

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Academic Program Review
College of Arts and Sciences*

PROGRAMS

**Environmental Studies BA,
Environmental Studies Minor, Urban Agriculture Minor**

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

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CAMPUS VISIT

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Draft reviewed and approved by: Environmental Studies faculty and the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences

The review team read the self-study written by faculty in Environmental Studies, reviewed the curriculum, course syllabi and evaluations; interviewed faculty, students and staff; and met with the Dean, Associate Dean and other relevant members of the campus community. Prior to their visit, the reviewers were provided with USF's Vision, Mission, Values Statement, 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 external review team gave the program a rating of VERY GOOD, and they “recommend that the University further invest in the program in order to support its work, especially through diversification of faculty.” They described Environmental Studies (ENVA) as a program “at the leading edge of environmental studies and environmental humanities,” which stems, in part, from “the commitment of the faculty to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) in their classes and research.” The review team noted that they “see great potential for the ENVA program to recruit and retain students, as well as for ENVA to carve a particular and valued place among environmental science and studies programs in California and nationally.”

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

The external reviewers’ report emphasizes the need to increase the diversity of the Environmental Studies faculty through strategic hiring to meet the needs of the program’s diverse student body and curricular focus on “environmental justice studies.” They also discuss challenges in delivering high-impact, immersive courses due to a lack of resources. The under-utilization of USF’s campus and Star Route Farms, and under-resourced Community Garden, are also a focus of the report.

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

The external review team focused on the importance of increasing the diversity of the faculty through strategic hiring in Native American and Indigenous Studies, Black/African Diaspora Studies, and/or Chicana and Latina Studies. Given the diversity of the students in the program and the curricular focus on “environmental justice studies,” the review team stated that “diverse faculty are essential to recruit and retain diverse students.” The reviewers also mentioned their support for a cluster hire of new faculty to promote the longevity of these positions within the program.

In addition, the reviewers’ report recommends increasing resources for the experiential learning components of the ENVA curriculum. “A major strength of the curriculum, and an area of distinction for the program, is the commitment to community-engaged and experiential learning,” they wrote. “Not only are these types of learning a hallmark of effective Environmental Studies curricula, they are considered to be one of 10 high-impact educational practices according to a 2008 report from the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)” that also “align well with Jesuit education.” The review team mentions that “Environmental studies programs often have to justify the benefits of these types of

experiences to administrators, who are concerned with expense, risk management, and rigor. While field classes are a norm in the sciences, these are equally important in environmental studies.” Investment in experiential learning within Environmental Studies would create opportunities for immersive experiences for students within Environmental Studies and from other majors due to the program’s commitment to offering courses that fulfill Core requirements. They also recommend that the program develop an internship program and strengthen career counseling for students.

Finally, the external review team saw potential for greater partnerships between the Environmental Studies program and campus organizations, such as the Office of Sustainability, which could facilitate better usage of campus spaces for learning and teaching. The reviewers noticed “a failure of the institution as a whole to realize the potential of campus as a living lab and to engage students.” This is exemplified by the USF Community Garden, which is a powerful teaching space that recruits students into the program, but could benefit from a full-time garden manager position rather than relying on volunteers and adjunct faculty to maintain the space.

4. In the opinion of the external review committee, is the program following the University’s strategic initiatives?

According to the external reviewers’ report, “the program supports many university goals. The mission is clearly aligned with USF’s vision statement; its focus on interdisciplinary, collaborative learning, and collective action match well with the core values of the institution.” The program offers excellent community-engaged learning courses, “which require significant time commitments outside the classroom and beyond the boundaries of the semester,” which serve students within the program as well as undergraduate students from across campus. “The commitment to engaged learning, and the deep experience ENVVA provides to its students,” the reviewers notes, “are markers of best practice and reflect what many environmental studies programs can only aspire to offer.”

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?

As mentioned above, the review team was particularly vocal about the benefit of community-engaged and other experiential learning opportunities provided by the program. They wrote,

Through community engaged and experiential learning, students learn to observe, analyze, empathize, and problem solve. Students develop interpersonal and leadership skills that can

benefit higher-order thinking. This type of learning has the ability to create connections to places and peoples that can translate abstract concepts into concrete and tangible understandings. While these skills may seem less rigorous than classroom learning (which is more easily measured and quantified), the skills of community engagement are essential to student's success beyond the classroom and after graduation. We see the integration of experiential learning, in conjunction with internship programs and job placement, as an emerging focus in liberal arts colleges that will only grow through time. Finally, CEL is essential to helping students learn the ethics of engagement and research, particularly with communities who are underrepresented in higher education. Students can only learn the practice of reciprocal and respectful engagement when they see this modeled by their faculty and have the opportunity to build relationships of trust themselves. These are core values articulated in USF's mission, and the skills learned through this kind of engagement can be transferred to any career.

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, Associate Deans, and Associate Director of Assessment to meet with the full-time faculty in Environmental Studies during Fall 2022 and discuss the action plan based on the self-study and reviewers' report. Based on the reviewers' suggestions, the Office of the Provost could assist the program by: strengthen lines of communication between academic programs and campus organizations, such as the Office of Sustainability and Facilities, to expand opportunities to use outdoor space for teaching and learning in the immediate future; and investing in existing resources, such as the USF Community Garden and Star Route Farms, to increase opportunities for student engagement in the next five years.

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

No additional information is necessary to understand the report.