

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**Academic Program Review**

**DEPARTMENT/PROGRAM**  
**Environmental Studies**

**EXTERNAL REVIEWERS**

Dr. Jonathan Isham, Middlebury College  
Dr. Ted Toadvine, University of Oregon  
Dr. Nancy Tuchman, Loyola University Chicago

**CAMPUS VISIT:**

April 23-25, 2014

The review team read the self-study written by the faculty in the department; reviewed the curriculum, course syllabi and evaluations; conducted class visits; interviewed faculty, students and staff; and met with the Dean, Associate Deans and other relevant members of the campus community. Prior to their visit, the reviewers were provided with USF's Vision, Mission, Values Statement, the department's self-study and other university materials.

**1. How did the external review committee rate the quality of the program – excellent, very good, good, adequate, or poor? How does the program compare with benchmark top-tier programs nationally? Please provide a brief rationale for the external review committee's rating.**

The reviewers agreed that the program could be rated as GOOD. They were impressed by the "rich and interdisciplinary faculty who are passionately committed to this program", "the large number of majors who are satisfied with the program", and the new, innovative curriculum. The review team discussed structural and resource issues that are current limiting the program's potential. Overall, their comments indicate that Environmental Studies has the ability to become an excellent program at the level that one would expect to find at a top-tier liberal college or university.

**2. What are the most important general issues that emerged from the external review process?**

- According to the review team, the Environmental Studies Program is positioned to be a leading institution in the West "with a moral and ethical compass" that "should contribute significantly to local and regional level knowledge and understanding" of and "solutions and advocacy" for pressing environmental issues.
- The program should "aim high" in its aspirations because of the urgent need to address global climate change, the potential to use the city as a "learning lab", and the many strengths of the program (e.g., a caring, passionate, engaged faculty; talented students; and innovative curriculum).
- The issues that the program faces are common among interdisciplinary programs: balancing breadth and depth in a manageable and flexible way; providing prerequisites and upper-level courses across many disciplines; relying on courses taught through other departments; and scheduling and offering courses with few or no dedicated faculty.
- Faculty tensions and a lack of cohesiveness are preventing the program from "leveraging its strengths to forge a shared vision of future opportunities."
- The program faculty should address their challenges by building a common cause and placing the students in the "very center of their sights."

- The reviewers noted the important work of the dedicated, committed, passionate co-directors. They also emphasized that new leadership with clearer, more active guidance from the Dean's Office is needed to address the program's challenges.
- The faculty and administration could consider creating a center that might feature several themes (e.g., ecology, energy and climate, water, environmental health, and sustainable cities) and facilitate a common core for Environmental Studies, Environmental Science, and Environmental Management programs.

### **3. What specific recommendations for improving the program's quality has the external review committee made to the Dean?**

The reviewers highly recommended that the Dean create a task force that will be charged with outlining the future mission and structure of the program. They also proposed that Associate Dean Brooks serve as liaison between the ENVA task force and the USF administration.

The reviewer team highlighted three issues the program is facing: faculty tension, lack of resources, and lack of connections with alumni. They also discussed a few additions to the curriculum.

Specific recommendations included:

#### Faculty/ENVA Structure

- A different organization structure to be established by the task force and formalized in official by-laws. The task force should "consider and present cost-effective alternatives to the administration" and the administration can "tie the investment of new resources to the development of a new collaborative vision for the program's future and to evidence of a revitalized spirit of collaboration among the faculty."
- Appointment of two co-chairs this year, one for the sciences and one from the social sciences or arts/humanities.
- External hiring of a chair that is senior with broad interdisciplinary background and relevant administrative experience.
- Appointment of members of the Advisory Board that are formally recognized as joint faculty of ENVA and their home departments. The reviewers strongly encouraged the administration to consider appointing some Advisory Board members at a level higher than .0 FTE, which would shift a portion of some faculty teaching and service from other departments to the ENVA program.
- Support a kick-off retreat and celebrations of achievements by the task force and the program faculty and staff.

#### Resources

- A fully dedicated space for the ENVA program. A central space would provide "a home base that would give the program an identity and operational base, providing students, staff and faculty a sense of belonging to a real community".
- An increase in regular support staff. Staff could help with developing the curriculum, maintaining experiential learning facilities, building community, and connecting with alumni.

#### Alumni/External Community

- Visits to leading innovators in higher education (e.g., Arizona State University's Global Institute of Sustainability; NYU's interdisciplinary institutes; post-Katrina changes at Tulane; Change Maker campuses).

- Building of stronger ties with their own alumni. Recent graduates can provide mentoring, facilitate internships and professional networking, give invaluable feedback on the program's success, establish and maintain a fruitful alumni network.
- Collection of program assessment data through surveys at graduation and at regular post-graduation intervals (e.g., 3 and 5 years post-graduation).
- Invitation to recent alumni to share their experiences and advice with current students, such as during an annual "homecoming" event.
- Development of an online database or social media network that connects current students with alumni who are willing to offer career advice or professional opportunities such as internships.

#### Curriculum

- The new "pathways" curriculum model is meant to address several frustrations that students voiced during the visit: the courses did not have enough depth; a lack of cohesiveness, lack of core courses and inconsistency in offerings. The reviewers recommend a few additional changes, including more strongly defining areas of concentration and creating more upper level specialty and experiential courses.
- This curriculum must be carefully evaluated and assessed on an ongoing basis to determine whether it successfully achieves the program's learning goals and outcomes prospect of a new center.

#### **4. In the opinion of the external review committee is the program following the University's strategic initiative in that it is;**

- Recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty of outstanding teachers and scholars.*  
According to the reviewers, the key to the program's success is the "highly diverse faculty from across the university - including the humanities, social sciences, sciences, and professional schools – who often devote extra time and effort to ENVA. They provide a rich, transdisciplinary teaching and experiential learning opportunity around environmental issues for the students."
- Enrolling, supporting and graduating a diverse student body that demonstrates high academic achievement, strong leadership capabilities, a concern for others, and a sense of responsibility for the weak and vulnerable.*  
The reviewers "met a large enough group of [students] to learn of their talents and aspirations. Most are happy with the major. They are eager to learn, experience, and act to a calling to steward creation, care for the marginalized and poor, and protect resources for future generations."
- Providing the environment necessary to promote student learning in the program.*  
The review team praised the newly developed curriculum as "innovative and thoughtful." They commented that it "will help provide focus and structure to pathways of learning that students can choose to specialize in" with a "variety of offerings across disciplines and from general to specialized." The curriculum balances "interdisciplinary training with individually tailored flexibility" through "broadly interdisciplinary foundations courses, Pathways sequence, Cornerstone Seminar, and applied projects". The reviewers, however, also agreed with the students that more hands-on/experiential learning opportunities needed to be intentionally built-in to the program.

**5. In what way is the program contributing to the goal of making the University of San Francisco a premier Jesuit, Catholic urban university with a global perspective that educates leaders who will fashion a more humane and just world?**

The Environmental Studies program addresses important global issues and the faculty and students are committed to addressing social justice issues. The reviewers pointed out that the program's mission is in line with the Jesuit mission and values. In their report, the reviewers discussed Father General Adolfo Nicolas' November 2012 letter to The Society of Jesus. Father Nicolas cited the Healing a Broken World document "and called upon the Jesuits to develop agency about the environmental crisis." The reviewers reminded us that "the Jesuit Universities were called to address the grand environmental challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century for the marginalized, for future generations, and for Creation through teaching, research and advocacy" in this influential document.

**6. What is the timetable for the response to the external review committee's recommendations for program improvement? What can the Office of the Provost do to appropriately respond to the review?**

The next step is for the Dean to meet with the Environmental Studies program to create an action plan and assemble the task force, which will have a two-semester period of work. The Office of the Provost could assist the program by: 1) providing resources for the task force; 2) considering the possibility of joint appointments; and 3) providing funding for a support staff position. Future discussions may involve dedicated space and a center for sustainability.

**7. What general comments or issues, if any, are crucial to understanding the reviewers report?**

The reviewers argued strongly that USF could lead in environmental studies. Our location in the San Francisco Bay Area and the arrival a new president supportive of the program's mission significantly increases the program's chances of becoming one of the top programs in the country.