

Environmental Studies – Major and Minor
Assessment Report, 2017-2018

Logistics & Program Learning Outcomes

1. Please indicate the name and email of the program contact person to whom feedback should be sent (usually Chair, Program Director, or Faculty Assessment Coordinator).

David Silver, Program Director, dmsilver@usfca.edu

2. Were any changes made to the program mission statement since the last assessment cycle in October 2017? Kindly state "Yes" or "No." Please provide the current mission statement below. If you are submitting an aggregate report, please provide the current mission statements of both the major and the minor program.

No.

Although the Environmental Studies Program has not formally adopted a mission statement, we operate 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.

3. Were any changes made to the program learning outcomes (PLOs) since the last assessment cycle in October 2017? Kindly state "Yes" or "No." Please provide the current PLOs below. If you are submitting an aggregate report, please provide the current PLOs for both the major and the minor programs.

No.

ENVA Major PLOs (Update approved April 25, 2017):

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 environmental problems; and
5. Connect environmental problems to issues of social justice through study and community engagement.

ENVA Minor PLOs (Update approved April 25, 2017):

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.

4. Which particular Program Learning Outcome(s) did you assess for the academic year 2017-2018?

We did not assess a PLO during the 2017-2018 year.

There were multiple reasons we did not assess a PLO during the 2017-2018 year. The first was that the program director, David Silver, assumed the position directly prior to winter break (due to Jeff Paris going to the Dean's Office) and spent nearly all of spring semester learning the ropes. The second reason was that spring 2018 marked the first time our core faculty were fully assembled: In 2015-2016, there were no full-time ENVA faculty; Steve Zavestoski joined ENVA full-time in 2016-2017; David Silver and Melinda Stone joined ENVA full-time in 2017-2018; and Adrienne Johnson, our newest hire, joined us full-time in spring 2018. We decided to focus our assessment efforts on our current curriculum.

We will, however, assess a PLO during the 2018-2019 year. We agreed as a Program to assess PLO 5 (in Major) and 3 (in Minor), which is, "Connect environmental problems to issues of social justice through study and community engagement." To assess this, we will use student work from five ENVA classes: Cornerstone; 2 sections of Community Garden Outreach; Environmental Justice; and Capstone. We will use both direct tools (course embedded questions in all five classes) and indirect tools (exit surveys for both Cornerstone (sophomores) and Capstone (seniors) students).

Methodology

5. Describe the methodology that you used to assess the PLO(s).

As previously mentioned, we did not assess a PLO last year. We did, however, assess our curriculum through three different and overlapping approaches.

- First, we established a summer curriculum committee that was tasked with finding ways to reduce our 58-unit major. The summer curriculum committee met multiple times, both in person and online.
- Second, we established a series of conversations, both small group and one-on-one, among the Program Director and “Methods and Approaches in Environmental Studies” professors (Adrienne Johnson and Steve Zavestoski). The goal of this committee was to assess whether ENVA 255 (Quantitative Skills for Environmental Studies) is a necessary pre-requisite ENVA 355 (Methods and Approaches in Environmental Studies) and whether it should remain as a required class within ENVA.
- Third, we established a series of conversations, both small group and one-on-one, among the Program Director and all professors who have taught Cornerstone (Brian Dowd-Uribe, David Silver, Melinda Stone, and Steve Zavestoski) to assess the continuation or elimination of Cornerstone as a required class within ENVA.

RESULTS & MAJOR FINDINGS

6. What are the major takeaways from your assessment exercise?

We have three significant takeaways from our assessment exercise.

First, at 58 units, the ENVA major is not feasible for numerous transfer students who want to major in Environmental Studies. They can't fit the 58 units into their remaining units. This is a major problem.

Second, at least two core faculty members – Melinda Stone and David Silver, both rooted in the Humanities – have few options to teach required classes. David teaches Cornerstone and Capstone; Melinda teaches Cornerstone, Capstone, and Nature Immersion. We believe our curriculum should better reflect the expertise and experience of all faculty, especially core faculty.

And third, our interdisciplinarity is off-balance. Currently our required classes (minus Pathways) are as follows:

4 Environmental Science + Math classes (16 units)

ENVS 110: Introduction to Environmental Science w/Lab

ENVS 210: Ecology and Human Impacts w/Lab

ENVS 212: Air and Water w/Lab

ENVA 255: Quantitative Skills for Environmental Studies

3 Social Science classes (12 units)

ENVA 109: Environment and Society

ENVA 355: Methods and Approaches in Environmental Studies

ENVA 367: Environmental Justice

2.5 Experiential Learning classes (10 units)

ENVA 290: Nature Immersion (2 units)

ENVA 311: Cornerstone

ENVA 450: Capstone

1 Humanities class (4 units)

ENVA 310: The Commons

Instead of 4, 3, 2.5, and 1, it should be 2, 2, 2, 2.

Closing the Loop

7. **Based on your results, what changes/modifications are you planning in order to achieve the desired level of mastery in the assessed learning outcome? This section could also address more long-term planning that your department/program is considering and does not require that any changes need to be implemented in the next academic year itself.**

We desperately need to reduce our major from an unwieldy 58 units. We need it to better reflect our faculty. And we need it more balanced across the disciplinary clusters of Environmental Science, Social Sciences, Humanities, and Community-Engaged Learning.

We need to learn to work together, both core and affiliate faculty, to produce the best possible major and minor for our students.

Thus far:

1. The summer curriculum committee produced and shared a model that would reduce the major from 58 to 42 units.
2. The topic has been discussed during three different ENVA faculty meetings: once in spring 2018 for about 5 minutes; once in September 2018 for about 5 minutes; and once last week for about 40 minutes. We seem to be achieving some kind of understanding but it is moving very slowly.
3. The Program Director (David Silver) met with ENVS Chair (Jack Lendvay) and they agreed that it would be helpful for David to visit an ENVS faculty meeting to appraise them of our curriculum revisions.

We are all ears for how to reduce and refine our curriculum effectively and quickly. Should we meet with Josh Gamson? Should we meet with Marvella?

- 8. What were the most important suggestions/feedback from the FDCD on your last assessment report (for academic year 2016-2017, submitted in October 2017)? How did you incorporate or address the suggestion(s) in this report?**

The most significant suggestion we received was related to PLO #1, which is, "Demonstrate an understanding of the roles of humans and institutions in creating and responding to environmental issues."

Feedback from the FDCD stated:

"I do have a minor comment on PLO #1, how does one measure if a student "demonstrates an understanding?" I might suggest you rephrase PLO #1 to read, "Analyze (or evaluate or review, etc.) the roles of humans and institutions in creating and responding to environmental issues." As I said this comment is minor, but the suggested change allows you to construct a rubric in which you evaluate a student work product to make sure it is critically and logically analyzed."

We discussed this feedback and decided to keep PLO #1 as is.