations.)

\*Increase the laboratory and field experiences of our majors through internal development of these capabilities with the school and through the use of courses in other programs. (Increased computer technology available, College purchase of vans, new plans for field trip experiences in various courses, and improved operating budgets have led to gradual improvement in these areas. The College has also developed a computer BATS lab in which we have scheduled Quantitative Methods and Senior Thesis courses for the 1999-2000 academic year.)

\*Evaluate the wisdom of strengthening the emphasis in our program in areas of land-use and land-use planning, an area we expect to expand in importance in the Sacramento region particularly, and in the nation more generally. (There has been only a little movement in this direction, mainly due to need to give attention to the rapid changes in faculty presence and strength in this period. We have moved to more frequently offer Environmental Studies 122, the environmental impact reporting course that is at the heart of much of the land-use planning process.)

\*In support of our present program...we hope to add a fifth member to our program, as recommended in the recent Program Review. However, we are eager to explore various arrangements that might make it possible to share the expertise of new faculty hires made jointly with other programs, either formally or informally. (This has been done, with cooperation with the graduate programs as mentioned above and with the Government department in our and their hiring processes.)

\*Play an active role in developing interdisciplinary courses within the School of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies, such as the "honors" program now under discussion by SSIS Chairs. (After long discussion, this has been on hold among the Chairs.)

\*Continue to explore the feasibility of developing graduate programs in conjunction with other departments. (A plan is underway with PPA, with additional offerings in the M.A. International Affairs and Liberal Studies programs.)

#### A4. Departmental Teaching and Learning Goals (IN DISCUSSION)

- Development of environmental literacy within a global context
- Development of an empathetic understanding of human diversity and environmental relations, demands, and conflicts within historical and cross-cultural contexts
- Understanding of the roles and limitations of scientific studies in environmental practices and decision making (information, models, and aggregation of information to guide and constrain individual, corporate, and state behaviors)

- Understanding conflicts between behavioral patterns and scientific and critical cultural and political arguments about large-scale and long-term impacts of those patterns (e.g., tragedy of the commons, global impacts of environmental management decisions, survival and distributional issues in patterns of natural resource consumption, etc.)

## A5. Recommendations of the 2001 Departmental Review

The following specific guidance to the department is provided in the last departmental review:

### A5.1. Recommendation to the Department:

Consider the possibility of forming subcommittees for various department tasks to spread the workload.

#### A5.1.1 Department Chair

As the program goes through its current transition period and welcomes a new Chair for the department, we would like to suggest that the Chair take this opportunity to reconsider the duties of the position and take more active steps to increase the visibility of the department on campus, and to develop stronger relationships with other departments as well as the larger Sacramento community. Perhaps the Chair could also establish a connection-- such as a listserv for Chairs-- with other CSU Environmental Studies programs to compare notes about how different programs accomplish their goals and objectives.

Also, currently the Department Chairperson's position is a 9-month position, and we recommend that in the future the department consider converting it to a 10/12 position, as the Chair's efforts to build and further strengthen the reputation of the department will require significant commitment of time and energy.

A5.2.2 Support the Chair in his efforts to increase the visibility of the department on campus and to develop stronger relationships with other departments as well as the larger Sacramento community.

Consider converting the Chair's position from the current 9/12 to a 10/12 position.

### A5.3. Recommendations to the Dean:

Support the Chair in his efforts to increase the visibility of the department on campus and to develop stronger relationships with other departments as well as the larger Sacramento community.

Consider supporting the department by providing additional resources if the department decides to convert the Chair's position to a 10/12 position.

A5.4. Recommendations to the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs:

Support the Chair in his efforts to increase the visibility of the department on campus and to develop stronger relationships with other departments as well as the larger Sacramento community.

Consider supporting the department by providing additional resources if the department decides to convert the Chair's position to a 10/12 position.