

## Annual Assessment Report

Program: Environmental Studies Program

Academic Year of Report: 2018-2019

Contact Person for Assessment: Dr. Kathryn Lynch, [klynch@uoregon.edu](mailto:klynch@uoregon.edu)

### Section 1: Learning Objectives 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

Our assessment efforts to date have focused on our 200-level introductory sequence.

- December 2016: Goals Defining Activity with ENVS Executive Committee members.
- January 2017: Faculty teaching ENVS 200-level courses met to discuss: 1) learning outcomes, 2) approaches, topics, and readings covered, 3) the continuation/coordination of our Classroom-Community Connections efforts, and 4) assessment within the 200-sequence. Dr. Rempel then stepped up to conduct an assessment of ENVS 202: Introduction to Environmental Studies: Natural Sciences for the 2016-2017 academic year.
- February 2018: Assessment report for 2016-2017 submitted.
- During 2017-2018: Dr. Sarah Wald coordinated a review of ENVS 203: Introduction to Environmental Studies: Humanities.
- During 2018-2019: Returned to look at how changes in ENVS 202 were working. Also, began looking at developing an exit survey that would be implemented as part of the commencement registration process for graduating seniors.

### Section 3: Actions Taken Based on Assessment Analysis

- For ENVS 202, Dr. Rempel experimented with tightening the focus on fewer learning outcomes, but covering them in greater depth. For ENVS 202 this means focusing on **Learning Outcome 4a: Critically analyze environmental information, data and problems**, and not spending as much time on **4d. Communication**. This is important since ENVS 202 covers numerous conceptually involved topics, and is one of the few science courses that Environmental Studies majors must take.
- In addition, Dr. Rempel's 2018 class also focused more on the ability to discuss key concepts in environmental studies (e.g. climate change; air quality; sustainable agriculture) from multiple perspectives (**Learning Outcome 3**). She ended group term projects in ENVS 202 because of the coasting problem and replaced them with the end-of-term section debates in which individuals were responsible for their own arguments. Students chose the issues, but were assigned

perspectives from which to argue. Each issue was phrased as whether or not to pursue a specific action: city adoption of smart meters, state banning of pesticides, individual decisions to buy an electric car, etc. This both reduced group work stress and improved assessment of individual accomplishment.

- Dr. Rempel continued to work on ENVS 202 during the 2019 Summer Teaching Academy, exploring the possibility of re-working it to provide five two-week student-initiated projects and abandoning weekly homework and the term project / issue debates altogether. The idea would be to help everyone find something they care about enough to motivate greater effort, because motivation is a huge obstacle for about a third of the students.
- In summary, for ENVS 202: Natural Science, the main actions taken include: (i) reductions in content and pace, sadly, to accommodate the large proportion of students with extremely little preparation in science; (ii) substitution of in-class (i.e. large class) discussions with specific clicker-type questions done through Socrative to reveal comprehension more clearly; (iii) exchange of group term projects for issue debates with individually assigned positions; (iv) increased focus on comprehension & synthesis of scientific evidence to support arguments, with less emphasis on the quality of the writing itself.

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

This year, we continued our focus on helping our majors be career-ready at graduation:

- Winter-Spring 2019: The Environmental Leadership Program offered five projects that provided students with high-impact, community-based learning opportunities that focused on developing their research, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and leadership skills.
- February 2019: We hosted an ENVS Career Workshop, focused on resume and cover letter tips, helpful clues for internship and job searches, and an opportunity to practice interview skills.
- April 2019: We hosted *Environmental Connect*, our signature networking event in which students met with 27 organizations to learn about volunteer, internship and job opportunities, as well as practice networking skills. Over 110 students participated in this event.
- May 2019: We hosted ENVS Community Field Day in collaboration with the Student Sustainability Center.
- Throughout the year we hosted and/or participated in various events designed to share our broad interdisciplinary research with students. For example, Mark Carey discussed “Glaciers, Water and Culture” as part of the Museum of Natural and Cultural History’s pub talks, and Barbara Muraca participated in a panel discussion focusing on resolving environmental conflicts, with Bryan Norton (Georgia Tech) and Konrad Ott (Christian Albrechts University Kiel).
- Throughout the year we continued our new community-building initiative of holding town halls and social events so undergraduates could get to know each other enjoy some social time, and/or discuss current issues and/or plan their course schedules together. This year it included hosting a finals study night in fall term, and tip sheet release parties each term.

#### **Section 5: Plans for Next Year**

During the 2019-2020 year, we are examining the lower-division requirements for the Environmental Science (ESCI) major. Dr. Lynch has been involved in the AAU Stem curricular review process, in which we’ve been examining the structure of our STEM majors to look for ways to reduce the persistent equity gaps found there. Dr. Lynch will be bringing these results to the ENVS faculty retreat in September 2020 for a more comprehensive discussion and review of our required courses. Specific actions will be discussed then and a strategy for 2020-2021 developed in early Fall. In addition, we plan to evaluate ENVS 201: Introduction to Environmental Studies: Social Sciences during 2020-2021.