2023-24 ENVA Assessment

1. Names of all programs and degree types assessed:
Environmental Studies major, Environmental Studies minor

2. Names and contact information of the faculty coordinating the assessment of each program and report:
Adrienne Johnson, lead contact, <ajohnson21@usfca.edu>; David Silver, <dmsilver@usfca.edu>

3. Your Mission Statement; note any changes since last report:
Although the Environmental Studies Program has not formally adopted a mission statement, we operate the major and minor in accordance with the following statement:
The Environmental Studies Program is interdisciplinary in nature, reflects the current state of the field, recognizes the relationship between human behavior and nature in ecological issues, and responds to the Jesuit call to promote environmental justice and ethical stewardship of the natural world.

4. Your PLOs; note any changes since last report:
PLOs for the Major:
1. Demonstrate an understanding of the roles of humans and institutions in creating and responding to environmental issues;
2. Integrate perspectives of multiple disciplines to understand the complexities of human-environment interactions;
3. Apply scientific principles to environmental problems;
4. Critically analyze socio-culturally appropriate strategies to address
5. environmental problems; and
6. Connect environmental problems to issues of social justice through study
7. and community engagement.

PLOs for the Minor:
1. Demonstrate an understanding of the roles of humans and institutions in creating and responding to environmental issues;
2. Apply scientific principles to environmental problems; and
3. Connect environmental problems to issues of social justice.

5. Your current Curricular Map; note any changes since last report:

ENVA Curricular Map					
REQUIRED COURSES (30 units)	Integrate perspectives of multiple disciplines to understand the complexities of human-environment interactions	Demonstrate an understanding of the range of environmental issues and the roles of humans and institutions in responding to them	Analyze critically and develop socio-culturally appropriate strategies to resolve environmental problems	Connect environmental problems to issues of social justice through study and community engagement	Apply scientific principles to develop solutions for environmental problems
ENVA 109 Environment and Society	I	M	I	I	
ENVS 110 Introduction to Environmental Science w/Lab	I	I	I		M
ENVS 210 Ecology and Human Impacts w/Lab	M				M
ENVA 285 Nature Immersion + Campus and Community Projects				M	
ENVA 310 The Commons: Land, Air and Water	A	A	M	M	
ENVA 355 Methods and Approaches in Environmental Studies	M		M		M
ENVA 367 Environmental Justice	A	A	M	M	
ENVA 450 Capstone Practicum in Environmental Studies		A	A	A	

6. Your assessment schedule between APRs: a year by year list of PLOs assessed since your last APR and those to be assessed before your next APR:

- 2021-22 - APR
- 2022-23 - PLO 3: "Apply scientific principles to environmental problems"
- 2023-24 - PLO 1: "Demonstrate an understanding of the roles of humans and institutions in creating and responding to environmental issues"
- **2024-25 - PLO 5: "Connect environmental problems to issues of social justice through study and community engagement"**
- 2025-26 - PLO 4: "Critically analyze socio-culturally appropriate strategies to address environmental problems"
- 2026-27 – PLO 2: "Integrate perspectives of multiple disciplines to understand the complexities of human-environment interactions"

7. Description of the assessment methodology:

On October 22, 2024, Adrienne Johnson and David Silver met for several hours to engage in Assessment of Program Learning Outcome #5, **"Connect environmental problems to issues of social justice through study and community engagement."** To assess this PLO, we gathered work products in the form of final research proposals from Adrienne's Fall 2023 course, *Environmental Approaches to Research Methods* (ENVA 355). This course is a required course for all ENVA majors. The overall aim of this final assignment is for students to demonstrate an understanding of the intricacies and applications of research methods by choosing an environmental topic, identifying a researchable question related to the topic, and then designing an approach to execute the research. Students are encouraged to design a project informed by community needs and realities and prinicples of social justice. They are taught the ethics of

doing 'good' research and how important it is to be self-reflexive in order to address power inequalities and to avoid doing 'extractive' research.

We jointly created a rubric which captured varying degrees of student comprehension when it comes to understanding different actors and institutions involved in the production of environmental problems and governing solutions to them. The assessment criteria was **Exceptional, Proficient, Approaching Proficient; or Below Proficient**.

A random sampling method was employed where out of 22 proposals, every 3rd one was selected for analysis. A total of 7 proposals were assessed according to the rubric included below. The proposals came from both ENVA majors and minors. After each faculty had read and rated 2 student work products, an informal discussion was held to question whether those products appeared to match expectations for a 300-level course, and what sorts of challenges could be had, if any. This discussion was repeated again until all 7 proposals were read.

8. Rubrics (and other instruments, if applicable)

We assessed each work product according to 3 criteria and used a scale of Exceptional, Proficient, Approaching Proficient, and Below Proficient.

	A ▼	B	C	D	E	F
PLO 5. Connect environmental problems to issues of social justice through study and community engagement					
Criterion	**Exceptional**	**Proficient**	**Approaching proficient**	**Below proficient**	
Introduction - The proposal contained a strong introduction that addresses a worthy and relevant social and/or environmental justice issue	Thoroughly formulates a strong introduction that addresses a worthy and relevant social and/or environmental justice issue	Coherently formulates an introduction that addresses a worthy and relevant social and/or environmental justice issue	Provides a limited introduction that addresses a social and/or environmental justice issue	Does not show evidence of an introduction that addresses a social and/or environmental justice issue	
Literature Review - Demontrates what has been studied and which solutions have been enacted (or not)	Thoroughly demonstrates how humans and institutions exacerbate environmental problems, on multiple planes	Coherently demonstrates how humans and institutions exacerbate environmental problems on one or more planes	Provides limited description of how humans and institutions exacerbate environmental problems	Incomplete, misleading, or misguided presentation of how humans and institutions exacerbate environmental problems	
Research Design - Ethical considerations are identified and explained, as are anticipated challenges	Provides in-depth examples of how humans and institutions are addressing environmental problems and driving solutions forward	Provides only cursory examples of how humans and institutions are addressing environmental problems and driving solutions forward	Provides only a single example of how humans and institutions are addressing environmental problems and driving solutions forward	Fails to provide a coherent perspective on how humans and institutions are driving solutions forward	

9. Description of your results, noting any significant findings from the data or assessment process:

The students scored the following: For criterion #1, 14% of students scored 'Exceptional' with the remaining (almost 85%) scoring 'Proficient'. For criterion #2, almost 43% of students scored 'Exceptional' with the remaining (51%) scoring 'Proficient.' For criterion #3, 51% scored 'Exceptional' while the remaining (43%) scored 'Proficient.'

Overall, we found that students wrote proposals that were on timely issues and ones that sought participatory involvement with communities, based in San Francisco and abroad. The proposals also ranged in scale – some of the proposals examined local, small-scale issues concerning environmental behaviors at USF while others delved into global environmental issues such as carbon counting and international finance. Students also employed various methodological approaches which impressed the reviewers. For example, in some proposals, students combined participant interviews with GIS mapping techniques. Others utilized long-term ethnography with

global statistics. These multi-modal, multi-scalar projects demonstrated keen interest and appreciation for research design and implementation. Several areas for improvement are noted below:

1) **Glossing over ethics** – while many students spent much time explaining the ethical implications of their research, we found that several proposals mentioned possible ethical concerns of their research in a superficial or surface-level way. More depth and reflection was needed. Simply acknowledging ethical implications does not give a researcher a 'greenlight' to do the research. Much more discussion and elaboration could have been provided along with a more thoughtful analysis on whether the project should go forward and why.

2) **Lack of 'through line' between sections** – in some cases, each proposal section read as a stand alone section and the connecting thread was not apparent. Some proposals read as if the sections were written by different people. Having a more obvious through line or connective tissue would make more obvious how the proposal 'hangs together' and what each section's purpose is and what it contributes to the proposal.

3) **Stronger introductions** – as many social science grant writers know, a captivating introduction is key! Unfortunately, we found that several of the proposals lacked a clear and compelling introduction. Rather than providing interesting facts or statistics, we found that several proposals went almost straight into the literature review and did not announce the importance of the topic at hand.

10. Description of how the results were shared with faculty and how your department/program responded to the results. This is where you should lay out any plans for future improvement or assessment of your program indicated by the results.
We shared the results with our fellow ENVA faculty and devised the following actions:

1) To address critique #1, there is an on-going discussion about whether students in ENVA 355 should actually DO the research they propose at some point in the ENVA 355 semester. Currently, the course is designed for students to devise a research proposal over the course of the semester but they do not get the opportunity to do the research during the course. (Students may have the opportunity to execute the research project in the following semester as their Capstone project, but this is not mandatory). If the proposal assignment was reduced in length, this would open up several weeks at the end of the semester to actually implement the project proposed. In this way, students could work with local communities and get a on-the-ground sense of what the ethical impacts of their projects might be. At the moment, the ethical component seems very abstract to students so adding in a more hand-on approach might address this issue.

2) To address critiques #2 and #3, we will implement the following changes. First, the instructor will spend more time in the peer review phase of the proposal assignment. In this stage, students are divided up into groups and asked to read the proposals of their peers. At this point, students can be asked to give feedback on how well each section connects to one another. Then, an additional class or two can be dedicated to revisiting

each section and revising it so connects better with the other section. Additionally, an entire class will be dedicated to not only writing one's Introduction, but also to revising it according to peer feedback. Students will be asked to answer the WHY question by providing statistics or interesting facts.

11. Discussion of any significant feedback from your previous year's report and how your program responded to that feedback:

We did not receive feedback on our last assessment. We received confirmation of receipt on November 29, 2023 from the Assessment Committee.