

April 21, 2008

PROGRAM UNIT RESPONSE TO THE EXTERNAL REVIEW OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES PROGRAM

OVERVIEW

The Environmental Studies Program Unit (ESPU) would like to thank the Review Panel for their effort and diligent work throughout the entire process of compiling and writing this report.

Overall it is gratifying for us to have the Review Panel state that the program is generally sound and effective and well suited to the general aspirations of a liberal arts and science institution such as Sir Wilfred Grenfell College. Furthermore, we fully acknowledge that the program faces a number of challenges and deficiencies, and some of these issues need the prompt attention of the unit as well as the college administration.

To date, since the report was released, the unit has had an opportunity to have a couple of very useful meetings and, these sessions have given us an opportunity to formulate our initial, yet still general response to several of the panel's recommendations. We feel there is still much to be done and we will endeavor to thoroughly discuss each recommendation and draft an effective action plan and timeline for the recommendations. In our discussions of each recommendation we will focus on three important criteria:

1. On academic grounds, to what extent and for what reasons do we agree or disagree with the recommendation.
2. If implemented, what are the resource implications for the recommendation:
 - Additional materials and supplies?
 - More work load for the faculty and staff?
 - More workload for students?
 - More collaboration between college programs
3. Is the recommendation one that can be dealt with within the ESPU or one that involves other components of the College or the entire university?

At our last meeting it became apparent that from now until the beginning of next term it will be very difficult for us to meet without having two or three members absent at any one time. Furthermore, one of our two new faculty members will be joining the unit at the beginning of September and it would be to our advantage for her to join in our deliberations. As a result, we have decided to pick up our review and action plan meetings in September and this course of action has the full support of our Division Head.

DISCUSSION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As mentioned above, the forthcoming discussion of the recommendations submitted in the review, are presented in a very general nature and a more detailed discussion and action plan will follow.

Recommendation # 1 – There needs to be more coordination of course content for courses offered by Environmental Studies and Environmental Science.

The Environmental Studies Unit recognizes that there is a need to carefully coordinate course offerings and course content with those of Environmental Science (ES). Furthermore, there are now two new programs in the Social Science Division: Tourism Studies (TS) and Sustainable Resource Management (SRM); and the same necessity to coordinate course offerings and content would apply to them. The appropriate process will be discussed at our own unit meetings as we formulate an action plan and the chairs from the other programs will be included in the discussion at the appropriate time. One possibility would be to look at offering some common first-year series of courses in Environmental Studies, but that involves each of the participating programs to alter their degree requirements.

Recommendation #2 & #21 - The notion of a “School of the Environment”

This concept is not new; it was first mentioned in the Environmental Science review completed a couple of years ago. There have been some preliminary informal discussions about this concept within our own unit and with other program unit members and administrators. This is a very large issue, as it involves a re-shifting of the public image of SWGC as well. It involves many questions regarding whether this would be a physical space, whether it would offer courses and/or degrees, how it would be coordinated with other units and Divisions, who will lead the School and how it would be structured (e.g., would faculty be associated with the School of the Environment as well as other units, such as Tourism Studies)? The discussion

about these questions has begun. Despite the fact that the issues arising from it are large, we need to engage them directly.

Recommendation # 3 – Undertake a cooperative review of the first year courses in Environmental Studies and Environmental Science with a view of introducing a comprehensive course suitable for both programs.

This opportunity could flow out of discussions /meetings of the appropriate program chairs and course instructors suggested in recommendation # 1.

Recommendation # 4 – The Environmental Studies unit should offer required courses every year, especially the third year GIS course.

This has been an ongoing faculty resource issue. However, with the hiring of new faculty members in our program and in Sustainable Resource Management this problem should be resolved. The Division has made a commitment to a regular scheduling of the GIS courses.

Recommendation # 5 – Timetable conflicts among courses in environmental Studies and Environmental Science.

This issue could be addressed, as previously mentioned, in an annual meeting of the environmental Studies and Environmental Science Chairs; although the Chairs from the SRM and TS programs would have to be involved. This is a problem that is college-wide, and it results from the increasing complexity of our timetable and the lack of physical resources (especially classrooms). We will need to keep pushing Senior Administration to give the Registrar's Office the necessary resources to address this problem.

Recommendation # 6 – There should be additions made to the course options at the 3000 - 4000 level.

This issue requires considerable discussion among our unit members with regard to which courses would be the most appropriate to add. We at least need to go over the courses on the books and make sure that we are committed to offering them on a regular rotation, before adding in new courses.

Recommendation # 7 – Environmental Studies should offer a course in Research Methods designed specifically for Environmental Studies.

A discussion of this issue has already begun at our unit meetings.

Recommendation # 8 – Environmental Studies should explore the possibility of an Honours degree.

In the past there has been an issue of logistics and resources with regard to the development of an Honours degree in Environmental Studies. The decision to offer an Honours stream must be a serious discussion, with solid commitments on resources for the long term. However, as a result of the pending increase in the number of faculty members in our unit we are about to set up a committee to explore the options for an Honours degree.

Recommendation #9 – There needs to be more opportunity for student qualification / certification in sea kayaking and wilderness First aid.

Plans are already underway to have a unit member acquire the necessary instructor level courses to provide certification opportunities to students. In time certification in canoeing will also be added to the mix for our students.

Recommendation # 10 – The expedition course should be modified so it can be available to all students with an interest in the environment.

There are safety-related issues which we would need to address if we broadened these expedition courses. Also, it would require increased staffing, as there is a standard student-instructor ratio for field courses. In addition, any modification would have to ensure that the quality of the course was not adversely affected by the change in the experience and background of the new students.

Recommendation # 11 – The unit should consider widening the scope of outdoor pursuit and include field trips that would broaden the student experience of environment studies.

A great deal of discussion is required among unit members regarding these Recommendation 10 and 11. There are concerns here with regard to liability and resourcing or capacity issues. We will need to set priorities for any development of such field trips. Utilizing the Bonne Bay Marine Station would be a reasonable first step.

Recommendation # 12 – Faculty advisors should make clear to students that a broad environmental education does provide a basis for gaining usable skills to critically evaluate , make ethical decisions, gather information, etc.; also a work-study option

This appears to be a recruitment and retention strategy, which can be suggested as a guiding theme. However, there needs to be a buy-in on the part of all faculty, and some understanding of what this actually means, if the theme is to be of any value. In terms of the work-study issue, it would require a great deal of planning and resourcing. The unit, as currently staffed, is not in a position to explore this assertively.

Recommendation # 13 – Students should be required to take Philosophy 2809 or Religious Studies 3880.

The unit needs to thoroughly discuss this issue, particularly the value of these courses. Anytime courses become required, there must be significant discussion, as it does limit and direct student studies.

Recommendation #14 – Strong consideration should be given to developing a course in Environmental Thought.

This could possibly be part of a common first-year course, or even be included in one of the options mentioned in Recommendation # 13.

Recommendation # 15 – The Environmental Studies Program should explore the possibility of developing a for-credit work-study course option for students in their third or fourth year.

A preliminary discussion has begun about this recommendation; however, there is still a great deal of discussion needed. Some years ago, the College worked through a proposal for work-study options for all of its programs, but it was deemed too expensive at that time. We would need to determine how it would fit with the student schedule, whether there would be enough relevant placements in the region (given that the College of the North Atlantic already sends many Environmental Technology and Community Studies students into the community every year), and what the resourcing costs would be.

Recommendation # 16 – A systematic plan for acquiring and upgrading equipment should be developed and implemented on an annual basis. Priority should be given to safety equipment. Moreover, equipment needs should be identified as a priority item in Grenfell’s annual budget submission.

Ever since the Program began there has been an equipment renewal plan recommended to the administration. The plan focused primarily on the renewal of safety equipment as needed and a seven year total renewal scheme for major equipment items such as canoes, sea kayaks and tents. The renewal of boat safety equipment has not been a major issue (paddle floats, throw ropes, appropriate paddles, etc.) and students have been responsible for their own personal safety equipment, such as wetsuits or dry suits and life jackets. The renewal of the major items i.e. the boats, in a timely fashion, has been a profoundly serious issue due to financial resourcing problems.

One of the complicating factors has been that this equipment is not depreciated annually in the budget. If that were the case, then there would be an annual budget line item for equipment depreciation, and at the end of the equipment’s life, there would be money available for its replacement. As it stands now, we make a special request for equipment every few years, but in some years the budget might not have any significant equipment costs. It is always harder to make requests for “special” line items to buy equipment, since we do not account for the regular depreciation of the equipment.

Furthermore, we need to purchase our own winter skiing equipment: cross country and telemark gear, as well as snowshoes for the winter pursuit’s course - Environmental Studies 2220. This recommendation needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

This larger issue of the underfunding of equipment can have safety and public liability aspects, and so must be dealt with pro-actively.

Recommendation # 17 – The administration of SWGC should make provision for a dedicated storage space to house and maintain equipment associated with Environmental Studies. If space is not identified within current College plans, then Environmental Studies should take steps to construct a facility in support of its program.

In the past storing the sea kayaks and canoes outdoors has not worked. The weather decreases the useable lifespan of the boats or in some cases it has lead to their direct damage i.e. falling ice or water that has frozen and the ice has deformed the hulls of the boats. Furthermore, there needs to be a heated indoor space suitable for doing regular repairs on the boats. The space used housing the boats should also be used for storage of all the Environmental Studies pursuits' equipment.

Recommendation # 18 – It is highly recommended that a project room or meeting room be identified and assigned to Environmental Studies students. Avoiding the perception of double standards among the student population is essential to the health and success of the program. The Chair of the program along with members of the unit should act as strong advocates on this issue.

It is important to note here that the Chair and several other members of the unit have brought this to the attention of the College administration on several occasions. The response from the administration has always been that it is a space or a resource issue that could not be addressed under the current circumstances. Almost all degree programs are looking for project and meeting room space for their students.

Recommendation #19 – Tourism 3210, 3010, SRM 4003 and 3002 should be included under the heading “Environmental Studies Concentrations” for both the Environmental Perspectives Concentration (2, a) and the Outdoor Environmental Pursuits Concentration (2, b, ii).

The inclusion of the above mentioned Tourism courses will be discussed during our future meetings. The Tourism Studies faculty will need to be consulted as well, since all of these courses have pre-requisites in Tourism Studies.

Recommendation #20 – The college administration should continue to work towards breaking down barriers that exist between Environmental Studies and Environmental Science. A concerted effort should be made to integrate or align environmental programs so that SWGC can harness its full potential. Much discussion and planning is needed among the various units. In particular, Chairs of Environmental Science and Environmental Studies in collaboration with colleagues in Tourism and SRM programs should aim to jointly develop an environmental agenda for SWGC. This agenda should strive to integrate teaching and research interests to take advantage of all available assets.

There is a need for further discussion among all interested parties regarding this recommendation; this would include further clarification of the recommendation from the Chair of the Review Panel. The issue also seems to allude to the concept of the “School of the Environment” discussed in Recommendation # 2 and 21. It is possible that structural changes will promote further cooperation among the units.

Recommendation # 21 – The college administration should, in the near future, establish a “Centre/School for the Environment” as an umbrella structure that will bring together all interested and relevant parties at the College, both academic and research institutes, to present a cohesive group for Grenfell College as a centre of environmental excellence.

In order for the concept to become a reality there is a tremendous amount of work and discussion needed by all the possible stake-holders. It has the general support of all members of the Environmental Studies Unit.

Recommendation # 22 – Students in the Environmental Studies program should be made more aware of the opportunities afforded by its partners. Opportunities should be made available for students to engage in undergraduate and graduate research projects and to consult with researchers working within these units....

Recommendation # 23 – SWGC administration should take steps to formalize its relationship with all its on-site partners.

Recommendation # 24 – Immediate steps should be taken by the unit to appoint CFS scientists and other qualified personnel in non-academic units as adjunct professors to

Environmental Studies. A pro-active effort by the Chair of the program is required to initiate this process.

Recommendations # 22, 23 and 24 are all interrelated and they have to do with the expansion and availability of expertise within the within Environmental Studies. Before any definitive decisions are made, there will have to be considerable discussion between our program the administration, ES, SRM and TS. Although these recommendations have a great deal of merit, it would not be an ideal situation for Environmental Studies to move in isolation of the other programs. In addition, some of these items are well beyond the purview of the Environmental Studies Unit (e.g., recommendation # 23 refers to a College-wide administrative initiative).

Recommendation # 25 – A faculty member with a strong research background should be assigned to be a graduate studies advisor and be responsible for posting both print and electronic material about graduate studies in environmental studies and related areas....

This recommendation is not clear. It recommends that a faculty member be assigned the responsibilities of a graduate studies advisor. Such a position is needed and should be a full time Student Services position, not filled by just one faculty member, who is also busy teaching and doing research. Furthermore, this has important workload ramifications which would have to be negotiated with the union.

Recommendation # 26 – The Chair should dialogue on a regular basis with the School of Graduate Studies (MUN) and keep the unit abreast of developments and opportunities arising within Graduate Studies at Memorial....

For the purpose of efficiency and effectiveness both of the recommendations above need to be fully discussed by the program unit; they are important and necessary considerations.

Recommendation # 27 – the committee recommends that ‘greening of the campus’ projects be supported both in volunteer/service clubs and through credited courses. Where appropriate, courses should contain applied projects involving campus sustainability....

This recommendation is worthwhile and it could go a long way in bringing a sense of identity and ownership from all our students towards SWGC. There has already been a discussion related to including a ‘greening of the campus’ component in the new SWGC Strategic Plan.

Recommendation # 28 – Establish an information bulletin board as a first step for resolving this concern [wanting more connection with members of academic communities outside of SWGC]. Longer-term possibilities include promotion of on-line academic interest groups and electronic networks.

This recommendation appears easy to implement at first glance; however, it is not clear how it would be actually implemented. The problem of student information (about postgraduate, research and job opportunities) is real and should be dealt with in a more consistent manner. The Learning Centre already does some of this, so they should be included in planning with respect to this recommendation.

Recommendations # 29 – A concerted effort should be made to identify a distinctive approach for the Environmental Studies Program. The responsibility for providing leadership in this effort lies with all members of the unit.

This appears to be an issue that should be coordinated with the Recruitment and Retention folks, and would require agreement on the part of the faculty of Environmental Studies. Imposing a vision would not be advisable.

Recommendation # 30 – Courses in the perspectives and Outdoor Pursuits areas should be integrated with the new programs in SRM, TS and Business Administration. As well, courses from other institutions (e.g., College of the North Atlantic) should be more fully utilized and not duplicated within the program.

The integration of the new programs with Environmental Studies will be an evolutionary process and any connection will unfold as the new programs develop. It is not wise that they integrate so much, or overlap so much in their course requirements, that they become indistinguishable from each other. They need to remain unique, in order to survive.

In terms of our relationship with the College of the North Atlantic, that can be enhanced by improving our articulation agreements with CNA, thus allowing their graduates appropriate access to our degree programs.

Recommendation # 31 Environmental Studies students should be recognized for their commitment to the Program, enthusiasm and concern. They should be enabled to participate in the discussions concerning the emergence of a distinctive approach to the Program...

Clearly, this is a good idea, although it is not obvious how this would be implemented. The development of clubs such as the Outdoors Club may help in this matter.

Recommendation # 32 – Attention should be given to increasing awareness of the Environmental studies program within SWGC and also on the St. John’s campus and in recruitment efforts that originate in St. John’s. Similarly, the program should continue to be better highlighted within SWGC’s recruitment activities domestically and internationally.

This is an issue to be worked out in cooperation with the Recruitment officers.

Recommendation # 33 – New strategies for recruitment should be established that reflect the emergence of a more distinctive approach to the Environmental Studies Program. This new approach may well be attractive to students across Canada and internationally. It is recommended that a careful review of the program take place among students, faculty and the SWGC recruiters with a view to creating a more accurate representation of the program....

As with the above recommendation, this is a matter to be dealt with in relationship to the Recruitment officers. It may help to set up a meeting with our recruiters to go over the distinctive aspects of Environmental Studies.

The five recommendations above (29-33) make several points that are vague and there is a need for clarification. Perhaps this can be accomplished through a meeting with the SWGC internal review panel members who are here at the College. These recommendations certainly need to be thoroughly discussed among the members of the program unit.

Conclusion

The Environmental Studies Unit feels very confident that our Program is fundamentally sound and effective and well suited to SWGC; furthermore, this report implies that we must strive to continue delivering an effective experience to our students. At the same time we have to closely examine and act on the recommendations made in the Environmental Studies Review in an effort to improve the program