

Program Performance Review: Culmination Meeting Memo Environmental Studies MS program

The 2023-2024 Program Performance Review (PPR) process for the Environmental Studies MS program in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) concluded with a culmination meeting on January 31, 2025.

The following people attended the meeting: Amir Dabirian (Provost), Sean Walker (Deputy Provost), Aimee Nelson (Director of Graduate Studies, DGS), Jessica Stern (Dean), Carl Wendt (Associate Dean), Laura Zettel-Watson (Associate Dean), Elaine Lewinnek (Program Coordinator), Nicole Seymour (Graduate Advisor), and Su Swarat (Senior AVP for Institutional Effectiveness and Planning, SAVPIEP).

The Provost congratulated the program for completing the PPR process and thanked the program for its contribution to raising campus awareness in environmental sustainability. The following specific accomplishments were highlighted during the PPR process:

- The program has a diverse student population and supports student projects that reflect diverse environmental issues.
- The program maintains excellent partnerships across campus and with the community, resulting in well-rounded, high-impact, co-curricular, and professional opportunities for students.
- Students appreciate the program's interdisciplinarity, with faculty maintaining course offerings current and exposing students to a diverse range of environmental topics.
- The program has enthusiastic faculty members and strong leadership, both committed to students and the program.
- The program has strong graduation rates, with about 60% of students graduating in 2 years, 82% within 3 years, and 92% within 4 years. The program has also demonstrated excellent commitment to reducing students' time to graduation.

Major recommendations and issues raised through the PPR process were discussed as follows:

1. Program recruitment and growth:

- All parties involved in the PPR process agreed that the program should develop more robust recruitment strategies and strengthen enrollment. Suggested strategies include developing undergraduate to MS pipelines, cross-listing 400/500-level courses, providing online or hybrid courses, recruiting beyond Southern California, expanding connections across the CSU, and developing strategic advertisements to environmental nonprofits across the US.
- The Program Coordinator reported that the program is working with the Office of Graduate Studies to attract applicants who are denied from other relevant programs or current students who wish to transfer from other programs.
 - The DGS concurred but shared that there is currently no process for graduate students to change majors.
 - The Provost asked the Deputy Provost to work on this process so that we do not lose students who wish to leave their current programs but desire to pursue studies within the environment/sustainability themes.

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- The Program Coordinator reported that the program aspires to be a hub for environmental/sustainability issues on campus. The program is working with the geography department to institute a new Minor in Geography to establish a sustainability pathway as a “pipeline” for the program.
 - The Program Coordinator shared that the program is also working to open up its wonderful array of field trips (immersive experiences) to students beyond those enrolled in the MS program to enhance program visibility and build out a pipeline.
 - The Program Coordinator stated that the program desires a cohort of 20 students and engages in a variety of recruitment efforts including information sessions, tabling, etc. The program has seen the quantity and quality of application increase.
 - o The Program Coordinator raised the challenge of updating the program website; The program has all the information ready, but cannot find the university venue to publish it.
 - The Provost asked the Deputy Provost to resolve this issue.
 - o The Program Coordinator also expressed the need to hire the program’s own students as “grad ambassadors” to encourage undergrads to join the program, a model with proven success.
 - The Dean agreed to find long-term solutions to sustain the effort.
 - The Provost inquired about recruitment of international students.
 - o The Program Coordinator stated that the current admission timeline makes it difficult to recruit international students; The Graduate Advisor also expressed the concern that there is insufficient support for international students.
 - o The Associate Dean shared that conversations are taking place with the Office of Graduate Studies, with the goal of identifying focused recruitment for international populations.
 - o The Provost recommended the program to connect with and learn from CBE and ECS, who have a streamlined process and support for international students.
2. Hiring of returning lecturers:
- The Program Coordinator expressed that the reappointment process for returning adjunct faculty is challenging, including lots of administrative barriers, threat to the lecturer’s entitlement, and loss of range elevation in home department. Such challenges prevent faculty in other departments from teaching in the program.
 - The Provost acknowledged that this is a systematic issue, and the university is working on solutions. The Dean also expressed commitment to working with the program to address this issue.
3. Courses at the Desert Study Center:
- The Program Coordinator shared that the Desert Study Center provides a wonderful environment for the program, where they would like to offer intersession courses. The challenge is that such classes may not meet the 25 minimum enrollment required for intersession courses, and thus would like to seek exceptions.
 - The Provost supported the idea and asked the program to work with Extensions to explore.

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- The Dean suggested the idea of offering a “study away” experience at the center, which could possibly receive funding support from the college.
4. Administrative support:
- The external reviewers recommended that the program should have its own administrative support member to coordinate tasks such as department communication, event planning, recruitment, and more.
 - The Program Coordinator shared that the main concern is the bureaucratic barriers, e.g. new hire paperwork and process are very time consuming.
 - The Provost and the Dean acknowledged the issue and agreed to support the program in making the process more streamlined.

The Provost concluded the meeting by thanking the program leadership and faculty for their contribution to the university and the community.