The mission of the Department of Environmental Studies is to provide students with the advanced interdisciplinary training necessary for solving environmental problems. Graduates of the department are prepared for diverse careers in the environmental field.

Welcome from the Chair

The Department of Environmental Studies (ENS) at UIS has undergone many changes since the last newsletter—although I should add that I’m not sure when the previous newsletter was produced. Nevertheless, the Department felt it useful to reconnect with our alumni and friends.

Quick history: founded as Sangamon State University (SSU) in 1970, the first classes included ones for the Environments and People Program, ENS’ predecessor, giving this campus one of the first environmental studies departments in the country.

SSU was founded as a senior campus—having upper division undergraduates and graduate students, but no freshmen or sophomores. It became the third campus of the University of Illinois in 1995, started admitting honors freshmen in 2001, and began regular admission for freshmen and sophomores in 2006.

Today UIS is the top ranked regional public university in Illinois and second in the 12-state Midwest (US News & World Report), and it is the only Illinois member of the prestigious Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges.

Curricula in ENS have continued to change, adapting to the developing discipline in light of social and scientific needs, and evolving educational technology. At the graduate level we offer an MS in Environmental Science, MA in Environmental Studies, and a Graduate Certificate in Geographic Information Systems—all available on-campus or in an entirely online format.

I’m proud of our accomplishments and growth and look forward to continued advancement. Or, I will once my sabbatical is over; until then Dr. Predmore will guide ENS interim chair. -DR

New Bachelor’s in Environmental Studies

2013-2014 saw the return of the department’s bachelor’s degree with the introduction of the BA in Environmental Studies. In addition to all BA students completing a set of common core courses, they take electives in three areas: natural sciences, social sciences & humanities, and policy, law, & planning. The program culminates with students taking a capstone course that provides employment skills, requires demonstration of effective oral and written communication, and has students complete an off-campus research project to develop a practical skillset. The key is for students to integrate their knowledge from varied coursework in a cohesive way. The capstone course was first offered this May to 10 students, and the instructor took a unique approach, empowering the students to create their own course syllabus (within some limits).
Selected Department Highlights

- More master’s students pursuing environmental science/studies degrees than any other institution in Illinois
- Students Allied for a Greener Earth (SAGE) chosen as political/advocacy student group of the year for past two years
- Alumni have leadership positions in local governments, state and federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private companies, as well as success in being admitted to PhD and JD programs
- Graduate Public Service Internship program places students in government agencies for a unique applied educational experience, and provides a stipend and tuition waiver.
- Location in state capital provides access to policymakers and organizations such as the IL Environmental Protection Agency, IL Department of Natural Resources, and IL State Museum
- Graduate Certificate in Geographic Information Systems is the first in the state to be available fully online
- In the past decade enrollments grew in the MA in Environmental Studies by 57% and in the MS in Environmental Science by 200%; during the same time UIS graduate enrollment overall increased only 7%
- In Summer 2009 ENS had two faculty members; in fall 2014 ENS will have six tenure system faculty, a halftime instructor, and two dozen adjunct instructors

Tih-Fen Ting and Restoration Ecology

Through the support of the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Program administered by the IL Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Dr. Tih-Fen Ting (right with April Simnor) currently has two long-term projects on the recovery and conservation of state threatened and endangered species.

One project focuses on habitat management and evaluation for the state-threatened Franklin’s ground squirrel; the other aims to re-establish permanent breeding populations of state-endangered ospreys in Illinois.

In Summer 2014 Dr. Ting’s grants are employing or covering research costs for eight students, including two fulltime graduate research assistants employed throughout the year.

Outstanding Graduating Students

Each academic program at UIS selects a single graduating student to be Program Marshal for the UIS commencement ceremonies. This goes to students selected by the faculty as best exemplifying the goals and spirit of the program. The Program Marshals for 2014 are Omonike Ayorinde (MS, Environmental Sciences), Emily Cross (MA, Environmental Studies), and Makenzie Riedle (BA, Environmental Studies). See photos on next page.

Each master’s program also selects a student from the previous year whose thesis or graduate project the faculty considered the best work. Chris Young (Response of the Franklin’s Ground Squirrel to Recreational Trail Development in Springfield, Illinois) received the Outstanding Thesis award for his work toward his MS in Environmental Science. The UIS Research Board subsequently presented Chris (at right with squirrelly friend) as the Outstanding Thesis Award recipient for the campus at a reception in February 2014. Chris’ work then represented UIS at the Midwestern Association of Graduate Schools Outstanding Thesis Award competition.
New Professor (Jan. 2014): Megan Styles (Sustainability)

Dr. Styles received her PhD in Environmental Anthropology from the University of Washington in 2011. She also holds an MA in Anthropology from the University of Washington and a BA in Anthropology and Environmental Studies from Washington University in St. Louis. Megan’s research focuses on issues of sustainable development and social justice in Africa and the United States. Her PhD research investigated the social and ecological effects of cut flower (mainly rose) farming along the shores of Kenya’s Lake Naivasha. Before joining the faculty at UIS, Megan completed a teaching post-doc in the University of Washington’s Program on the Environment. She also worked as an environmental educator in high school classrooms in Knoxville, TN, and conducted research on fishing dependent communities at NOAA Fisheries. Megan’s research was recently published in an edited volume entitled *The Ecotourism-Extraction Nexus: Political Economies and Rural Realities of (un)Comfortable Bedfellows*. She is passionate about teaching, mentoring students, and conducting research that will lead to a more just and sustainable future.

New Professor (Aug. 2014): Shipeng Sun (GIS)

Dr. Sun is uses geographic information science and technologies to explore our networked world. He believes “nothing is better than a network to represent the First Law of Geography.” He says “the complexity generated by and embedded in these network connections requires new thinking, new theories, and new analytical methods. It also makes interdisciplinary, planned and unplanned cooperation a necessity in both natural and social sciences”.

Human-environment interactions in urban, suburban, and exurban areas, particularly those having taken place in the land and housing markets and shaping the social and physical landscapes we observe today, are focuses of Shipeng. Land-use and land-cover change is a set or complex interactions between human beings and their environment, involving residents’ housing decisions that he sees it as a place for great growth and progress. Network analyses and agent-based modeling are the methodological frameworks that can be adopted to simulate, visualize, and analyze the complexity in these interactions and Dr. Sun will bring these tools to UIS.

Shipeng received his PhD in Geography from the University of Minnesota, and earned an MS in Spatial Information Systems and BS in Environmental Geology from Peking University.

New Professor (Aug. 2014): Anne-Marie Hanson (Sustainability)

Dr. Hanson is trained in human-environment geography and critical development studies. Her primary objective as a scholar is to increase understanding of political-ecological processes and to share this knowledge with others.

As a researcher, Anne-Marie’s work focuses on sustainable development politics as they relate to marginal communities, conservation practice, and the production of natural and urban environments. This addresses the expectations of development associated with garbage in places where cities and protected areas overlap along the costs of Yucatán, Mexico.

Dr. Hanson’s teaching strives to bring geographic insights to students through media-based and field projects. She encourages students to consider the multiple layers of social difference that frame the way in which complex social and environmental problems are framed and mitigated.

Anne-Marie earned her PhD in Geography and MA in Latin American Studies from the University of Arizona, and her BA in Anthropology and Spanish from Luther College. Before coming to UIS she was a visiting assistant professor at Trinity College (CT).
Clockwise from bottom right: Melody Lamar, Caleb Ruyle, Kallie Sinkus, and Glen Wetterow (all MA) smile as the await their turn on stage; Nate Hoyle (BA) realizes a dream that will continue at UIS as he pursues an MA; Omonike Ayorinde (MS Program Marshal) and Sarah Lentz prepare to cross the stage; Makenzie Riedle (BA Program Marshal) hangs out with a stoic bear; Emily Cross (MA Program Marshal), Caleb Ruyle (MA), Dr. Andrew Predmore, and Dr. Megan Styles relax before heading into the commencement ceremonies.
In fall 2013 Dr. Dennis Ruez took ENS 551 Environmental Natural Sciences to Emiquon Preserve (top two), behind the scenes tour of the Illinois State Museum (right), and Starved Rock State Park (bottom), among other sites.

An individual field trip can cost a fourth of the annual department budget just for vehicle rental. Can you help by contacting our college dean (Mark Wrighton; jwrig5@uis.edu) and letting him know 1) the importance of these trips to environmental education; 2) your favorite trip as a student at UIS/SSU; and 3) where you think we should travel next?
Clockwise from bottom right: Dr. Andrew Predmore and Joe McNamara (MA) present some of their research in Edmonton, Canada; Nate Hoyle shows off his GIS work with Senator Sam McCann at the first U of I Undergraduate Research symposium at the state capitol (hosted by UIS); Dr. Predmore’s ENS 587 Natural Resources Policy and Analysis class visits Shawnee National Forest; Dr. Desserae Shepston takes ENS 311 Global Change in Local Places to the world-famous Mazon Creek fossil locality.
Some ospreys just don’t like to be watched (above). However, Dr. Tih-Fen Ting’s research project reintroducing ospreys to central Illinois is being closely watched. Her graduate student April Simnor (MS) starred in a local advertising campaign for UIS.

ENS faculty, staff, students, and alumni are often visible faces of the UIS advertising plan. Have you seen someone from ENS on a billboard near you? More importantly, have you seen someone from ENS (current or past) make a difference based on research, teaching, or outreach? Send us that story or a photo at ens@uis.edu.
ENS is making memories, and we are sure our alumni have their own from their time at UIS/SSU. Please share! Tell us your stories, forward us your photos; we want those for the next newsletter. Have a job/internship that you’re looking to fill? We can provide qualified applicants. Please stay in touch by emailing us at ens@uis.edu.