



## 2008-2009 Assessment Plan Report

### PROGRAM ASSESSMENT REPORT AY 2008-2009

**Report Date:** June 3, 2009

**School/College:** Arts & Sciences

**Department/Program:** Environmental Studies

**Person completing the Report:** Stephen Zavestoski

1. **Overview Statement:** Briefly summarize the assessment activities that were undertaken this academic year, indicating:
  - a. The following program learning outcome was assessed:

Environmental Studies majors should be able to draw on various disciplinary perspectives to describe a range of environmental issues and their human causes and consequences, such that the student will be able to:

    - i. Describe how at least three of the following disciplines approach the understanding of environmental problems: anthropology, economics, history, philosophy, political science, sociology, religious studies.
    - ii. Draw on one or more disciplinary perspectives to compare/contrast the causes/consequences of local, small-scale and global environmental problems.
    - iii. Give examples of how three of the following factors shape the human causes of, and responses to, environmental problems: cultural beliefs, historical precedent, market forces, public policies, social institutions, social norms.
  - b. As the Chair of the Environmental Studies Program and the instructor in the Capstone Seminar in Environmental Studies, the main course in which assessment was conducted, Stephen Zavestoski is the person primarily responsible for carrying out the assessment and for this assessment report. All members of the Environmental Studies Advisory Board participated in discussions of how to carry out this initial assessment effort and were appraised of the assessment plan and progress.



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### 2. Please Answer the Following Questions for Each of the Student Outcomes Assessed:

#### a. What did you do?

Describe clearly and concisely how you assessed the learning outcomes that were evaluated this year (e.g., measures, research methods, etc.). [please use bullet points to answer this question]

- All three parts of the first learning outcome were assessed through oral examination of graduating seniors in the Capstone Seminar in Environmental Studies and through assessment of the final exams of the four Environmental Studies majors enrolled in the introductory course Humans and Environmental Change.

#### b. What did the faculty in the department or program learn?

Summarize your findings and conclusions as a result of the assessment indicating strengths and weaknesses in student learning demonstrated by this assessment.

- i. Describe how at least three of the following disciplines approach the understanding of environmental problems: anthropology, economics, history, philosophy, political science, sociology, religious studies.

In the introductory Humans and Environmental Change course, 1 out of 4 students demonstrated average achievement of this outcome. 2 out of 4 demonstrated good achievement, and 1 out of 4 demonstrated very good achievement.

In the Capstone Seminar in Environmental Studies, 4 out of 11 students demonstrated average achievement of this outcome. 4 out of 11 demonstrated good achievement, and 3 out of 11 demonstrated very good achievement.

The assessment suggests that all students have at least an average grasp of at least three different disciplinary perspectives with respect to how they would approach environmental issues. As expected, the seniors' grasp was deeper and fuller than students in the introductory class.

The highest levels of understanding were demonstrated in the areas of economics, sociology, religious studies, and philosophy. The weaker understandings of political science and anthropology reflects that absence of courses in these disciplines in the curriculum.

The main conclusion drawn is that the Program needs to find a way to offer



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environmental policy courses.

- ii. Draw on one or more disciplinary perspectives to compare/contrast the causes/consequences of local, small-scale and global environmental problems.

Not assessed in the introductory Humans and Environmental Change course.

In the Capstone Seminar in Environmental Studies, 3 out of 11 students demonstrated average achievement of this outcome. 2 out of 11 demonstrated good achievement, and 6 out of 11 demonstrated very good achievement.

Strengths included student ability to link consequences of a global problem like climate change to specific outcomes for specific localities, and the ability to explain the spatial and temporal dislocation between the causes and consequences of such problems.

One area of possible improvement is in understanding what options exist at the local level for addressing environmental problems stemming from actions taking place at a distance.

One possible conclusion to draw is that the curriculum could use more emphasis on strategic problem solving.

- iii. Give examples of how three of the following factors shape the human causes of, and responses to, environmental problems: cultural beliefs, historical precedent, market forces, public policies, social institutions, social norms.

In the introductory Humans and Environmental Change course, 1 out of 4 students demonstrated average achievement of this outcome. 2 out of 4 demonstrated good achievement, and 1 out of 4 demonstrated very good achievement.

In the Capstone Seminar in Environmental Studies, 4 out of 11 students demonstrated average achievement of this outcome. 4 out of 11 demonstrated good achievement, and 3 out of 11 demonstrated very good achievement.

The three students demonstrating very good achievement are all double majors. It may be that the intense cognitive work necessary to balance coursework in two majors also gives them greater ability to think abstractly about the significance of cultural beliefs, historical precedent, market forces, public policies, social



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institutions, and social norms in shaping human causes of/responses to environmental problems.

All students were able to discuss the influence of market forces, and to a lesser degree cultural beliefs and social norms. Improvement is needed in the areas of historical precedent (except among those students who have taken Environmental History of Africa), public policies, and social institutions.

As above, the primary conclusion here is that the Program needs to find a way to offer the environmental policy courses that are part of the curriculum but that are virtually never offered. It would also be helpful for environmental history courses to be offered more often so more students can fit one into their schedules. If an environmental history course could be offered at least once a year, the Program might want to consider making it a requirement.

c. **What will be done differently as a result of what was learned?**

Discuss how courses and/or curricula will be changed to improve student learning as a result of the assessment. Include a discussion of how the faculty will help students overcome their weaknesses and improve their strengths.

The main outcome of this initial assessment will be an attempt to offer an environmental policy course at least once a year. The Program should wait for assessment results from the introductory level course Humans & Environmental Change, and for a second year of results from the Capstone Seminar in Environmental Studies, before making any decisions about changes to the existing curriculum.

Additionally, it was determined that assessment procedures in the Capstone Seminar in Environmental Studies were inadequate on account of the Program lacking any full-time faculty dedicated to teaching it. Without a full-time faculty member to teach it regularly, the Program depends on volunteers whose home departments permit them to teach a course does not serve any of the department's majors—only Environmental Studies majors.

During 2008-2009, it was not even known who would teach the course until the middle of the Fall semester. As a result, the course was not run as it normally would be run. Different course requirements, including student projects, made adhering to the Assessment Plan challenging. In the future, the Program will need the commitment of the College to hire a full-time faculty member whose responsibility will be to teach the Capstone Seminar in Environmental Studies



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annually. This continuity and the opportunity for course preparation well in advance of the course being offered will ensure that the necessary assessment components are designed into the course and carried out in the manner intended.

3. **Attach a copy of the components of the department/program assessment plan that have been modified since its initial submission:**
  - a. Program Mission
  - b. Program Learning Goals (**see attached**)
  - c. Program Learning Outcomes (**see attached**)
  - d. Program Learning Rubrics aligned with outcomes (**see attached**)
  - e. Curriculum map that shows the courses that pertain to the outcome (**see attached**)

**Please return to: Provost Office by June 1, 2009**

**You can send your replies as either a Word attachment (to: [marin@usfca.edu](mailto:marin@usfca.edu)) or as a hard copy to: Provost Office, Lone Mountain Rossi Wing 4<sup>th</sup> floor.**

**If you have any questions, please contact: William Murry, Director of Institutional Assessment ([wmurry@usfca.edu](mailto:wmurry@usfca.edu) or x5486).**