

The Program on the Environment, College of the Environment,
University of Washington

10-year review

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1. Executive Summary

The Program on the Environment (PoE) offers a Bachelor of Arts degree as well as a minor in Environmental Studies (ES), within the College of the Environment (CoEnv). The unit serves as an intellectual hub for students and faculty across the University who are interested in environmental programming. The Program delivers a series of core courses that prepare students for additional coursework in eight disciplines representing classes offered across the College and the University of Washington (UW). The culminating experience of the degree is a three-quarter capstone. The degree is large - serving over 480 majors in Fall 2023 - comprising between 20-28% of all majors within the College over the last decade. The minor currently serves 45 students. PoE is also leading efforts for a proposed minor in Sustainability and Environmental Justice (SEJ), offered campus-wide. The faculty within the unit comprise a Director (50% FTE), Associate Director (50%), three teaching faculty at the Associate and Assistant Teaching Professor levels (one is the Associate Director), and two part-time instructors, with ad hoc hires of temporary instructors as needed. The Program is guided by a Faculty Advisory Council, whose members are drawn from academic units involved in environmental programming across the University. The unit is staffed by one administrator (0.8 FTE) and one student advisor, with an additional hire in student support pending.

The members of the review committee were provided with the Program's self-study document and conducted a day-long series of in-person interviews with the Dean of the College of the Environment, the Director and Associate Director, core faculty and instructors, students, and the Faculty Advisory Council. Broadly, the committee views the Program highly favorably and finds that it meets the University's expectations of quality and reputation. **The committee therefore recommends continuing status for the Program with a subsequent full review in 10 years.** We give the caveat that any reconfiguration of the unit (for example, becoming a department) will reset this timeline. Below we summarize our responses to the key questions posed by the Graduate School and the Program itself. These brief, high-level assessments are then followed by key findings. More detailed responses to those same questions are provided in the main body of the report, after the Executive Summary.

A. Graduate School questions

1. Quality of the degree

The unit offers a very high-quality degree program, and the required capstone is a major asset to the major. The degree serves a critical need at the University by offering interdisciplinary environmental programming. Over the last decade, the unit has experienced extraordinary growth both in number of majors (61% growth) and student credit hours (135% growth). This growth has been sustained largely by the current faculty. Given these trends, the committee is concerned about the impact on degree quality. We strongly recommend stabilizing current part-time positions through teaching faculty appointments and making additional hires representing new disciplines.

2. Comparison with peer and aspirational programs

The PoE compares quite favorably with other programs in large, public research universities, where the Environmental Studies programs are considered to be models in the field. The unit particularly excels in course offerings, training in critical professional skills, and opportunities for hands-on experience. Faculty members in PoE are notably active in scholarship on the teaching of environmental topics. However, the faculty-student and advisor-student ratios for the PoE are poor in comparison to those at the peer institutions. The committee recommends expanding the faculty and

advising capacity within the PoE and creating formal affiliations with other faculty members across the University of Washington campus.

3. Recommendations to improve educational programming and scholarship

Given the recent growth in the number of majors and student credit hours, faculty and advising staff are stretched too thin, which affects both the student experience and the faculty's time and energy to engage in scholarly activities. The committee strongly recommends that the lines of the two part-time lecturers— who have both served PoE for eight years or more – be converted to Teaching Professor lines. Beyond these two lines, additional teaching, mentoring, and advising capacity is needed. The minor in Sustainability and Environmental Justice should be implemented as soon as it is ready.

4. Recommendations to increase regional and national prominence

There is merit in developing the profile of what is a solely undergraduate program precisely because it is in such a critically important and growing field. The initiatives likely to be most immediately impactful involve highlighting efforts along two axes: place-based teaching and learning, and global environmental issues in a comparative context.

5. Supportive environment that promotes degree learning and careers

Students, faculty, and staff were overwhelmingly positive about their community. Students identified rich, productive, and ongoing relationships with the core faculty as being central to their learning. Faculty described a highly collegial working environment with a strong team ethos and horizontal decision making. Staff hires are recent, but they cited a warm and welcoming environment that encourages innovation. All commended the strong leadership within the unit. All groups identified the growth in the program as impacting their sense of community and their productivity. The committee therefore recommends concerted efforts in community building and advising for students, once hiring has stabilized. Finally, the committee supports hiring of additional staff, with an eye to reducing mission creep in administrative duties.

6. Inclusion of underrepresented groups into intellectual life

There is a very strong culture of inclusion in PoE. This is evident in the self-study and the eagerness to welcome diverse colleagues and students within the PoE community. The leadership clearly recognizes the need to cultivate greater representation among the students and faculty, and several impressive initiatives are currently underway, including the new Sustainability and Environmental Justice (SEJ) minor. The program's community outreach efforts have included environmental education initiatives in Title I middle and high schools in Seattle. The committee recommends supporting efforts to raise the visibility of PoE among students who had not previously considered environmental studies as an option and emphasizing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in planning any future hiring efforts.

7. Facilities and building space

The PoE space in John M. Wallace Hall meets current needs, but, as noted at several points in this report, increased faculty and advising capacity is necessary to keep pace with the growth in the major. Additional space will need to be identified; maintaining close proximity of PoE spaces is important for fostering interactions and building community; if such proximity is not possible, a clear plan for maintaining collegiality, especially for those working outside of Wallace Hall, will have to be developed.

8. Student preparation for careers and future academic pursuits

Based on the information the committee was provided, PoE is effectively preparing students for careers and postgraduate education. Maintaining appropriate student-to-faculty ratios in the capstone internship courses will uphold the quality of this key programmatic component. The flexibility of ENVIR B.A. curriculum makes advising even more important than in a more hierarchical, prescribed curriculum, and more advising capacity is needed. Strengthening connections with PoE alumni will facilitate keeping track of their career progress and involving them in events with current students.

B. Unit specific questions

1. Perspectives on becoming a Department

The motivations for becoming a department should be clearly identified. From an academic perspective, the committee heard that the creation of a department would enhance scholarly activities and initiatives in “boundary spanning” environmental programming. A department would also elevate the unit’s profile by serving as a hub for related activities across the University. From an administrative perspective, autonomy was viewed as important for future growth, decision making, and shaping the academic direction of the unit through internal promotions, hiring, and joint appointments. The committee encourages deep reflection on several points, including whether forming a department will indeed address current instructional opportunities and constraints, developing a strong intellectual rationale for scholarship and hiring given the mission of the unit, and elevating a vibrant intellectual culture that connects PoE with the College and across units. In our more detailed response to this question below, we explore a number of advantages and disadvantages associated with his step.

2. Perspectives on how well the revised major is working

Based on continued growth in the major after the revisions were implemented in Winter 2022 and on the committee’s discussion with a small group of students, the revised major seems to be working well for students. The revised major has a great degree of flexibility, which enables students to pair the major with a complementary minor or second major. The amount of science content is somewhat high for an environmental studies B.A. degree, and may be more appropriate for a B.S. degree.

3. Perspectives on shaping the future direction of the program

We expect that a commitment to breadth will continue. As the program grows, there may be opportunities to consider developing thematic tracks within the major. The humanities and social sciences are under-emphasized and represent an opportunity for growth. It is possible to develop a B.A. option (emphasizing the environmental humanities and social sciences with some exposure to environmental science) and a B.S. option (emphasizing environmental science with some exposure to the environmental humanities and social sciences). Another framework would be a set of thematic tracks within the environmental studies major, with the caveat that these may become dated and may need to be periodically reshaped. Regardless of how PoE develops in the future, the review committee recommends keeping in mind the value of using advanced, 400-level courses as a way of integrating student experiences across their coursework in tackling important environmental and societal issues.

4. Perspectives on faculty composition and shared responsibilities

Assuming that a departmentalized PoE would remain solely an undergraduate program in the near term, it stands to reason that the teaching mission would remain central. In such a scenario, a nearly equal mix of tenure-line and teaching professor appointments to ensure coverage of core courses while also developing a departmental research profile would seem appropriate, with part-time lecturer appointments deployed to cover fluctuations in enrollments. In a teaching-focused unit, service responsibilities should be shared, but with clear distinctions regarding responsibilities and paths to promotion for each faculty type. Most important in this process will be maintaining the exceptional collegiality, sense of common mission, and program quality that currently characterizes PoE.

C. Key Findings

1. The Program on the Environment is a successful unit offering a degree of high quality, with deep engagement by faculty, staff, students and leadership. As such, it serves a critical need within the University. The PoE compares quite favorably with other programs at large, public research universities.
2. The growth trajectory is not sustainable without additional investment in faculty and staff positions. The committee acknowledges that it is typical for external program reviews to recommend additional resources, but the program's tremendous expansion has been sustained by near constant numbers of teaching faculty and staff over the last decade. It is therefore imperative to allocate resources for personnel in order to maintain degree quality. We recommend the following: (i) Current part-time faculty positions should be converted to full time positions, and should not be delayed by parallel efforts to departmentalize; (ii) New faculty that represent a broader range of disciplines should be recruited. The latter may be tied to the proposed Sustainability and Environmental Justice minor, which has substantial momentum and interest; (iii) Hires of support staff proportionate to the size of the program are critical. Attention to student-to-advisor ratios is especially important in this major because of the varied and complex routes that students take to degree completion.
3. The committee encourages expansion of connections with other academic units and faculty across the University that share interests in Environmental Studies. Such an effort can leverage the current standing of the Program and enhance scholarly work within the University as a whole.
4. The major has a significant opportunity to expand in subject matter, once hiring issues have been addressed. The committee suggests strengthening the arts, humanities, and social sciences, consideration of separate tracks, and possibly offering a B.S. in Environmental Studies.
5. The committee strongly supports the Program's efforts in building the SEJ minor, and elevating their work in DEI within and beyond the University
6. The committee supports ongoing exploration of departmentalization, and has identified several strong reasons for doing so. Still, the committee also encourages deeper reflection on the outcomes of such a step.
7. The committee found the College to be supportive of ongoing growth as well as new initiatives within the Program.

2. Full Report

A. Response to the Graduate School Charge Letter

Question1: Quality of the degree

Are the unit's degree programs of high quality? Do they meet the university's expectations of quality and reputation?

The unit offers a very high-quality degree program. The major serves a critical need at UW by offering an interdisciplinary environmental course of study and, in doing so, delivers a well-crafted liberal arts degree within a large university. The core courses have been thoughtfully designed and offer several points at which students are able to intersect and integrate their learning across the eight different disciplines (Analytical Methods, Biological Systems, Earth Systems Literacy, Economics/Business, Environmental Justice, Policy/Governance, Sustainability, Values and Culture). The required capstone sequence, which offers all students an opportunity to apply their learning in an internship during their final year, significantly elevates the program and is rare among degrees at UW. The capstone is an asset. Courses are delivered by highly talented and dedicated teaching faculty and instructors. These faculty members are deeply engaged in pedagogy, leading College and University efforts to elevate teaching, and all maintain sustained scholarly activities of high standards. These faculty are critical for the delivery of the core programming. The size and profile of the program, the strong student evaluations, and the high degree of student satisfaction reflect well on the College of the Environment and the University of Washington.

The committee is concerned about the long-term sustainability of the Program, given the substantial and continuing growth in demand. The number of majors in Autumn quarter has increased to 479 in AY 2023/24 - a 61% increase over 10 years - and the unit consistently graduates between 20-28% of all students in the College of the Environment. Course enrollment has increased to 2716 student credit hours in AY 2022/23 - a 135% increase over 10 years - accounting for 14.6% of student credit hours in the College as a whole. The delivery of the degree and the core courses is dependent on a director (50% FTE), three teaching faculty, and two part-time instructors who have been part of the program for many years, as well as ad hoc hires of temporary instructors. The unit is staffed with one administrator (0.8% FTE) and one staff member in student support services. Further growth in student numbers without investment in staffing will impact the quality of the degree. We note that there are initiatives in place to hire two more teaching-track faculty and one student support services staff member, but we hold the view that these hires will stabilize the existing program rather than anticipate ongoing growth.

Broadly, the availability of faculty lines impacts both the structure of the degree and the ability to integrate environmental education across the University beyond the College. The newest offering of the degree relies on five core courses, a set of eight "integrated disciplines" electives that draw from courses across the University, and a culminating capstone sequence. Given this structure, the committee noted that particular attention needs to be placed on scaffolding and integrating learning within the degree itself - and this goal may be limited by the number of core courses that are offered. Further, working across the University to achieve learning goals in the "integrated disciplines" requires substantial effort, outreach, and collaboration. The committee anticipates challenges going forward.

Recommendations

It is critical to maintain degree quality in the face of growth, -and this is best achieved by ensuring the ratio of faculty to students is appropriate. The current levels are not sustainable. If the

major is to stay the same size or grow, the number of teaching faculty needs to increase, as does the number of advisors. Further, reliance on temporary faculty to develop a strong pedagogical culture is not optimal - such faculty positions should be stabilized.

Question 2: Comparison with peer and aspirational programs

How does the unit compare with that of peer and aspirational institutions in terms of educational programs and scholarship?

The PoE compares quite favorably with other programs at large, public research universities, such as the University of Oregon and the University of Utah, where the Environmental Studies programs are models in the field. This is especially true in the area of educational programs: in particular, course offerings, training in critical professional skills (such as communication and research methods), and opportunities for hands-on experience (outdoor place-based research and internships with appropriate organizations). Faculty members in PoE are also active in scholarship on the teaching of environmental topics, while faculty at the other universities tend to be primarily focused on research in their specific disciplines. Research in the area of environmental pedagogy is entirely appropriate for teaching professors at the University of Washington; we also recognize that some of the PoE faculty members continue to do research in their primary disciplines, although their official faculty roles foreground undergraduate teaching. PoE faculty are also deeply engaged with the College, University, and Seattle communities. In all these ways, the PoE is on par with these other strong programs at peer institutions.

As is the case with the other programs, there is a strong emphasis in the PoE on breadth of academic experience. However, the other two programs offer somewhat more depth in specific academic areas; Oregon does this by giving students an option between a B.A. track or a B.S. track, the former emphasizing the humanities and social sciences, while still exposing students to some of the natural sciences; Utah currently offers four specific thematic tracks within the major (such as Air, Water, Health and Conservation & Land Management). Other exemplary programs in the field of environmental studies, such as those at Oberlin College and Middlebury College, offer numerous micro-specializations for students; Oberlin offers as many as twenty-two concentration pathways, while Middlebury has fourteen potential concentrations within Environmental Studies (in tandem with other departments).

One of the crucial differences between PoE and the ES programs at other institutions is the small number of in-house and affiliated faculty members associated with PoE in comparison with the other programs. Oregon, for instance, has more than 600 students in the Environmental Studies and Environmental Sciences programs (two separate programs), but courses and mentoring are offered by more than 100 faculty members from at least thirty participating departments; approximately thirty faculty members have formal affiliations with Environmental Studies at Oregon.

The faculty-student and advisor-student ratios for the PoE are poor in comparison to those at the peer institutions. In addition to expanding the faculty and advising capacity within the PoE, it would make sense to cultivate more investment from other faculty members across the University of Washington campus who are engaged in environmental teaching and research, which can be achieved via both formal procedures (such as courtesy appointments in ES) and informal approaches (including cross-listing relevant courses and invitations to ES events). We recognize that the latter is already being done, but, in light of the program's rapid growth, anticipate that these efforts will have to be stepped up.

Recommendations

The review committee understands that one academic support position has been offered at this time, but we strongly recommend that the program hire a second additional student advisor. The Dean of CoEnv has offered support for such a position.

As mentioned above, there are many faculty members in other units across the campus who might be interested in formal affiliations with PoE, such as adjunct or courtesy appointments and even permanent partial appointments. The Comparative History of Ideas Department (CHID) offers a model for creating partial faculty lines and working with participating faculty members from multiple departments).

Question 3: Recommendations to improve educational programming and scholarship

How can the unit improve the quality of its educational programs and scholarship?

The current PoE faculty are excellent educators, as evidenced by course evaluations and numerous teaching awards and award nominations. However, the quality of the educational programs, including the signature three-quarter-long capstone experience, is threatened by the growth of majors and enrollments in the PoE without commensurate growth in faculty. There are two steps that are necessary to bolster the standing of the educational programs. First, increasing the number of faculty is critical. Two of the core PoE faculty are part time lecturers - one has been with PoE for ten years, and the other for eight years - and advancement opportunities are limited for faculty in these positions. Conversion of these positions to Teaching Professor lines would greatly benefit the program and the morale of faculty. Second, it is important to enhance the disciplinary diversity of core faculty - four of the five core faculty have Ph.D. degrees in either Biology or Aquatic and Fishery Sciences. Recruitment in other topic areas relevant to environmental issues, such as social sciences and humanities, is critical.

The committee wishes to highlight the Program's enthusiastic embrace to reach beyond traditional constituencies served by Environmental Studies. We support their efforts in this regard. We also note that the positive College environment is conducive to changes regarding diversity, and PoE has stepped up to take advantage of these circumstances. There are, however, additional opportunities for directed recruitment campaigns to enhance diversity among the student body. The demographic data provided in Appendix D of the self-study report indicates there is a slightly higher percentage of undergraduate students from underrepresented groups in PoE than in the CoEnv overall, but a lower percentage than for all of UW (14.16% for PoE, 13.14 % for CoEnv, and 15.66% for UW). Identifying a possible audience for historically excluded communities engaged with environmental issues might move these statistics. PoE is also well positioned to enhance its leadership in serving diverse constituents interested in the environment at UW. An undergraduate minor in Sustainability and Environmental Justice, housed in PoE, is under development. PoE faculty have ongoing efforts to improve representation of communities impacted by environmental issues through both community outreach and on-campus engagement. Stabilization and expansion of these programs - particularly with STEM teachers at the middle- and high-school levels in the local community - provides additional opportunities to improve the standing of its educational program.

PoE core faculty are all actively engaged in the pedagogical scholarship expected of teaching professors, and some faculty are engaged in externally funded disciplinary research. Faculty scholarship, whether pedagogical or disciplinary, contributes to the vitality of the student experience and the visibility of the program within and beyond the university. However, PoE faculty are currently stretched thin, which makes finding time for scholarship and bringing that scholarship to the classroom challenging. Along with additional hires in PoE, the scholarship profile of the unit could be increased by formalizing affiliations of tenure-track faculty in other units.

Recommendations

The committee urges leadership to convert the positions of the two long-term part-time lecturers to teaching faculty as soon as possible. As noted in the response to this question and to other

questions, the recent dramatic increase in the number of Environmental Studies majors necessitates an increase in faculty capacity. These hires should be made in a greater diversity of disciplines than are currently represented among PoE faculty. Implementation of the minor in Sustainability and Environmental Justice and other efforts to broaden the relevance of environmental studies should be supported.

Question 4: Recommendations to increase regional and national prominence

What does the unit need to do to increase its regional and national prominence?

It is the committee's understanding that this question is primarily directed at the graduate programs of departments under review, but we believe that there is merit in developing the prominence of what is (for now) solely an undergraduate program precisely because it is in a growing field and is important to the overall financial health of CoEnv. Clearly, the PoE has a strong reputation on campus, to the point, in fact, that it is at risk of becoming a victim of its own success. The review committee is therefore primarily focused on highlighting the need to make faculty and staff positions commensurate with enrollments. Still, as more high school students choose the university they will attend on the strength of its ES program, making PoE more visible will be important for the continued growth of the program. The initiatives likely to be most immediately impactful involve highlighting what is already in place or close at hand along two axes: place-based teaching and learning (Seattle, Salish Sea, UW Urban Farm, etc.) and global environmental issues in comparative contexts. These two directives may seem at odds, but they align both intellectually - as the decades-old environmental slogan "think globally, act locally" has it - and practically - PoE faculty have competencies concentrated in local, place-based teaching, whereas environmental humanities and social-science faculty elsewhere on UW's campus have global range of expertise. Highlighting the "in-house" focus on the Puget Sound region and the U.S. West (complemented by access to courses in the College of Arts & Sciences as well as in other UW colleges and schools that address environmental issues in broader national and transnational frames) in the promotion of the program will add to its distinctiveness, even if PoE ultimately decides to highlight specific thematic tracks that it deems the most crucial for meeting the current moment. (An obvious corollary to this recommendation, addressed in other sections of the report, is the importance of building stronger relationships with faculty in allied fields and disciplines at UW outside of CoEnv.) Finally, it is important to recognize that UW student recruitment happens locally, regionally, nationally, and globally: being able to present the PoE degrees as attentive to each of these areas provides prospective students with a notional foothold in the Environmental Studies major and, we hope, the SEJ minor.

A program's prominence can also be increased through the company it keeps, as it were. We note in this regard the efforts of PoE to align itself with singular leaders in the field of environmental studies as a means of projecting its own values and ambitions. The May 2023 visit of Robin Wall Kimmerer was, by all accounts, a resounding success that helped identify PoE with particular areas of environmental studies that it aims to develop and highlight (in that particular instance, Indigenous environmental justice). In a similar vein, we recognize the programmatic work conducted by PoE to engage the local community on campus. As always, more could be done: as time and budgets allow, PoE could organize regional scholarly conferences in environmental studies to help consolidate the program's status as a leader in the field. And just as it is important for the prominence of the program to invite scholars, teachers, and community members doing cutting-edge work to UW, so too is it important for the students and faculty in PoE to present their work at national and international conferences (for instance, at the Association for Environmental Studies and Sciences [AESS], which actively encourages student participation). In fact, the PoE's Capstone experience is the ideal context for developing student research that can become conference presentations, which has the double virtue of

increasing the prominence of the program and offering an important form of pre-professionalization to undergraduates.

Recommendations

To this and other ends, the committee strongly recommends instituting a more formal and much more robust program of affiliations with faculty outside of PoE and especially beyond the College of the Environment (who teach primarily in the environmental sciences). From a reputational perspective, a non-PoE faculty member with a visible affiliation or joint appointment will be far more visible to students considering the program than a loosely affiliated faculty member who occasionally teaches a class for the PoE. We also surmise that bringing the teaching and support staff to appropriate levels will create the additional bandwidth needed to develop some of the co-curricular initiatives listed above.

Perhaps the least controversial rationale for the departmentalization of PoE is the impact such an administrative change would have on the program's regional and national prominence, precisely because it would bring about an influx of research-active faculty, some of which might be joint appointments with existing faculty in other departments in CoEnv or in Arts and Sciences (A&S), whose projects would draw additional attention to the program.

Question 5: Supportive environment that promotes degree learning and careers

Do students, faculty and staff find the department a supportive and welcoming environment in which to pursue their degrees and careers as scholars, teachers, and administrators?

The students that the committee met were overwhelmingly positive about the degree and the environment provided by the unit. Importantly, they identified rich and productive relationships with the core faculty as central to their experiences and expressed great appreciation for the dedication of the faculty. Components of the degree that were viewed as key assets were the interdisciplinary nature of the degree and the flexibility to pursue a chosen topic in depth, the ability to match the major with other degrees (13% of the students in the program are double majors), and preparation for core skills in communication and research methods. The students particularly appreciated the community developed during the capstone process and the very strong emphasis on diverse perspectives and interests. They used descriptors such as "joy in the program," "deep appreciation," "unique education," and they "felt valued," enjoyed "authentic connections" with the faculty, and held the view that the degree prepared them "well for understanding and responding to environmental issues." The students described being well supported by staff and student advising and felt that degree requirements were transparent. By contrast, the students expressed some anxiety about the ongoing expansion of the major and particularly the impact of growth on advising, course availability, the capstone (70 students in a cohort is not conducive to a meaningful group or individual experience), and student-faculty interactions. They identified the low student-to-advisor ratio as already impacting them, especially in course-planning logistics around the "integrated disciplines" and matching their requirements with other majors or minors. (One student developed a spreadsheet of all environment-focused courses offered on campus; once appropriately staffed, this might be a function filled by PoE). The students also felt that the development of community had suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic, and were eager to see initiatives at rebuilding through small actions (such as the much appreciated book club), as well as larger steps such as the revival of the Program's registered student organization (RSO), creation of a first-year interest group (FIG), and more frequent connections with alumni. They fully recognized the limitations on current faculty and staff time, believing them to be "stretched thin." Finally, the committee notes that the students we met may not have been fully representative of the student body and we have

some concern about students who were underperforming - particularly, on how they were tracked and advised.

The faculty cited the Program as providing a very inclusive and welcoming environment, even for temporary and part-time appointments. For those faculty who had served in other academic units, the culture was described as the best that they had worked in. The governance structure is horizontal and highly collegial, which has effectively led to the development of a vibrant and highly productive culture. The faculty members are deeply immersed in excellence in pedagogy and, as such, peer and near-peer mentoring is a central part of the culture. Faculty described the co-development of the curriculum and the ability to pursue academic interests through teaching, mentoring, and outreach as key motivators for being part of the unit. They felt supported in their career development. Faculty were deeply appreciative of the Program's leadership and highlighted the dedication and institutional knowledge of the current Director. Still, all faculty expressed anxiety about the inherent inequality associated with the high number of part-time and temporary positions, especially for those faculty who have been part of the Program for over ten years and have been central to the unit's growth. Further, there is some concern about succession and bringing a new Director up to speed; these appointments have historically been made from faculty outside the unit.

The current staff on PoE are relatively recent appointments, a result that can largely be attributed to attrition during the pandemic experienced throughout the University. Nevertheless, the staff characterized the leadership as welcoming and supportive, the student body as energizing and dedicated, and the faculty as highly collaborative. As a result, they described stepping into their roles easily and being able to identify areas where they can significantly contribute to the culture and administration of the unit. However, staff members have been substantially impacted by the delays associated with administrative processes, especially around hiring. These restrictions have led to significant mission creep. The staff identified a pressing need for additional support and rapid hires for outstanding positions.

Recommendations

Students: When there is more capacity in student advising and support, facilitate the revival of co-curricular and social activities for PoE students. In addition, ensure that there is sufficient advising and support for students to navigate the selection of appropriate courses outside of PoE.

Faculty: Prioritize the planned conversion of the temporary faculty lines to permanent teaching faculty lines. The unit and the College should develop a plan to bring in additional faculty as the program grows and focus particularly on developing a long-term plan for sustainable succession in the faculty body. The committee also suggests developing a process for onboarding a new director, which may include collectively authoring a guiding handbook.

Staff: Prioritize the hire of the academic support specialist and hire another academic advisor. Clarify staff roles relative to College staffing and services.

Question 6: Inclusion of underrepresented groups into intellectual life

Are students, faculty and staff from groups that are underrepresented fully included in the intellectual life of the department?

There is a very strong ethos of inclusion in PoE. This is evident in the self-study and the eagerness to welcome diverse colleagues and students within the PoE community came through vividly during the review committee's meetings with all the program's stakeholders. Instructors at all levels expressed the sense that they feel included in the life of the program. The program directors clearly recognize that the program should cultivate greater representation among the students and faculty, and

several impressive initiatives are currently underway, including the development of the new Sustainability and Environmental Justice (SEJ) minor. In recent years, the program's community outreach efforts have included environmental education initiatives in the Seattle community, focusing on Title I schools.

Recommendations

The review committee applauds the previous efforts of the PoE to reach out to under-represented students in the Seattle area. If there were sufficient time and resources, we would encourage faculty and staff members to continue such efforts. These would include developing and implementing environmental studies workshops in the public schools. According to the 2023 PoE self-study, there has already been a significant recent increase in representation of certain groups of students. The development of the SEJ minor is a major initiative in pursuit of diversity in the program and will likely succeed in raising the visibility of PoE among students who had not previously considered environmental studies as an option for them.

Faculty members have also expressed a commitment to emphasize DEI in planning any future hiring efforts within the program. Diversifying the PoE faculty may be the single most effective way of signaling to undergraduates that the program is a welcoming and relevant community for all.

Question 7: Facilities and building space

To what extent do the unit's current facilities and building space meet its needs?

There seems to be clear recognition from the CoEnv that faculty and staff in the PoE will need to grow to meet the demands of the current number of majors and minors and the potential influx of students from the proposed SEJ minor. The review committee, as noted throughout this report, is in strict alignment with this perspective. At the same time, the space occupied by PoE in John M. Wallace Hall, which consists of a suite of offices, a small conference room, a common space, and a classroom, is at the breaking point. To state the obvious, then, the current space is not adequate for the necessary growth in teaching and support staff that is coming.

There are different ways to solve this problem. If one considers that additional faculty - whether tenure-stream or teaching professors - will likely have joint appointments in other units, at least for now, perhaps their offices can be located in those units. From one perspective, this is less than ideal: for the casual but meaningful interactions with colleagues and everyday interactions with Environmental Studies majors and minors that help create the esprit de corps for which PoE is rightly lauded, having faculty offices scattered across campus may not be the best option. However, if PoE-affiliated faculty are housed in other units, whether in CoEnv, A&S, or another college or school, this does the work of insinuating PoE's mission across campus. We believe this to be an important, but, for the moment, underdeveloped factor in the future health of the program. We also note that Wallace Hall is, like so many other older buildings on campus, slated for demolition, but do not recommend a collective holding of breath that a new building will appear and resolve the current capacity issues, since there is still no timeline attached to that eventuality. Still, as the program gains prominence, perhaps a new ES building that leverages support from a donor could be a priority for College development officers (the Environmental Studies program and its building at Middlebury College provides a model). Here too, it should be noted, departmentalization could help the cause - donors are motivated to support an organization that has some markers of permanence - and one can even imagine donors "sponsoring" the process of becoming a department (there are examples at UW and elsewhere of "named" departments and schools).

Putting those future-oriented considerations aside for a moment, the committee noted PoE's maximally efficient use of all the resources it is accorded, and the use of the space in Wallace Hall is no exception. The common space is nicely laid out and is used extensively by students and faculty. PoE controls the scheduling of one classroom (capacity approximately 30), which it puts to good use, and this provides needed flexibility when access to registrar-controlled spaces is tight. One virtue of Wallace Hall is its proximity to most of the buildings that house Environmental Sciences program in the College; an ideally situated future space would be one that maintains that proximity while also being open to the rest of campus.

Recommendations

The committee recommends the development of a facilities plan to accommodate the needed growth in numbers of both faculty and staff, while maintaining control of one or more classrooms and a configuration that fosters the sense of community that is one of the program's key virtues.

Question 8: Student preparation for careers and future academic pursuits

To what extent is the unit preparing students at all levels for careers and future academic pursuits?

Based on the information in the self-study and the committee's discussion with current students, PoE is effectively preparing students for careers and postgraduate education. Capstone internships are highly valuable in reinforcing interdisciplinary learning and preparing students for careers following graduation. However, with the increase in student-to-faculty ratios in the capstone courses (ENVIR 490, 491, and 492), students report that the variety of internships made available through PoE is limited. This issue will become more pressing given growth.

Flexibility in the curriculum allows students to pursue specific interest areas as well as double majors and minors and was cited as one key reason for taking the degree. However, this flexibility places a greater demand on advising. Students identified some anxiety about finding appropriate courses outside the program, highlighting the need for specialized support in helping students identify courses that align with their varied academic pathways and future careers. An additional burden is placed on advising by the fact that some students are drawn to PoE because it is one of the few open majors at UW. Creating minimal barriers to entry to the major, as PoE is currently planning, should help in that regard.

Tracking of PoE alumni career progression, which could be done in collaboration with the recently hired Career Services Specialist in CoEnv, would provide useful information to more fully answer the posed question. Strengthening connections with alumni would benefit current students. Events such as alumni career panels - with participants spanning a range of years post-graduation - or networking events would provide students insights into career paths and could help build community.

Finally, creating formal affiliations for relevant faculty outside of PoE could strengthen connections between those faculty and PoE students.

Recommendations

The committee notes that staffing for the capstone course sequence needs to be increased, so that instructors have adequate time to identify and cultivate varied internship opportunities. Given both the flexibility of the Environmental Studies B.A. and the needs of students drawn to it because it is, for the moment, an open major, maintaining an appropriate student-to-advisor ratio is essential. Maintaining connections with alumni, both to track their career progress and to involve them in events with current students, would both inform and benefit the ability of PoE to prepare students for post-graduate education and careers.

B. Unit Questions

Question 1: Perspectives on becoming a Department

Is the current institutional structure working or not working for the program? If PoE were to become a department, what would be the advantages and disadvantages?

Identifying the primary motivations for becoming a department is central to addressing this set of questions. Simply put, how would formation of a department address issues and opportunities that cannot be delivered by the current institutional structure? Generally, the committee found the program to be healthy and morale to be good; therefore, this question is where the most reflection is warranted.

From an academic perspective, the committee heard that creation of a department would enhance scholarly activities and initiatives in environmental programming. Subject areas such as food systems, climate change, environment and climate justice, and energy were proposed, to which we add climate-induced risk analyses and extinction studies. Throughout our conversations, “boundary spanners” were identified as a category of potential faculty members who would motivate the Program’s progress in novel directions. The academic unit would act as a hub, serving as a critical link with scholars within the College and the University. In doing so, the academic programming would be responsive to existing and novel directions in Environmental Studies on campus, and intellectual productivity and national prominence would be elevated.

From an administrative perspective, autonomy was viewed as important for future growth. Substantial effort is currently expended on bringing the Program together and delivering the degree. This work is achieved by reliance on the core faculty, temporary appointments, and tenure-track faculty “buy outs” across campus. Faculty in the latter category have teaching and service obligations in their home units. Currently, academic appointments in PoE are made by “friendly units” within the College and rely on administrative and promotion processes in these external units. Due to these circumstances, PoE faculty are subject to evaluation by faculty not directly linked to the program - they also have service obligations in the units in which they are appointed but where they do no teaching. Finally, there is no formal structure for academic governance within PoE and the unit is not represented on the College Council. In theory, the director has unchecked power, although we note that this was not raised as an issue with current leadership during the review. However, there is some anxiety about the appointment of a new director.

Before we list advantages and disadvantages associated with the formation of a department, we encourage deep reflection by the unit and the College on several points. First, departmentalization might not be a panacea to addressing the issues raised. The current structure of the unit is fairly typical of environmental studies programs across the country, and it is worth investigating the functioning of such programs in more depth. We also encourage reflection on the suitability of future hires to the mission of PoE, and especially to the teaching mission. Along these lines, there is a need to develop a strong intellectual rationale for the creation of a department and to acknowledge the tension between breadth and depth of disciplinary focus. Further, formation of a department will require work to maintain the collegial and collaborative environment shared between the current faculty. There is also a need to consult related programs and environmentally oriented faculty in the College and across the University regarding the potential transformation of the Program into a department. The committee encourages a focus on maintaining and expanding a vibrant intellectual culture that connects PoE with the College and across units.

The committee heard, and agreed with, many advantages associated with the formation of a department. The shaping of the intellectual direction of a unit by its faculty is best served through

diverse scholarship in the research and pedagogical domains. Diversification of fields will also improve research productivity. By moving in this direction, PoE has a recognizable opportunity to become a leader and innovator within an R1 university. Increased synergy with colleagues across the College and University will create an intellectual profile in environmental studies that, in turn, will elevate the program's national prominence relative to other Environmental Studies programs. Autonomy in hiring and administration will assist the logistics of running the unit. As a department, the unit would likely have a stronger voice in resource allocations and shared decision making. The ability to make academic appointments within the unit - shaped by the faculty in PoE itself - would engender teaching and scholarly commitments to the unit and promote regularity of course offerings.

The committee also heard disadvantages associated with the formation of a department. First, the positioning of the unit relative to other units and scholars within the College has not been fully articulated - there is potential for overlap and duplication. The change in status would also result in a change in program culture. Several interviewees were concerned about intellectual, cultural, and pedagogical outcomes if the unit became hierarchical, especially through new hires and introduction of tenure-line faculty. The resourcing of a new department is not trivial and might face significant challenges. Here, we recommend creative discussions around faculty appointments as one way to address this concern - for example, by exploring shared positions with other units in CoEnv, A&S, and other colleges and schools. The committee was also concerned that the appointment of current teaching faculty positions could be stalled, and therefore, we urge prioritization of this task.

Question 2: Perspectives on how well the revised major is working

Is our recently revised major working well for students, especially from their perspective?

(In this report, we switched the order of Unit generated Questions 2 and 3).

Revisions to the Environmental Studies B.A. were implemented in Winter 2022. These revisions decreased the number of areas in which students took "integrated discipline" courses from 14 to 8 and made the major more distinct from the Environmental Science and Terrestrial Resource Management B.S. (offered by the School of Environmental and Forest Sciences, SEFS). In addition, some of the required STEM classes were dropped. Based on the conversation the committee had with students, the revised major is working well for them, although the sample size was small. The increase in declared majors after the implementation of the revisions indicates that they increased the popularity of the major. Though the revised major seems to be working for students, the committee offers some perspectives on the reconfiguration, in part based on our experience with and knowledge of other environmental studies programs nationally.

The current focus of the degree is on a particular mix of disciplines. While the committee views the amount of science in the revised major as appropriate for an environmental studies B.A. program, on balance, the committee notes that the "integrated disciplines" coursework is light on environmental philosophy and environmental literary studies. We therefore encourage the inclusion of appropriate existing courses offered by other units.

Depth versus breadth is always a tension in environmental studies academic programs, and we note that the PoE program is tipped towards breadth. That said, the degree design opens pairing with a minor or a second major, providing a pathway for students to pursue their specific interests. This will be particularly important when the new SEJ minor is launched. Given these different outcomes, close advising and mentoring of students is required to make sure that students are taking appropriate courses that align with their interests and future plans, enabling them to make use of the flexibility in the degree.

The committee noted that it is possible for students to take six of their eight “integrated discipline” courses at the 200-level or below. A lack of upper division courses in this type of course could lead to greater superficiality. We note that access to these classes might be limited by the fact that students have not taken relevant foundational courses offered by external majors. Further, PoE core classes may not include foundational “integrated discipline” classes, making the use of 200 level “integrated discipline” courses necessary.

During the review committee’s meeting with current students, we heard strong interest from the students in learning specific practical skills and topics that might be directly applicable to near-term employment opportunities; these skills and ideas include grant-writing and the calculation of carbon offsets. The committee acknowledges the urgency of setting up students for success on the job market. However, we feel the difference between a degree in environmental studies from a major research university and a vocation-oriented degree is that the former will emphasize qualitative and quantitative research skills, high-level communication skills, and sophisticated critical-thinking strategies rather than certain practical skills that can be acquired during internships or post-graduation jobs.

In our response to Q3 (previously Q2) of the Unit-generated questions, we discuss other possible models to structure the degree program.

Question 3: Perspectives on shaping the future direction of the program

In the context of environmental issues in 2023, what framework(s) should we use to shape the future direction of the program - a particular mix of disciplines (if so, which ones?), an area or topical structure (climate change, food, energy, environmental justice, sustainability, etc.), multiple and sequential acquisition of skills, and/or... ?

As mentioned in Question 2 of the Graduate School Charge letter (concerning the comparison with other Environmental Studies programs), one of the hallmarks of the PoE curriculum at present is its coverage of a broad swath of issues and topics in the environmental field. This is a typical goal of ES programs throughout the country and is one of the reasons why students with broad environmental interests are attracted to such programs: as a means of exploring environmental issues from a variety of perspectives, using diverse methodologies. No matter how PoE evolves in the future, we expect that this commitment to breadth will continue, even if it is primarily accomplished through foundational core courses.

The current curriculum emphasizes students’ selection of samples of disciplinary approaches from a smorgasbord of options. In the future, as the program grows, there may be opportunities to consider developing thematic tracks within the major. The PoE faculty has clearly been considering interesting and relevant topics already, such as climate change, food, energy, environmental justice, and sustainability. All of these are viable possibilities for future thematic tracks and are in line with emphases in ES majors at other universities. In order to effectively achieve the development of thematic options within the major, it is important to consider the following pre-conditions and opportunities: 1) the need for more teaching faculty representing a broader range of disciplinary perspectives; 2) the possibility of encouraging co-teaching possibilities, as a way of showing how faculty approach similar topics from diverse and mutually challenging/reinforcing points of view and as a way of modeling cross-disciplinary interaction and synthesis for students; and 3) the value of balancing disciplinary depth and disciplinary breadth.

Although the current PoE curriculum seeks to weave elements of the humanities and social sciences into the natural-science-heavy distribution requirements, there is noticeable imbalance among the range of disciplines emphasized in the program. The humanities and social sciences are under-

emphasized. Two major frameworks to consider in the future would be the possibility of developing a B.A. option (emphasizing the environmental humanities and social sciences with some exposure to environmental science) and a B.S. option (emphasizing environmental science with some exposure to the environmental humanities and social sciences- this is akin to the current structure of the program). Another viable framework, after bringing on board additional core faculty members from the environmental humanities and/or social sciences, would be to initiate a set of thematic tracks within the ES major. As mentioned above (again in response to the Question 2, the comparative question), some other programs offer a modest number of thematic/disciplinary tracks (2-4), highlighting such emphases as the environmental aspects of public health, conservation philosophies and management policies/practices, food systems and community identities, and environmental justice and education. The risk of selecting thematic emphases, even rather broad categories of emphasis, is that the thematic rubrics may atrophy over time and seem dated, inconsistent with current global challenges and terminology, and in need of periodic revision. The virtue of thematic categories within the major is that they may help the program seem in tune with pressing contemporary issues and may help to make the program “legible” (and therefore attractive) to current and potential students and to other constituencies. Stony Brook University’s Sustainability Studies major, for example, demonstrates the idea of a highly legible model that clearly enables students to select a track suited to their particular disciplinary and thematic skills and interests; the major’s three tracks include Ecosystems and Human Impacts; Environmental Humanities; and Societies, Economics, and Governance.

One thematic area that seems not to be receiving much attention among environmental studies programs, despite the fact that many academics are now addressing it in teaching and research, is the area of global catastrophic risk (including extinction studies and the philosophical and practical issue of human non-exceptionalism - the idea that the human species may be susceptible to dire population changes, including eventual extinction). Perhaps because ES programs tend to be concerned with training students to solve current problems in the spirit of optimism and idealism, the grimmer aspects of environmental issues are sometimes downplayed. However, a thematic category that encompasses environmental risk and society could potentially bring together perspectives ranging from the economics of risk management to the unequal distribution of risk (environmental justice), the communication of risk (literature and cultural studies), and the science of natural resource management. If thematic categories are being considered at some point in the future, it could be helpful to consider broad categories that do not directly duplicate what other ES programs across the country are offering and that are flexible enough to be potentially useful for an extended period before requiring replacement or revision.

Regardless of how PoE develops in the future, the review committee recommends keeping in mind the value of using advanced, 400-level courses (such as the current course emphasizing case studies) as a way of integrating student experiences in tackling important environmental and societal issues. Even if PoE eventually adopts a curricular framework that offers multiple thematic tracks, it would be helpful to have certain courses that bring the students from the various tracks back together toward the end of their undergraduate experience, enabling them to interact with and learn from their peers who have followed different curricular paths through the major.

Question 4: Perspectives on faculty composition and shared responsibilities

What would be an appropriate mix of tenure-line, teaching professor and part-time lecturer appointments...and why (i.e., based upon what sense of shared responsibilities for teaching, scholarship, mentoring, community engagement, service and diversity enhancement)? Should, for instance, all faculty be encouraged and enabled to do scholarly research and publish?

Despite the current, unsustainably low staffing levels in the PoE, the committee noted exceptional collegiality and overall excellence in the program. Maintaining these defining characteristics of the program in a period of staff and faculty growth and program transformation will be one of PoE's greatest challenges in the years ahead, even as it aims to diversify its offerings and its faculty. We reiterate, though, that what needs to happen now is the stabilization of teaching and support staff. We strongly recommend that PoE not tread water for an indeterminate period in the name of setting itself up for departmentalization.

The mix of tenure-stream faculty and teaching professors is difficult to determine in the abstract, but, assuming that a departmentalized PoE would remain solely an undergraduate program in the near term, it stands to reason that the teaching mission would remain central. In such a scenario, a nearly equal mix of tenure-line and teaching professor appointments would seem appropriate. Tenure-line faculty hired into the PoE would have to be prepared for proportionally more emphasis on teaching, which is a model that exists within the University (in UW Arts & Sciences, the nominal teaching load of most tenure-line faculty in the Division of Social Sciences is 4 courses per year, whereas it is 5 in the Division of the Humanities). However, negotiating a variable emphasis on teaching within the context of CoEnv, where research is privileged and the nominal teaching load is 3 courses per year, might be difficult. There would need to be clear, written guidelines on this point before any tenure-stream faculty are hired into a departmentalized PoE.

Eventual tenure-stream hires would, of course, be research-active, and the question of research infrastructure, namely access to graduate students with whom to collaborate, would also have to be resolved in advance. As in other units on campus that do not have graduate programs, tenure-line faculty can work with students in graduate programs outside of their home department. This, though, can be a somewhat haphazard occurrence, and it is only in cases of strong collaboration between departments that it happens consistently, which is another argument for PoE to strengthen relationships with key partners on campus, whether in CoEnv or beyond.

As to the distribution of responsibilities, the social dynamic of PoE makes it clear that a rigid, two-tiered system would be harmful to the student-centered approach that characterizes the program. Mentoring students, for instance, in the year-long capstone should be done equally by teaching professors and eventual tenure-stream hires. That said, there are good reasons why roles and responsibilities are spelled out differently for teaching professors and tenure-stream faculty. In this regard, the committee defers to the excellent CoEnv document on teaching-track faculty (Appendix L1), which leaves open the possibility of disciplinary research, but rightly foregrounds teaching excellence, curriculum development, and pedagogical research. The committee also notes the disciplinary research is beneficial for staying current and engaged in a rapidly evolving field and can invigorate teaching. At the time of the appointment of tenure-stream faculty (i.e., when PoE becomes a line-bearing unit), a similarly thoughtful document regarding tenure and promotion within the particular context that is PoE should be developed.

Finally, should departmentalization not be an immediate outcome, it is worth considering other routes to hiring tenure-stream faculty into PoE. For instance, an assistant professor could be hired into a position in a CoEnv department (School of Marine and Environmental Affairs, School of Environmental and Forest Sciences, etc.) with a portion of the teaching (33% or 66%) in PoE. At the time of tenure and promotion, PoE would write a letter of support, but the faculty member would not be responsible for seeking tenure and promotion in two departments, which is part of what makes true joint appointments complicated.

Recommendations

However PoE and CoEnv decide to move forward, it is critical that hiring be done in alignment with the program's values and orientation, especially as it concerns the teaching mission. Even with an

eventual mix of teaching professors and tenure-stream faculty, service roles - for example, student mentoring - should be distributed equitably. We see virtues in having more research-active faculty in the program, but only if this is achieved in a way that maintains PoE's collegial culture and contributes to the diversity of the curriculum and the program.