

To: Su Swarat, Senior Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness and Planning, Accreditation Liaison Officer

From: Jessica Stern, Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences and Carl Wendt, Associate Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Subject: Dean's Summary and Evaluation of the Master of Science in Environmental Studies

Environmental Studies (ENST) is interdisciplinary and academically diverse program. It offers a flexible curriculum that allows students with backgrounds in a variety of disciplines to pursue advanced study on environmental issues that lead to a diverse array of professional and academic careers. This cross-disciplinary, graduate-only program offers experiential learning and co-curricular activities, and is one of the longest-running Environmental Studies programs in the nation. The program has an excellent placement record of students working in careers including environmental consulting, habitat restoration, forestry, museums, environmental education, and public administration.

The Environmental Studies program offers a Master of Science degree in Environmental Studies (36 units). The program has a cohort model. Students take three core classes (9 units) during the first year. The remaining courses are a planning course, elective courses, cross-disciplinary elective courses, and a culminating experience that is either a project or thesis. Currently all of the classes are in-person. In the last 7 years, the program has awarded 132 MS degrees -- an average of 18 MS degrees per year. Graduation rates are impressive. An average of 60% of ENST students graduate in 2 years, 82% graduate in 3 years, and 92% graduate within 4 years. Graduation rates show no discernible equity gap, perhaps because a majority of ENST students are members of underrepresented communities, which helps them find support within their own cohorts.

ENST has a Program Coordinator, a Graduate Advisor, and 47 affiliated faculty and researchers that represent 18 departments from five colleges across campus. The bulk of the affiliated faculty have expertise in the social sciences or environmental humanities. ENST has had a longstanding partnership with Geography and The Environment.

On February 6, 2024, the Environmental Studies MS program was reviewed by two external reviewers (Victoria Derr, Department of Applied Environmental Science, CSU, Monterey Bay, and Branwen Williams, Department of

Integrated Sciences, Claremont McKenna College) and one internal reviewer (Carrie Lane, Department of American Studies). On April 15, 2024, Dean Jessica Stern, Associate Dean Carl Wendt, Coordinator Elaine Lewinnek, and Nicole Seymour met to discuss the Self Study, the External Review Team (ERT) report, and the Program's response to that report. In the remainder of this memo we record and build on that discussion about the department's short and long term priorities.

Opportunities for Development

Growth:

Similar to other graduate programs across the campus and the CSU, enrollments and degrees awarded in ENST have been declining in recent years. In 2016-2017, the program had 100 students enrolled and in 2022-2023, enrollments declined to 50. An average of 21 degrees were awarded from 2016 to 2019, with an average of 18 awarded from 2020 to 2022, and 13 between 2022 and 2023. It is encouraging that recent active recruitment efforts have been successful -- students entering the program increased from 10 in fall 2022 to 17 in fall 2023.

Currently, the program's biggest priority is student recruitment. The Dean's Office supports ENST's idea of pursuing recruit efforts beyond Southern California, and establishing more connections across the CSU. Marketing and outreach efforts have focused on increasing visibility on the program, and developing cross-campus and regional partnerships. In spring 2024, ENST began a graduate ambassadors program, which involves graduate students visiting multiple sections of classes in Biology, Civil & Environmental Engineering, and Geology to recruit future applicants. Since their last PPR in 2016-2017, the program clarified their policies, revamped their website, deepened connections with their alumni, developed new recruitment strategies, welcomed new adjunct and affiliated faculty, re-emphasized the program's commitment to issues of diversity and inclusion, implemented new advising systems, pursued fruitful partnerships across campus, and established important new co-curricular traditions for their program's community, visibility, and connections.

The Dean's Office agrees with the ENST Self Study that identifies a number of ways to grow the program, which includes building stronger relationships with the natural sciences that can lead to more faculty from these departments teaching for the ENST program. ENST has a strong sustainability focus and a multidisciplinary approach to studying the environment, which aligns well with natural sciences departments. The Dean's Office agrees with ENST that departments across the university who have faculty teaching in the ENST program should clarify their faculty's teaching and service in ENST in their RTP processes. Faculty in non-HSS departments should be encouraged develop more cross-discipline courses, and even to serve as future coordinators of ENST. This would help address the issue of burnout of administrative faculty in ENST, which is a significant concern of the Dean's Office. The Dean is eager to work with ENST to develop a succession planning strategy for the program. One way to increase participation by faculty (especially non-HSS faculty) would be to increase the compensation for faculty doing advising for the program. Currently faculty are compensated \$250 for advising master's students.

The Dean's Office urges the ENST Program Council to develop a plan for building campus and community awareness of the program. We agree with ENST Self Study recommendation to collaborate with the college 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 Dean's Office will work with ENST's leadership to develop plans to increase communication efforts, initiatives, social media presence, event planning, etc.

Removing Barriers:

The Office of Graduate Studies can help to increase the size of the ENST program by reducing barriers if they make it possible for students who are denied admission to other departments be allowed to have their applications submitted to ENST for consideration. This would avoid interested students having to wait a year to apply to ENST. Streamlining the graduate admissions process would also contribute to this goal, including shortening the often months-long delay in processing international transcripts. ENST loses international applicants when the university transcript-verification process pushes their official admission date too late for visa processing. These are not problems unique to ENST, as other graduate programs in the college (e.g., AGST) experience them.

CSUF's requirement to re-hiring lecturer faculty who have not taught in the program for a semester or more is another burden to ENST. Currently, HRDI requires that faculty re-apply to the university to be re-hired after only one semester of not teaching. This is an undue burden that we hope can be addressed and look forward to discussing this during our culminating meeting.

We thank the program faculty and the external review team for their time and effort conducting these assessments and for putting these documents together. The Environmental Studies program is a model of how to engage students in meaningful, interdisciplinary work. We are particularly grateful for the leadership that Dr. Lewinnek and Dr. Seymour have provided. We look forward to working with the program and Academic Affairs on the areas of development.