

2012-2013 Annual Assessment Report
Department of Environmental Studies

1. As a result of last year's assessment effort, have you implemented any changes for your assessment, including learning outcomes, assessment plan, assessment tools (methods, rubrics, curriculum map, or key assignment, etc.) and/or the university baccalaureate learning goals?

Last year, the SCIPP process was a major strain on our two -person faculty, both of whom were, of necessity, deeply involved in the process. However, partly as a result of the SCIPP rankings, the Administration allocated another faculty position to the Department. We argued that this should be a senior position, with the expectation that the person would soon become Chair. As a result of negotiations, the new hire will become Chair, starting Fall, 2013.

As a result of these dynamics, the focus on assessment within the Department has been to consolidate the activities identified in the SCIPP report:

a. If so, what are those changes?

Changes have been made only at the individual course and instructor level.

b. How did you implement those changes?

Implementation was by individual faculty, and in collaborations amongst instructors, especially in EnvS 10 and 112.

c. How do you know if these changes have achieved the desired results?

Changes are resulting in improved class organization and student performance, as indicated by student evaluations and comments on classes.

2. As a result of last year's assessment effort, have you implemented any other changes at the department, the college or the university, including advising, co-curriculum, budgeting and planning?

The response for the Department is above. We cannot comment on responses at the College or University level.

3. What program (not course) learning outcomes have you assessed this academic year?

ENVS 190, the capstone course--senior thesis.

4. What methods/measures have you used to collect the data?

The measures include reviews of theses, assessment of thesis quality, and students' reports--from this and previous semesters-- about the thesis process.

The department conducts an extensive fifty-question exit survey of students as they finish their senior thesis. While these students are still in the throes of finishing their academic program, they are encouraged to reflect on their experiences and the relations between what is provided in the program and what their expectations were. Data from previous semesters is attached; data for the current semester is not available yet.

5. What are the criteria and/or standards of performance for the program learning outcome?

The standard of performance is the ability to make and test an argument about some environmentally relevant topic. Typically, this standard requires formulating an hypothesis, a null hypothesis, criteria for rejecting the null hypothesis, and a presentation of data--in the appropriate form--to test the criteria. All theses meet this set of criteria because they are not allowed to progress to acceptance without this logic, or an acceptable semblance of it.

6. What data have you collected? What are the results and findings, including the percentage of students who meet each standard?

Data from this and previous semesters indicate that the primary issues are with students' abilities to focus on such a large research and writing project while taking a full course load, and sometimes more than a full load. Some students (30%) cannot "get their heads around" doing such a large, long-term research and writing project. Others get bogged down with illness, family issues, or other course requirements (20%). The remainder of students approach the process in a workman-like manner and do satisfactory work throughout the semester.

a. In what areas are students doing well and achieving the expectations?

The ultimate quality of the theses is generally high, partially because students are not allowed to submit the work until it is approved by the instructor, and whatever

additional evaluators are appropriate, for both form and content. As a result, about 15% drop the class, and another 15% take an “F” in the class and repeat the class in a later semester.

b. In what areas do students need improvement?

Students need improvement in training and implementation of time management with respect to the thesis in the context of their other academic work. The best students are generally able to integrate this project with other requirements, but many delay starting their research and writing efforts until they have "mastered" their topic, at which point it is often too late to do a good job in the remaining time allotted. Some students have begun to work on thesis ideas even before the class begins, and some “audit” the class for a semester before expecting to do their thesis in a later semester.

7. As a result of this year’s assessment effort, do you anticipate or propose any changes for your program (e.g. structures, content, or learning outcomes)?

The Department's assessment process awaits the arrival and acclimation of the new Chair, hired from outside the CSU. There will be many changes with a 33.3% increase in faculty size. We expect the new Chair to bring his own perspectives, as well as new leadership to the Department.

8. Which program learning outcomes do you plan to assess next year? How?

We will make this decision after consulting with the new Chair.