

## **Environmental Studies**

### **1.1.1 Mission, vision, and goals**

Mission: Originating in the 1970s, the interdisciplinary Gustavus Environmental Studies program began offering a major and minor in 1995, with significant curricular revisions implemented in 2001. The program combines rigorous empiricism with analysis of ethical, aesthetic, and historical issues in examining the relationship between humans and the nonhuman world. A rich array of faculty expertise, courses, facilities, internships, and study abroad options provides the foundation for an interdisciplinary study of the environment.

Sixteen faculty members representing nine academic departments, one affiliated Center (the Johnson Center for Environmental Innovation) and a naturalist offer courses in the major, serve as academic advisors for majors and minors, and provide relevant insight to students and program faculty regarding courses that are appropriate for concentrations in the major. Currently there are twenty-five majors and three minors. Highlights of the program include a required entry-level course and a senior research capstone seminar, faculty research that includes students, and courses that incorporate fieldwork centered on the Linnaeus Arboretum and regional settings.

Vision: The disciplinary diversity of program faculty fosters among students both disciplinary rigor and lateral rigor, or the capacity to combine and apply knowledge from different academic fields. None of the faculty is specifically appointed in Environmental Studies. At the institutional level, this arrangement can weave Environmental Studies and environmental consciousness more completely into the intellectual life of the institution. On the other hand, it can (and does) create considerable pressure on program faculty because of competing departmental duties and loyalties. Due to the growing interest in land use issues, energy, resource management, agricultural practices, and sustainable development (among other environmentally-focused areas)—as well as changing priorities at all levels of government—there will be increased student interest in the program. There will also likely be an increase in the availability of external funding.

Goals: Recognizing that existent faculty commitments make staffing of the two Environmental Studies courses problematic from year-to-year, and pursuit of major external funding opportunities unrealistic, we propose creation of an Endowed Chair in Environmental Studies at the rank of Professor with appointment to be solely in Environmental Studies, who will teach the Introduction to Environmental Studies course in fall and spring, and teach the Senior Seminar one semester each year. This person will also serve as the permanent Director of the Environmental Studies program, procure external sources of funding to sustain the program's mission and vision, and seek internships for program majors.

Further, given the fieldwork component integrated into courses—as well as increased student interest in doing environmental research—we propose creation of an endowment to fund course-related field experiences and to support student research. This endowment

will also support presentation of student research findings at appropriate academic conferences.

Given increased student interest in developing world countries as destinations for study abroad—as well as the significance of these countries in international environmental issues and issues of environmental justice—we propose creation of an international environmental justice study abroad program developed by Gustavus faculty.

Finally, as true environmental stewardship has to be learned, developed, and practiced beyond the constraints of classroom scheduling, we propose the building of a permanently designated environmentally-focused student dormitory, which will integrate environmentally conscious architecture and materials, and serve as a central location for members of the campus community to learn about environmental stewardship and sustainability.

### **1.3 Support relationships**

Students in the Environmental Studies program benefit from co-curricular opportunities provided by the Johnson Center for Environmental Innovation and the Linnaeus Arboretum. They also benefit from participation in environmental-related student organizations (notably the Gustavus Greens). The program is totally dependent on faculty in affiliated departments to staff program courses, on their faculty colleagues in those departments who recognize the value of this program and can accommodate its course offerings, and on the continued, consistent support of institutional administration.

## **Section 2: Strategic Review**

### **2.1 Strategic issues**

The principal strength of the program is its interdisciplinarity, resulting in an academic experience for students that is environmental *studies* rather than environmental *science*. Students benefit from a curricular approach that allows for both breadth across the curriculum and depth in one disciplinary area. Students balance different ways of knowing, understanding, thinking about, and communicating about the environment. They develop skills necessary to measure, analyze, and disseminate knowledge using data, and appreciate competing humanistic and social science perspectives. There are diverse talents and interests of contributing faculty, wide interests and abilities of students, and high quality of courses even if many are relatively higher enrollment.

Students are successful in applying their learning about human relationships with the environment to making change in their life and effecting environmental-related change on campus. Anecdotally, there is also a good track record of students moving on to highly-regarded graduate school programs in environment-related fields, and employment in environment-related fields after graduation. Students have also been relatively successful securing environment-related internships while enrolled in the program, and have sought environment-focused study abroad programs.

Faculty have been active on and of campus, by initiating and contributing to environment-related initiatives, conducting research and disseminating knowledge through publication and conference presentations, and sharing environmental expertise with the on and off-campus communities.

The principal weakness of the program is the inability of faculty to offer courses as frequently as necessary, resulting in scheduling difficulties for students and late-declaring majors. Faculty are committed to the program and its students but are pulled in many competing directions. Further, the program needs to be more effective in tracking the post-graduation paths of graduates.

Over the past ten years many peer institutions have pulled ahead of us in terms of dedicated funding, infrastructure, and program support for Environmental Studies (for example, they have successfully implemented alternative energy sources and have constructed green buildings). The result is a more visible, vibrant, institutionally-committed program that can attract more informed, higher quality prospective Environmental Studies students. We are able to attract to campus prospective students interested in Environmental Studies and we offer a comparable quality curricular experience, but it is difficult to compete against the preceding testaments of environmental leadership.

## **2.2 Barriers**

The greatest barrier to realizing the vision is lack of faculty time to fulfill multiple responsibilities and pursue multiple opportunities and achieve the desired results, whether that is teaching courses, conducting research with students, advising students, contributing to outreach, or seeking external sources of financial support.

## **Section 3 Strategic Initiatives and Recommendations**

Creation of an Endowed Chair in Environmental Studies at the rank of Professor.

Funding to ensure all majors who wish to do research are provided the opportunity to do so.

Funding to allow all majors to study abroad on an environmentally-focused program.

Funding to have a consistent speaker series and more environmentally-related events on campus.

Funding to update aging infrastructure in departments that contribute to the curricular and research mission of the program.

Renovation of Lund Interpretive Center to include classroom space.