



To: Su Swarat, Director of Assessment and Educational Effectiveness

From: Sheryl Fontaine, Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Subject: Dean's Evaluation: Environmental Studies M.S. Program Performance Review

The Environmental Studies M.S. Program completed a comprehensive Program Performance Review in AY 2016-17. The program's self-study, the report of the External Review Committee, and the Chair's Response are attached to this report.

The Program Performance Review process included a detailed self-analysis that examined the program's short and long-term goals, its staffing and operations, curricular structure and assessment program, support for student success and advising, and the resources and facilities available to support its key functions as a center for student and faculty scholarship. A thoughtful review by a team of highly qualified specialists with expertise in the field paid particular attention to the challenges and opportunities presented by a graduate only program. Review team members included Dr. Matthew R. Cover (Department of Biological Sciences, CSU Stanislaus), Dr. David W. Ginsburg (Environmental Studies Program, USC), and Dr. Laura Zettel-Watson (Gerontology M.S. Program Coordinator, CSUF).

The Environmental Studies M.S. Program is multi-disciplinary; although it draws its affiliated faculty and Program Council members primarily from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences and Natural Sciences and Mathematics, it also includes faculty from the colleges of Health and Human Development, Engineering and Computer Science, and Education. In addition to the graduate program, Environmental Studies offers an undergraduate course on sustainability (ENST/CHEM 492) that gives the program some direct visibility with undergraduate students. In this context, the College of Humanities and Social Sciences is pleased to offer the following commendations and recommendations:

Commendations

The Environmental Studies Program offers a flexible curriculum that allows students with backgrounds in a variety of disciplines to pursue advanced study on environmental issues that leads to a diverse array of professional and academic careers. Structured to accommodate working professionals, the Program has great appeal for individuals already working in related fields but who seek to enhance their credentials.



The Program successfully recruits practicing professionals and disciplinary experts as part-time faculty, which enhances students' classroom experiences and the relationship between classroom and professional career.

Through a recently-created allied undergraduate course and the work of the program coordinator, the Program has maintained reasonable number of FTES through course enrollments and declared graduate students.

Recommendations

In collaboration with the H&SS Dean's Office, the Program Coordinator should develop a multi-year plan for student recruitment, curricular planning, and enrollment.

The Environmental Studies Program Council should develop or update a job description for the Coordinator, Program Advisor, support staff, and graduate assistant(s) that includes a detailed time estimate for their duties. Following a review of this document with the Program Coordinator, the H&SS Dean's Office will explore ways to balance available resources and program needs.

The Program Council should develop a leadership plan that allows for planned transitions between coordinators and ensures program continuity.

To support the efficacy of the Program Council and to assure faculty receive recognition for their work, the Program Council should develop guidelines that delineate the expectations for Council members and affiliated faculty, the benefits of doing so, and the expected RTP recognition that this work would receive.

The Program Council should develop a plan for building campus and community awareness of the Program and greater student/faculty interaction within the Program. This might include 1-2 faculty and student designed events per semester or a student research exhibit.

The Program Council and Coordinator should collaborate with the H&SS Marketing Specialist, the H&SS Dean's Office, and the Office of Graduate Studies to develop comprehensive short and long-term plans and associated materials for marketing, outreach, recruiting, and advising that take into account the challenges and opportunities presented by an interdisciplinary graduate program.

The external review team noted the lack of institutional support for data analytics for graduate programs. Many campus data tools do not track graduate student performance (retention and graduate rates, etc.). Both the dean's office and the program coordinator can reach out the Director of Graduate Programs to urge that the extension of analytics tools for assisting in the tracking and advising of graduate students become a campus priority.



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Support for interdisciplinary and cross-college programs

The external reviewers identified challenges specific to the support and development of an interdisciplinary graduate program housed in one academic college (H&SS), but which involves the collaboration of faculty from several colleges. To date, financial and logistical support has been provided by H&SS, but more direct support from other participating colleges would strengthen the program. Securing such support would be challenging, particularly in a time of restricted budgets and must include conversations among the faculty and chairs of participating departments as well as among the respective Deans. In addition, agreements recognizing faculty contributions to the Environmental Studies Program as part of the RTP process in all participating colleges would honor the significance of interdisciplinary research and teaching at CSUF.