Annual Assessment Report

Program: Environmental Studies Program
Academic Year of Report: 2019-2020, 2020-2021
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Section 1: Learning Outcomes Assessed for this Report

The learning outcomes for the Environmental Studies major are:

1. Articulate the contributions from the social sciences, natural sciences, and humanities in understanding environmental issues.
2. Articulate major root causes of environmental problems and avenues for addressing them.
3. Discuss several key concepts within the field of environmental studies (e.g. sustainability, environmental justice, climate change, humans' varied ways of understanding and representing nature, the relationship between nature and culture), drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives.
4. Demonstrate critical thinking and communication skills, including the ability to:
   a) Critically analyze environmental information, data and problems
   b) Interpret a variety of environmental writings
   c) Synthesize diverse information sources
   d) Communicate effectively through written and oral communication

Section 2: Assessment Activities, conducted and written by Galen Martin

Our assessment efforts to date have focused on our 200-level introductory sequence. We began by reviewing ENVS 202 (AY 16-17), then ENVS 203 (AY 18-19). We had plans to review ENVS 201 Spring 2020, but the Covid-19 pandemic interrupted those plans, so we have returned to that now, in AY 20-21.

ENVS 201: Environmental Studies: Social Sciences is responsible for introducing Program-level learning outcomes 1-4c and for developing outcome 4d, above. The syllabus for the Spring 2021 course lists topics, course-specific learning outcomes (which support but do not reiterate Program-level outcomes), the rubric that guides letter-grade evaluations, and assessment tools: bi-weekly quizzes, active learning assignments both in and out of class meeting time, class preparation assignments (short written assignments due before discussion sections), section participation and a term project. The midterm and final exam were eliminated for teaching under Covid conditions. Knowledge of course material is assessed through five bi-weekly quizzes comprised of 10 multiple choice questions and two short integrative essays. All assessments of student achievement are recorded as grades recorded in real time on Canvas; no other higher-level assessment is undertaken.

The first Program-level learning outcome is the ability to articulate both social science and relevant natural science concepts that are central to understanding environmental issues. We introduce the topic of climate change during the first week and this serves as a common reference point throughout the remainder of the course.

The second outcome, also emphasizing expression of ideas, is the ability to articulate major root causes of environmental problems and avenues for addressing them. The first four weeks of the term focus on possible root causes of environmental problems: anthropocentric perceptions of nature, human population, political economy, and consumerism. The next four weeks of the class focus on both broad

based and specific approaches to solving environmental problems. This includes student research into current and proposed solutions to problems in four areas: energy, climate, agriculture, and conservation. Students conduct individual research but present their findings in discussion sections as a group. In the final two weeks, we apply the information and concepts of the class to explore two pressing environmental issues—biodiversity conservation and global food production. Throughout the term, students are given short active learning exercises. These assignments are designed to stimulate personal reflection and engagement with course material, especially video clips introduced in class and assigned for outside of class viewing. These assignments may also ask students to reflect on their learning process. For example, the midterm reflection assignment asked the students to identify which of the class concepts and ideas had the most impact on their thinking. (This term the subject matter that garnered the most comments was the unit on consumerism as a root cause of environmental problems.)

The third learning outcome is the ability to discuss key concepts in environmental studies (e.g. climate change; environmental justice; sustainable agriculture) from multiple perspectives. To provide such perspectives, readings, videos and guest speakers include social and cultural commentary from a diversity of sources with attentiveness to voice and representation. Especially over the past half-decade, we have significantly increased the number of resources from historically underrepresented voices through guest speakers, documentaries produced by or about marginalized people, and readings authored by women and people of color. We have also emphasized environmental justice as one of the key organizing themes of the class with reference to themes and case studies throughout the term. Discussion sections serve as a forum for students to articulate and reflect on multiple perspectives on major course themes.

The fourth learning outcome includes the demonstration of critical thinking and communication skills. To this end, the class begins with a lecture on bias, perception errors, and risk analysis. Throughout the class, students are asked to articulate examples they detect in public engagement (or lack thereof) with environmental issues. They are also asked assess their own tendencies in these areas. More specifically, learning outcome #4 concerns abilities to (a) analyze environmental information and writing critically; (b) to interpret it accurately; (c) to synthesize it into a clear argument; and (d) to communicate such arguments in written and oral presentations. These objectives are achieved through the active learning assignments, short essay quizzes, and research projects. The research projects must be solution based in emphasis but include consideration of obstacles, social and technological, to the implementation of the solution under consideration. Students are required to consult resources from a number of specified source types. The research is presented in a group format, requiring students to work together in thematic groups. Each student also turns in work in the form individual papers incorporating feedback from the oral presentation. The quality of the oral presentations has increased markedly as a result of GE guidance on how to improve the research process and how to focus on solution-based presentations that are not redundant of material presented in the class.

Section 3: Actions Taken Based on Assessment Analysis

Review of actions and next steps has been delayed by COVID, and the fact that Dr. Sarah Wald is on sabbatical this year. We have plans at our fall faculty retreat (Sept. 2021) to return to the assessment results and plan out our next steps.

Section 4: Other Efforts to Improve the Student Educational Experience.

Despite the challenges of the past year, the Environmental Leadership Program was still able to offer a robust set of community-based projects that provided hands-on experience with collaborative problem-solving and critical thinking. In Spring 2020 we were able to transition our six projects to remote format. In AY 20-21 we were able to provide a mixture of both remote and hybrid projects that provided flexibility for our students and their various circumstances. We saw our largest enrollments, demonstrating students desire to get in the field and give back to the community, which was heartening.

In addition, the Environmental Studies Program has moved forward with a number of events and initiatives designed to improve communication, advising support, and career readiness. We've also co-sponsored numerous events, with goals of bringing our community together, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and stimulating a vibrant, inclusive intellectual community with our students. In AY 20-21, a major focus was anti-racism and justice, and bringing our community together during these particularly challenging times to provide mutual support. A list of events follows.

- ***Environmental Connect*** (Winter 2020, 2021), networking event with 100+ attendees
- ***Remote Environmental Hangout***s (Spring 2020) in collaboration with Office of Sustainability and Student Sustainability Center. Weekly hangout focused on different topics, including sustainable cooking, native plants, environmental career chats. We had about 3-15 participants per week.
- ***UO ENVS Instagram account*** (Spring 2020- Summer 2020), to maintain connections remotely
- ***Advising Efforts:***
    - ENVS Day (Winter and Spring 2020), in collaboration with Tykeson Advising
    - Regular remote meetings and close coordination with Tykeson Advisors
    - Digitalized paper forms/processes for ENVS 40x registration for remote student access
    - Began updating our website for increased ease of use and resource access
    - Reviewed and updated the ENV and ESCI degree guides
    - Reviewed and updated our curriculum review process. Each Fall we will do a comprehensive review of courses approved for the major (which come from across campus), and work with our Executive Committee to ensure courses are updated.
- ***ENVS Black History Month Podcast Club*** (Winter 2021). Discussed podcasts connecting racial and environmental issues each Friday in February. Included students, faculty, and staff.
- Graduate students established the ***Anti-Racist Working Group*** (open to faculty and staff too).
- ***Co-sponsored events*** (not comprehensive list):
    - Faculty participated in Office of Sustainability Open House "pub talks"
    - 4/17-24/21: Emerald Earth Film Festival.
    - 4/10/21: Environmental Justice Pathways Summit Keynote Speaker: Dr. Mustafa Santiago Ali.
    - 4/9/21: Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples Lecture.
    - 9/18/20: Environmental Justice Pathways: Tribal & Indigenous Knowledge in Policy
    - 10/22-23/20: CEF's "Sustaining Essential Work" Symposium
- ***ENVS Commencement Zoom Reception*** (Spring 2021)

Section 5: Plans for Next Year

The results from our initial assessment efforts of the 200-sequence will be discussed at our upcoming Fall 2021 Faculty Retreat. We will pull all the faculty who teach in the 200-sequence together to review results and discuss next steps. In addition, ENVS 345 is slated to be evaluated during AY 21-22.