

A Review
of
Environmental Studies
Lewis & Clark College
April 2, 2001

Introduction

An external committee was invited to review the Environmental Studies (ES) major at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, OR in part due to an assessment requirement for a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. This report will contribute to a baseline being established in preparation for future evaluation under this grant. The timing of this review is advantageous as it coincides with a strategic planning period at the college involving academic disciplines and interdisciplinary programs.

The W. M. Keck/Project Kaleidoscope (PKAL) Consultant Program provided partial funding for consultants Eric Pallant from Allegheny College in PA and Nan Jenks-Jay from Middlebury College in VT to visit Lewis & Clark College. This consultancy resulted from Lewis & Clark's participation in a PKAL sponsored Environmental Studies workshop. Evan Williams, director of ES, who requested the consulting team, was designated as the institutional contact by PKAL. With the exception of its earlier than usual occurrence, this review was conducted in a manner consistent with the Lewis & Clark Handbook section regarding "College of Arts and Sciences Department and Program Reviews" which stipulates that institutional responsibility rests with the Dean of the College or the appropriate divisional dean. In this case, Dean Johnson's designee to oversee the review was Dean of Arts and Sciences, Gary Reiness.

At the invitation of Lewis & Clark College, the review committee was asked to evaluate the ES major. With this as a charge, we based our evaluation on: the self study report "Assessment and the Environmental Studies Major," the ES student and faculty survey results, the A. W. Mellon proposal, other related materials provided to the review committee and interviews with select college administrators, faculty, students, and alumni. Early in the review, it became clear that the ES major had already evolved to a more advanced phase than would have been expected considering its short existence. Midstream in the process, the committee alerted Dean Reiness that our thinking was beginning to exceed the initial charge due to what we were discovering about the major, the program and the institution. He allowed us to follow our instincts and consider the fuller scope of this particularly dynamic ES program. Therefore, in this report, we have attempted to adequately address items outlined in the original charge focused on curricular and other basic topics. At the same time, being cognizant of the program's rapid advancement and enormous potential for the future, the report also includes recommendations related to strengthening the program and developing it as a primary component of the Lewis & Clark College vision for the future.

If this report contains omissions or misrepresentations or we have overstepped our bounds in some way, please accept our apology. Although our two day visit to Lewis & Clark College was comprehensive in nature and intensely scheduled, ours is still a narrow lens through which to view the ES program in its entirety and its relationship within the college. In this report, we share a collection of thoughts and offer a list of recommendations, but we do so in the spirit of wanting to make an already successful program even stronger. In no sense should any constructive criticism or comments be construed as implying anything but respect for the accomplishments of the ES program and enthusiasm about its future.

A Context for Success of the ES Program

This year's Environmental Studies seniors at Lewis & Clark are the first graduating class to have studied for four years in this new major. Established in 1997-98, the program has grown rapidly, more than doubling the number of majors in the first few years. It has attracted a diverse group of talented faculty members, benefited from the strong leadership of a visionary founding director and received significant institutional commitment in conjunction with a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. In short, ES is well on its way to becoming a leading program not only on its own campus, but in the Northwest and perhaps the nation if it continues on this path.

We say this about Lewis & Clark's ES program not simply to be flattering, but because the program greatly deserves flattery based on our observations during the review and our collective experience. We have calculated that between the two of us we have served for 38 years as program directors, administrators and faculty in ES programs at six institutions. We have advised and evaluated more than 20 ES programs and are intimately familiar with another 30 from all across the country. Most programs follow parallel trajectories and Evan Williams deserves enormous credit for his dedication and creativity in bringing Lewis & Clark's program along the trajectory so rapidly and skillfully.

The resources assembled for the ES program at Lewis & Clark College are impressive and extensive. These include:

- A committed core of faculty from 10 different departments
- Extremely talented, interested, energetic, and respected junior and senior faculty
- Envious (nationally enviable) relationships with one of the leading environmental and natural resource law schools in the country, with the graduate school of education and potential collaborations with the Northwest Writing Center which is reputed for nature writing
- Substantial financial support from the nationally recognized and selective Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
- Senior level institutional support
- Intelligent and committed students
- Impressive alumni who form the beginning of a committed alumni network, a valuable resource for the program and college
- Links with a host of agencies in the region and in Washington D.C.

- Access to countless environmental organizations and businesses that are based in the northwest

Our observations of Lewis & Clark's ES program lead us to believe that the program is reaching a critical juncture in its early history. Given the substantial array of resources available at Lewis & Clark College, the ES program has the opportunity to raise its stature to the next level, becoming in effect a shining jewel in the college's crown and leader in the region. It could become the program that attracts and retains Lewis & Clark's most serious and academically oriented students. To reach this next level, however, will require that the current leadership of the ES program begin now to invest its substantial talents in the creation of a well-respected and healthy future. Moreover, the college administration should consider raising the resources for the program including a faculty member whose training is in Environmental Studies as a way of complementing the existing faculty who are all trained in other disciplines.

Failure to begin now to plan for the future could portend a less promising outcome for the ES program. Several people we interviewed expressed concern about the rigor and coherence of the ES major and about a blurred distinction between academic pursuits and unsophisticated activism (this is a more challenging issue in the Northwest where environmental issues are more polarized and Lewis & Clark's students arrive predisposed toward simplified beliefs in right and wrong). We were disappointed to discover some people we interviewed questioning whether Environmental Studies was a discipline worth teaching on an undergraduate campus. We imagine this belief stems from a lack of exposure to the hundreds of outstanding ES majors being offered at many of the finest schools in the country.

We have witnessed more than one department initiated on the broad shoulders of a charismatic (we mean this in only the most positive sense) and inspirational leader only to see that same program founder when that leader moves on without laying the groundwork for a solid future.

We believe the next three to five years are a period of enormous opportunity and challenge. The recommendations we provide below are not meant to be prescriptive, but rather a series of suggestions to cogitate and ponder, wrestle with and discuss, and finally to apply in the ways that best fit the desires and goals of Lewis & Clark College.

Responses

What would be an appropriate ongoing assessment plan for our interdisciplinary Environmental Studies major? What questions ought we be asking; what research and analysis needs to be performed?

No perfect model for assessing environmental programs exists since interdisciplinary programs are often so uniquely designed. Therefore, assessments should largely be based on evaluating information that individual institutions traditionally value and/or evaluating goals set forth by the program. Institutions often benefit from knowing

information regarding: the interest expressed by prospective students in ES; numbers of majors and graduates; the retention of students; how alumni are employed or which graduate/professional programs they are attending; grants and other external funding received; awards received by students, faculty or the program; and peer reviewed articles published in environmentally related journals as well as books written and chapters authored. In the latter case to evaluate goals the ES program has set forth, it is imperative to develop a strategic plan, for example on a 5 year basis, that will not only serve as a guide and rationale for resource allocation, but will also establish realistic mid-range goals for evaluation. If an objective is to increase the diversity of the program, then information about the number of faculty and departments involved in the program is useful as well as courses offered by others or cross listed, topics of theses conducted, students serviced by ES courses who are not majors and research collaborations undertaken are also useful to note. A modest amount of information exists for comparison with other programs that can prove useful in demonstrating success for evaluative purposes; however, we recommend using great caution as it is a tricky business to begin comparing apples and oranges. ES programs are dramatically different from one institution to another. The surveys and baseline data being established by the Lewis & Clark environmental program for the Andrew W. Mellon grant is an excellent start for evaluation purposes.

What ways of creating coherence and facilitating communication have worked for others that might work here? Without a departmental structure, how can we create a more coherent community among the students?

The college should allocate space that will help create a sense of community for the students, faculty and alumni of the ES program. Available space is always in high demand at our institutions, but establishing such a location is vitally important for an interdisciplinary program like ES, even if it is nothing more at first than an office with a conference table for ES meetings or a lounge to post announcements of jobs, graduate schools, upcoming events or to keep relevant journals, etc. In addition, it will become a place where people can gather with like-minded individuals to discuss academic pursuits and collaborations or meet informally with students. Eventually, a larger dedicated space for ES is ideal. Most programs have acquired individual houses, entire floors or sections of academic buildings. At least a dozen programs have had newly constructed or renovated space with green technology and sustainable design as a model of walking the talk, and for creating buildings which themselves can become objects of study.

Hosting an annual retreat is an excellent way to increase faculty involvement, develop leadership and help create a sense of community. An effective retreat should consist of working sessions focused on topics such as a strategic plan or curriculum development in order for faculty and staff to feel they are part of the program's goal setting agenda for the future. A social event like a dinner or cookout could follow a day-long working retreat to continue community building and at this point include spouses and partners or students.

Establishing an environmental listserv or e-mail list for announcements is another way to help individuals with demanding schedules remain informed and to make them feel included and involved. Studies are beginning to demonstrate that electronic

communications can strengthen a sense of community when personal relationships already exist and when they are reinforced by occasional direct contact, for example with an annual retreat.

How should our interdisciplinary major fit into the academic institution?

The simplest solution would be to create a department to go along with the major and to hire faculty with interdisciplinary backgrounds. However, we understand that this might not be appropriate for Lewis & Clark. Some programs draw all their faculty from existing departments or depend almost exclusively on cross listed courses offered for other majors. While this model requires few additional resources, the interdisciplinary program is always at the mercy of other departments to offer courses on a regular basis or when key faculty retire or go on sabbatical. The program director is perennially scrambling to staff courses and students are often given exemptions to required courses which have been infrequently taught. Another model for an environmental program is to hire the director and a handful of faculty who are based exclusively in the program or who have joint appointments. A variation on this model has shared appointments and contractual agreements for new faculty to teach a certain number of specific courses for the environmental program. In the past ten years there has been a steady increase in the number of interdisciplinary courses, programs and centers at some of the most reputable institutions of higher education. This evolution reflects both changes in our society and advancements in educational pedagogy. Interdisciplinary studies help to enrich and broaden a student's traditional learning experience. Interdisciplinary programs like race and ethnic studies, Asian, African or Latin American studies, women's, international or environmental studies have become attractions for prospective students and excellent junior faculty who now have extensive training in one of these areas. In many cases, senior faculty on the verge of "burnout" find themselves rejuvenated by teaching in interdisciplinary programs. These all represent reasons why interdisciplinary programs should have a place at today's institutions of higher education. Just how ES will fit at Lewis & Clark will depend on what is acceptable to the administration and environmental program committee. There are numerous models at other colleges and universities worth examining and replicating.

Change in the ES program is inevitable and necessary. The current director, Evan Williams, will be retiring in the next five to seven years. The newest faculty member, Liz Safran, has no home department and it would be a disservice to place her appointment in a random science department. Similarly, the hiring of someone with ES training and experience would solidify the major, but might be undone if that person were required to also be placed in another department for the sake of expediency. In the end the administration and faculty of Lewis & Clark will need to create their own model.

What are some successful strategies for keeping track of our graduates? What do graduates of ENVS programs do after graduation?

Build and organize a formal ES alumni network. Lewis & Clark's ES alumni already have strong connections to the program, some even more then to the college which is not unusual. A network enables alumni to stay in touch with the program, provide

assistance, take pride in the institution and connect with each other. ES alumni enjoy learning about what's going on through newsletters or listserve. They can be invited back to campus to discuss their work, research or current projects and to share career opportunities. Alumni frequently hire students as interns or graduates of the program for positions. Some alumni find themselves in the position to be generous donors eventually, however nearly all prove to be valuable resources and good contacts for the ES program in one way or another.

We are confident that the graduates of Lewis & Clark's ES program will find jobs and access to graduate schools. Our experience is that at good schools with good programs nearly 100% of students find themselves in graduate programs or in long-term gainful employment within one or two years of graduation. Historically these jobs were often in the non-profit sector but today include a wide range of well paid positions with government and the private sector. It is important to note that these students are highly sought after because their majors in Environmental Studies/Science are such paradigmatic examples of a sound liberal arts education. A sound ES major includes the skills of critical thinking, research, public speaking, writing, numeracy, synthesis and integration across multiple disciplines. To increase your confidence level about career opportunities for environmental graduates there are recently published books and articles on the topic. If it is not already, your career service office should become a supportive ally, not only by listing job and internship opportunities, but by tracking this field closely and sharing materials about its trends so the program can remain current in preparing graduates in what has always been a rapidly changing field.

How do we ensure the quality and rigor of our major? What is an appropriate balance between depth and breadth in Environmental Studies?

We recommend that the ES program modify its curriculum in ways that will improve the rigor and coherence of the major programs. The addition of new ES courses and increased rigor in the major will require tradeoffs. These tradeoffs are true of all ES programs. Not everything required to become a professional in Environmental Studies can be taught in four years. The same is true, however, for pre-meds, pre-law, political scientists and physicists. Graduates of nearly any liberal arts college require further training on the job or in graduate schools. The objective should be to teach the processes required to practice Environmental Studies and some of the content rather than fight to squeeze in all the content at the expense of understanding the complexity of environmental issues. Nevertheless, we believe that by increasing the rigor and coherence of the ES major that graduating students will be better prepared (and more desirable) as they compete to get into graduate schools and for jobs.

We recommend the creation of tracks in Environmental **Science** and Environmental **Studies** and that these tracks be posted on the web. Having the tracks on the web will disperse the burden of advising and change the nature of advising to a student-faculty relationship that deals with larger issues of career and work experience and less with the selection of individual courses. In addition, having tracks devised by a variety of faculty will help increase the involvement of faculty from many departments in

the ES program. There are plenty of models around the country that can be viewed on the Web.

We recommend that for Environmental **Science** tracks that students be expected to take courses of equal rigor to students enrolled in other natural science majors. For students in Environmental **Studies**, the same should be true. Students should be required to take a significant number of upper division classes. At most schools that we are familiar with the ES major is the most or equal to the most challenging and most heavily required major at the school. We believe the same should be true at Lewis & Clark College.

There should be additional core courses in the ES major that focus on critical thinking skills, i.e. courses that require students to struggle with the complexity of environmental issues. These courses should help build sophistication among ES students in ways that improve their abilities to understand conflicting data (scientific, political and aesthetic) and to act upon their findings. (See the article "Assessment and Evaluation of Environmental Problems" for one example of how to do this.)

Students should be given more opportunities to participate in service learning. These experiences should not be opportunities for student activism, but rather a requirement for deep research and education in support of an agency, government body or non-governmental organization.

Is our major adequate to ensure that graduates are sufficiently educated to go on to careers or professional school? What sort of preparation serves ENVS graduates well as they move on to the next step in their careers?

We believe that as the majors described above evolve and increase in rigor and experiential learning that Lewis & Clark graduates will be more than adequately prepared for careers and professional schools. The ES program should continue to build bridges to the law school and the graduate school of education. These bridges will surely enhance the reputation of the ES program. Also increased association with the Northwest Writing Center would be beneficial. ES students should be given the opportunity to do scientific research and evaluation of scientific reports for the Pacific Environmental Advocacy Center and other nonprofit organizations as independent projects for credit.

Is the senior keystone course, ENVS 400, serving its intended purpose?

ENVS 400 is too large to be an effective senior seminar with a service learning component. We recommend that ENVS 400 be taught in multiple sections by faculty from different departments. Faculty would select environmental topics they know a great deal about and then organize the class in a way that both Environmental **Science** and Environmental **Studies** students were contributing toward a single culminating project or report. The emphasis should be research rather than advocacy. We recommend that the general area of research for the ENVS 400 class be selected by the professor, e. g. a carbon budget analysis for the college or an investigation for The Nature Conservancy, and that the professor have a good idea of what the final report should look like before the

beginning of class. The professor then acts as a guide to a research team. The students can craft the specific projects within the topic area to ensure that they gain a sense of ownership and investment in the projects.

How, in ENVS majors, does one deal with the wide disparity in math/science aptitude of the students?

There are two methods described above. The first is to require courses of Environmental **Science** students that are of equal rigor to those required of other natural science students. The second is to accept that Environmental **Studies** majors may not be as math/science capable as their science counterparts, but this does not make them weaker students (if their major is also rigorous.) There is a common (and insulting) misperception that quantitative and scientific skills are somehow more rigorous than skills required of scholars of economic systems, literature, institutions or aesthetics. This misconception should be eschewed.

What governance structure is workable for a program with such a large and diverse group of faculty participants? A committee of the whole; steering committee; strong chair?

We recommend that the ES program modify its organizational and governance structure. We identified several levels of faculty involvement in the ES program ranging from a high level of commitment to a developing interest that should continue to be nurtured. In addition, an unusual amount of responsibility currently rests with the director.

Responsibilities regarding the program should be more widely dispersed and decided upon by broader representation.

Lewis & Clark should form an ES steering or executive committee to develop policy and provide guidance. It should be comprised of 5-7 diverse and knowledgeable faculty. Representation on interdisciplinary program committees should be recognized as valued service to the college and as being critical to the institution's mission, not as an added burden to those in other departments. To achieve this goal, the appointment could be made by the President or Dean of the College. The members should rotate regularly, but include junior faculty who are most likely to become future leaders in the program as well as respected senior faculty who have gained institutional insights and understanding. This committee should meet regularly, at least once a month if not every two weeks depending on the number and importance of issues to consider in a given year.

There could be another sphere of faculty involvement in the form of a larger advisory committee. It should have a real purpose, for example as a sounding board for new ideas, to chair subcommittees when developing a strategic plan or to attend an annual working retreat to revise courses and to discuss the future of the program. This group would be comprised of faculty who might, but do not necessarily have to teach ES courses or advise majors. It is a group including individuals who may become more involved by serving on the steering committee or may simply continue to have a more

indirect role. These faculty are just as critical to an interdisciplinary program. They need to be kept informed, feel as though they are part of a community and allowed to be involved at a different times to a degree that feels appropriate for each individual.

Members of both committees could begin shouldering some of the advising of ES majors and overseeing other aspects of the program.

What does the subject of Environmental Studies encompass? How is the field forming and/or changing currently? What changes might be expected in the future? Can/should we anticipate them?

Major change is almost constantly occurring in all ES programs, not like departments of Classics, Chemistry, or Chinese where the curriculum changes normally only by increments. Environmental problems of one decade are replaced by newer and more pressing ones. Our collective understanding of what it takes to solve environmental problems similarly evolves with time. To stay abreast of and to learn from others we recommend that Evan Williams consider organizing a regional network of ES programs and hosting a meeting of these schools at Lewis & Clark College to share information and learn from one another. In the early 1980s the New England programs created such a network with a handful of schools. It grew to include the northeast and now involves colleges and universities in OH and PA. Even though many of us may compete for the same students, there exists no such competition in this network that is much valued by all for its collegial relationships and assistance.

Have students gained the ability to make impartial analyses of problems and to appreciate why there might be multiple perspectives on issues?

This is a challenging question. The alumni we spoke with as well as the students by and large understood the complexity of the environmental issues. We did not spend time probing which of them were activists for simplistic reasons or extremists. Nevertheless we believe that the ES program will continue to evolve in ways that will make it a leader at Lewis & Clark College, attracting some of the schools most sophisticated and serious students.

What kinds of resources -- faculty, facilities, budget -- are necessary to sustain a strong program? Or put another way, are Lewis & Clark's resources adequate to the task?

As indicated above we believe the most crucial resources for the program are an ES trained professor and a space for majors and faculty to congregate. Considering that Lewis & Clark College is entering a visioning and planning period, the ES program should consider how to match goals and objectives with those of the Commission on Academic Priorities and the upcoming Capital Campaign to achieve the greatest outcome for all. The ES program should assist in raising funds for the college and the program including an endowed chair in ES to help ensure its future.

As other faculty begin to assume more responsibility and ES leadership roles, Evan Williams should begin securing the program's future and developing valuable new

networks. The current director's sizable strengths can be assets that will help ensure the long-term success of the ES program as the leadership of the ES program is passed along to others. He should chair an Environmental Council to improve campus environmental responsibility and stewardship. Useful information regarding active Environmental Councils can be found on Middlebury's and the University of Vermont's websites (<http://www.middlebury.edu/~enviroc>, <http://www.middlebury.edu/facilities>, <http://www.uvm.edu/~envprog/?Page=weblink.html>), among others. Also see the sites for Second Nature (<http://www.secondnature.org>), National Wildlife Federation's Campus Ecology Program (<http://www.nwf.org/campusecology>), the University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (<http://www.ulsf.org>) and other webpages for a plethora of campus sustainability models being demonstrated all across the United States and in several other countries. The program should also work closely with your career service office to develop adequate resources to serve ES student's and graduate's needs. Today there exist numerous career list serves and internship listings exclusively for environmental majors.

Conclusion

Environmental Studies at Lewis & Clark is one of the most impressive new programs on the horizon. Its leadership, associated faculty, students and graduates will most assuredly continue to bring strengths to the college, provide new opportunities and become a great sense of pride.

With each external review, we learn as much about our own programs and institutions in reflection as we have about yours. For this new lens through which to view our own programs we are indebted to you at Lewis & Clark College. We wish you the best in the future and look forward to sharing ideas and successes with each other as part of the ever growing environmental program network.

We were honored to be selected by PKAL to serve on the Lewis & Clark external review committee to evaluate Environmental Studies at this particular point in time. We hope that our final report provides guidance to further advance and strengthen a most impressive environmental program, one we believe has enormous potential.

Respectfully Submitted,

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