

Environmental Studies Department Assessment Plan
Submitted by Roopali Phadke, Acting Chair
February 1, 2014

I. Department Student Learning Statement

The mission of the Environmental Studies Department is to provide students with the opportunity to engage in learning opportunities that support their desire to understand and solve environmental problems. The solutions to many environmental issues require both deep disciplinary knowledge and an interdisciplinary breadth of understanding. Our curriculum emphasizes academic rigor, experiential learning and collaborative research and action projects.

II. Department Learning Goals and Outcomes

The Environmental Studies Department has developed the following learning goals for our students:

As an interdisciplinary program, the Environmental Studies program expects students to develop a holistic understanding of environmental issues occurring at the local, national, and global level. Students gain this understanding by using the tools and perspectives of the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences to analyze the causes and consequences of environmental problems and the knowledge to develop solutions.

The Environmental Studies Department has developed the following learning outcomes for our students:

- The ability to think systematically about complicated problems.
- The ability to recognize and communicate with diverse kinds of specialists.
- The ability to understand the premises of diverse disciplines.
- The ability to appreciate the nature of scientific uncertainty and controversy.
- The capacity for consensus building and appreciation of group dynamics.
- The ability to appreciate the nature of our species, spirituality, aesthetics, and relationships and differences among cultures.

III. Department Assessment Strategies

We use two instruments to evaluate our learning outcomes each year: an online Senior Survey (required of every graduating major) and an individual student rubric for each Senior scored on a 5 point scale that is completed by all faculty in a consensus based assessment meeting.

The shortcoming of this system is that we are assessing students upon the completion of our major and using this as a tool for refining the content delivery and scope of our

courses. This does not allow us to examine student development through the learning goals at various stages through the major. The below plan describes additional tools we hope to implement to better assess learning outcomes.

IV. Four-Year Timeline to Implement Assessment Strategies

Environmental Studies faculty members meet annually to evaluate our students' ability to achieve our learning goals and outcomes. We will continue to use the instruments described above because they provide us with comparable data year after year. There are a number of ways we can continue to develop new assessment strategies. We document these below.

In 2013-14:

We will meet as usual in Spring 2014 to review senior surveys and learning outcome rubrics. Our individual rubric discussion of learning outcome relies on faculty who have worked most closely with a particular student to best evaluate their success at each outcome. In our Spring 2014 retreat, we will use the Biology department learning goals mapping tool as a model for our department. We will map each of our learning outcomes on to our current curriculum. This will draw our attention to the learning outcomes that need our curricular attention.

In 2014-15:

The National Council for Science and the Environment (NCSE) is developing a set of new learning goals in 2014 that apply to Environmental Studies and Sciences. We will review their learning outcomes and assessment report in 2014-2015 and consider changes we may implement in the following year.

We will also aim to tie student performance to our learning outcomes more closely now that we have mapped out our curriculum in terms of specific learning outcomes.

In 2015-16:

We will implement any changes to our curriculum based on our review of the NCSE document. This may call for changes in our assessment processes in 2015-16.

In 2016-2017

We are up for departmental external review in 2016-2017. We will prepare for that review by conducting an extensive alumni survey in the Summer 2016. We will survey alumni using the same questions in the Senior Survey. Clearly, this will provide important information for our self-study and will impact future assessment discussions.