TO: Lynn Fisher  
Chair, Campus Senate

FROM: Ranjan Karri  
On behalf of Graduate Council (Sharron LaFollette, Chair)

DATE: February 6, 2013
RE: ENS Graduate Program review: M.S. Environmental Sciences and M.A. Environmental Studies (Environmental Planning and Management, Sustainable Development and Policy, and Environmental Humanities concentrations)

The Graduate Council (GC) discussed the program review of the Environmental Studies (ENS) graduate degree programs (M.S. Environmental Sciences and M.A. Environmental Studies) and the undergraduate minor in Environmental studies at our November 26, 2012, meeting. Dennis Ruez, Chair of ENS, and Pinky Wassenberg, Dean of the College of Public Affairs and Administration (CPAA), attended our December 10th meeting to respond to queries as part of the GC review process.

The GC found that the ENS graduate program review presented a comprehensive discussion of both the M.S. in Environmental Sciences and the M.A. in Environmental Studies. The ENS Department discussed the many curricular and faculty changes during the review period. GC found that the responsiveness of the faculty to needed curricular changes was laudable. The department has developed learning objectives for each degree and concentration; aligned the curriculum accordingly; and addressed the range of career paths sought by students. Since environmental studies curriculum vary nationwide, there is no one model for environmental studies. The department has appropriately taken the path of a broad spectrum curriculum in the environmental natural and social sciences and environmental humanities. The curriculum in the ENS department at UIS is driven by faculty expertise, student demand, and employer needs. The faculty members in ENS are well accomplished teacher-scholars in their respective areas of expertise.

During the review period, the department had significant turnover in the faculty and changes in the curriculum. The M.S. Environmental Sciences with a concentration in Risk Sciences (and accompanying specialized courses) and certificates in Environmental Risk Sciences and Emergency Preparedness and Homeland Security were transferred to the Public Health Department (MPH). The ENS Department added online delivery of the M.A. Environmental Studies with concentration in Sustainable Development and Policy, made substantial revisions to the undergraduate minor in environmental studies, added a certificate in Geographic Information
Systems, and developed (since been approved for delivery) a B.A. in Environmental Studies. During the review period, it was necessary for department faculty to take on increased loads for curriculum delivery.

The GC offers the following recommendation for the next eight years:

- Develop measurable objectives for each degree and concentration in order to evaluate curriculum across students. Guided assessment will help strengthen the curriculum and help market these strengths to perspective students. Develop a systematic process of assessing student learning outcomes across the curricula, both at the course level and degree program level. We urge the department to work with the Committee on the Assessment of Student Learning (CASL) to identify those assessment tools best suited to the program. This assessment will complement the alumni satisfaction data already reviewed by the department.

- Evaluate the curriculum, including the number of concentrations offered, with respect to the viability of each curricular path given the resources at hand. This evaluation should include the added drain on current resources with the implementation of the new undergraduate BA degree. It will also be equally important to evaluate and maintain the distinction of the undergraduate and graduate curricula. In this, the GC agrees with recommendations of both the CPAA Dean and Curriculum Committee. In particular, the ENS department may want to reflect upon the MA Environmental Humanities concentration in light of the low enrolments over the review period.

- The Graduate Council recommends that the ENS department evaluate and pursue the acquisition of the resource needs such as equipment, software, equipment storage facilities, and other physical space.

In conclusion, GC recognizes that ENS has been through a rough period with significant turnover in faculty and revisions of curricula. We recognize that the program is still facing challenges and these challenges need to be addressed during the next eight years. To continue the improvement process, GC recommends that the department directs its efforts to the development of an assessment plan to ascertain if the curriculum is meeting specific learning objectives for each degree option. The GC commends the efforts of the ENS Department to move forward and we look forward to reviewing further developments in the future.

cc: Dennis Ruez, Chair ENS  
Will Miller, Interim Dean CPAA  
Cecilia Cornell, Faculty Associate in the Provost’s Office  
Campus Senate Office