

2 April 2014

Delphis Levia
Department of Geography
Campus

Dear Delphis:

Reluctantly, and perhaps regrettably, I approve of the proposed changes for the Environmental Science and Environmental Studies majors that you sent for my review last week. I do so at the request of my chairs and key faculty who believe that the proposal is a step forward. In my opinion, the proposed changes are relatively minor and do not solve the fundamental problem of confusion on the student's part regarding which major/concentration to select to prepare them for various career paths. For future reference, I list my main objections here, with the hope that you will consider these issues in future revisions.

- The proposal falls short of your stated goal on page 3 to make the program "less confusing for UD students". Students routinely visit our academic advisors to ask about the differences in all of UD's "environmental" majors/tracks. I do not see how your proposal changes this, thus the high transactional cost associated with these programs persists, as does the confusion. Using novel language like "theme" (to mean concentration?), "ecoscience" (instead of ecology) and "environment and society" (which appears to be environmental economics) may even add to the confusion. How would you suggest we explain to the parent of a prospective student the difference in learning outcomes between the Ecology major and the Ecoscience track? Is there evidence at other universities (or anywhere) that truly different learning outcomes and career paths are produced by these curricula? Will a student interested in the environment choose Penn State, Cornell or Maryland over UD when they can't get straight answers to these questions at Decision Days?
- You list nine ways that each curriculum addresses undergraduate education goals – but I see no evidence of an assessment of this in the previous majors nor is there an assessment plan proposed for the new majors. Much of your narrative is speculative. I suggest that your committee assess the new majors in three or five years to determine if you've met your goals.
- I see no evidence of stakeholder involvement in the revision. I realize that you spent considerable time on this as a faculty committee and do not wish to diminish those efforts. However, I would hope that prospective employers would have been consulted for their opinion on the changes needed to make graduates more attractive. Also, I would hope that alumni of the program, as well as current and prospective students, would have been interviewed and their feedback incorporated. Perhaps you did this and chose not to include it in your narrative.
- On pages 4-5, you attempt to justify having students advised in CEOE as an improvement of the new program. First, it seems contradictory to espouse interdisciplinarity throughout the narrative and then justify advisement within a single department (Geography). If students must be prepared to work across disciplines upon graduation, it seems that seeking advice from multiple perspectives on courses, careers, internships, etc, might be a good thing.

Second, I have seen problems in advisement that were sourced to CEOE in the current program. Last month, I viewed a Cognos report that showed several seniors on the graduation list for May 2014 that had not yet declared a concentration. This occurred last year as well. On page 5, it states that students "MUST" select a concentration during sophomore year, which is clearly an improvement over the current situation, but the consequences of not doing so, and proactive steps that CEOE might take to ensure this, are not stated.

- I applaud your efforts to reduce the number of tracks in the proposed majors; this is a good start. However, I am concerned that the Ecoscience track is too close to our Ecology major, and the Environment and Society track is too close to our Environmental Resource Economics major. Several of the core courses overlap, and I am hard-pressed to see any difference in career options for graduates of these programs. My concern is not for my budget, as RBB rewards colleges for having majors but then taxes colleges for their majors, such that the "home school" issue becomes a wash. My concerns are over the confusion created by having several similar "environmental" curricula and the increased overall cost of delivery associated with their support when, most likely, one program would be sufficient to meet student and societal needs.

Delphis, I know that you and your committee spent a lot of time on this proposal, and though I have been critical, my intent is to add to and refine the work started. I am thankful for the opportunity to review. I hope the objections raised above will be considered in future revisions.

Sincerely,



Mark Rieger

Dean and Professor

College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Delaware

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