

Environmental Studies - Disciplinary Communications in the Major

Objectives

The ability to critically analyze interdisciplinary environmental problems, justify one's position on an issue, and communicate that position to a range of audiences both verbally and in writing is a critical goal of our major. As a result, we have long emphasized both written and verbal communication skills. We have a 2-unit writing lab associated with our gateway course to the major (ENVS 100), require extensive writing in the majority of our upper division courses, and require a substantial written piece for our exit requirement. Given that Environmental Studies spans a range of disciplines the specific form of the written and oral assignments in upper division classes ranges greatly from policy analyses (ENVS 140) to writing scientific lab reports and participating in poster presentations (ENVS 104A).

Writing

Students should understand how to:

1. Write clearly and succinctly in a way that is tailored for the specific audience for which the information is intended.
2. Evaluate a range of positions on environmental issues
3. Synthesize information from and communicate across different disciplines.
4. Substantiate their arguments using the peer-reviewed literature.

Verbal/group work

Students should be able to:

1. Speak clearly and succinctly in a way that is tailored for the specific audience for which the information is intended, using the analytical approaches described above
2. Work with a group on problem solving

List of course(s) committed to disciplinary communications objectives

ENVS 100/L – required of all majors, usually as their first upper division course for the major

Seven upper division electives – our students may select any seven electives, one must be a social science elective and one a natural science elective. All the social science electives include a substantial research paper and many natural science electives also require extensive writing. Most of these classes have sections which offer students the opportunity to speak regularly and some have formal verbal requirements.

Exit requirement – ENVS 190 (Capstone), ENVS 195 (senior thesis), ENVS 196 (senior seminar), ENVS 183B (senior internship) – All of our exit requirements include a minimum of 15 pages of writing and most include a verbal component.

In summary, all of our students must take a minimum of three courses with extensive writing – ENVS 100/L, a social science elective, and the exit requirement, but nearly all students take more courses with a substantial writing component.

How each course contributes to the objectives

ENVS 100/L – The junior year core course for all ENVS students aims to model interdisciplinary use of natural science and policy analysis to understand complex environmental problems, and to help students articulate, challenge, and justify their assumptions or positions about environmental problems, their causes, and appropriate responses. Students are introduced to writing in different styles and for different audiences typical of the ecosystem-society interface. The lecture course is paired with a 2-unit writing lab in which students learn to do peer review of papers and get extensive feedback on their writing. For the course and lab students are required to write three 6-page papers and rewrite one after feedback. Students also work in groups on projects.

Electives – All of our social science classes and most of our natural science classes require a writing component. Many classes include papers (ENVS 120, 122, 130B, 140, 141, 151, 163, 165, 172, 172) usually tailored to the format of the discipline, some require lab reports (ENVS 104A, 130A-L, 161L, 162L, 163L), and a few require more specific types of writing, such as several short essays (ENVS 160), critiques of primary literature (ENVS 122), and opinion-editorials (ENVS 156). We also offer ENVS 156 – Environmental Action Through Writing. The majority of these classes give feedback on drafts of the paper. The papers vary in length depending on the discipline.

Exit requirements

ENVS 190 – Our capstone course, which is taken by approximately half of our majors, requires students to write a grant proposal, a project proposal, a cover letter and resume, and write a final paper with feedback on a draft (total ~15 pages). Students work in a group on a specific environmental issue (of which their paper is a component) and give a group verbal presentation.

ENVS 196 (Senior seminar) – We offer a few small senior seminars (10-20 students) each year which vary with respect to theme but all require students to write a paper and to engage in extensive discussions.

ENVS 183b (Senior internship) and 195 (thesis) – The final product of these is an extensive written project that is more applied for 183 and more research oriented for 195. Faculty sponsors and agency sponsors (183b only) comment on drafts of these papers.