In a meeting on March 25th, the Undergraduate Council (UGC) reviewed and discussed the proposal to create a Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Studies (ENS) submitted by the faculty of the ENS department. The UGC also reviewed a letter from the Dean College of Public Affairs and Administration (CPAA). In a special meeting on April 1st, 2011, UGC met for a question and answer session with Dr. Dennis Ruez, and Dr. Stefano Longo; Chair and faculty of the Environmental Studies department respectively. This memo is based on the application, supporting letter, and our meeting with Dr. Ruez and Longo.

**Degree overview and need:** This Bachelor of Arts (B. A.) degree will allow students to earn an undergraduate degree in an area that is at the forefront of modern social, economic, and political concerns. Marc Miller, Director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (a UIS alumnus), notes in a letter to the department the following argument related to significance of offering such a degree:

... the human dimension of environmental processes is increasingly being recognized as a fundamental area of study. Providing a Bachelor of Arts degree within the Environmental Studies program will train graduates to work within their communities and the public service sector to develop new strategies, initiatives and policies to address growing environmental concerns like climate change, habitat loss, and sustainability.

This program will offer a multi-disciplinary curriculum with interdisciplinary learning goals. The ENS department currently offers a graduate degree M. A. and a minor in Environmental Studies and this degree would be a natural extension of the departmental offerings.

The majority of institutions in Illinois that currently offer a B. A. in Environmental Studies are private institutions and most of them are in northern Illinois. The ENS BA degree at UIS will provide an affordable alternative to these private institutions in the central Illinois region.

**Program description and requirements:** This degree requires 34 hours that will include three core courses and eight elective courses with a minimum of two courses from each focus area (Environmental Policy/Law/Planning; Environmental Social Sciences/Humanities, and Environmental Sciences). The UGC examined closely the issue of breadth and depth in the degree
requirements, and discussions with the department faculty resulted in several changes to the proposal. There is depth in the multidisciplinary framework of the curriculum, and the interdisciplinarity of the degree is intentional. Students will have the opportunity to integrate multiple perspectives during the degree, especially in the capstone course, ENS 451. Four of the eight elective courses must be at the 400 level and two of the remaining four courses must be at the 300 level. As the proposal notes, “The program seeks to implement interdisciplinary learning using an approach in which it provides synthesis and interaction between the different areas of study to develop a level of comprehension and skill that transcends and transforms disciplinary boundaries and integrates knowledge.”

**Assessment of student learning:** The proposal has a detailed and well thought out plan for the assessment of student learning. This plan includes assessing learning objectives and outcomes by implementing value-added methods. The use of the introductory required course, ENS 271, and the required closure course, ENS 451, will help the department in the evaluation and measurement of student growth and achievement of learning outcomes. The department has devised an assessment rubric that is appropriately linked to the program learning outcomes.

**Cycle of continuous improvement:** The ENS department will complete a self-study of the new degree program at the end of the third year, as designated by IBHE for new programs or units. The proposal identifies the information and materials required for the initial program review and demonstrates the department’s commitment to a cycle of continual data-gathering and analysis for program improvement.

**Resources:** The department identifies the resource needs for the new degree program in the proposal, which include a new faculty line in year one, which would begin fall 2012 (FY2013). Dean Wassenberg has identified internal resource reallocations that will fund the new position for ENS. The dean indicates in an email communication with the chair of UGC that the college might need partial bridge funding from the Provost for a year. By the fifth year, the Department will need to convert their current half-time office support position to a full-time position.

The UGC voted unanimously to approve the Environmental Studies degree proposal.

**CC:** DR DENNIS RUEZ, CHAIR, ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES  
PINKY WASSENBERG, DEAN, CPAA

HDB