

Assessment of our educational program in the Department of Environment and Society is based on two sources of information:

- Student surveys administered in each course at the end of every semester; and
- Exit interviews conducted with students when they complete their degree requirements.

Our faculty members have identified four broad **learning goals**, as well as 34 **learning outcomes** that are important for achieving those goals. These goals and outcomes flow directly from our departmental mission. Assessment is designed to identify the extent to which we are meeting our goals and equipping students with these learning outcomes. The goals and outcomes include:

Goals

Students who complete academic programs in the Department of Environment and Society will be able to:

- Analyze complex, real-world problems;
- Understand and integrate ideas from the ecological, social, and physical sciences;
- Sustain an increased desire for lifelong learning;
- Lead purposeful lives.

Learning Outcomes

Attitudes & Behaviors

- Exhibit professionalism
- Adhere to ethical principles
- Identify future NR/E problems or concerns
- Engage in processes of scientific discovery
- Participate in public debate and social change
- Have a sense of civic responsibility

Skills & Abilities

- Analyze complex problems
- Think logically and critically
- Think creatively
- Employ scientific reasoning and methods
- Find, evaluate, and use appropriate information resources
- Utilize current information technologies
- Analyze problems at different spatial scales
- Communicate effectively in writing
- Communicate verbally
- Communicate visually
- Work cooperatively in teams or small groups
- Work cooperatively in large groups or organizations

- Respect interdisciplinary diversity
- Respect cultural diversity
- Integrate social, biological, and physical science knowledge in natural resource and Environmental problem solving

Knowledge

- Social science
- Biological or ecological science
- Physical science
- Economics
- Natural resource and environmental management issues or problems
- Natural resource and environmental policies and issues in the Intermountain West
- U.S. natural resource and environmental policies
- International natural resource and environmental policies
- Communication skills
- Conflict management skills
- Mathematical or statistical skills
- Computer skills
- Identification, inventory, mapping, classification, and monitoring techniques in an area of specialization

Assessment Process

At the conclusion of each term, students in every course with an ENVS or GEOG prefix complete a survey which asks them to rate the degree to which each of the 34 learning outcomes has been met by that course. Ratings are made on a scale from 1 (not at all successful) to 5 (very successful). Students are told that if a course has not met a particular objective that may be perfectly acceptable – no class can address all 34 objectives – and that the survey is designed to help us do two things:

- Assess the degree to which the course achieves the objectives it is *designed to achieve* (as evaluated by the instructor who designed it); and
- Assess the degree to which the overall Environment and Society curriculum is able to address all 34 learning objectives.

To avoid confusion with a standard course and teacher evaluation, the surveys are given on a different day toward the end of the semester. After the conclusion of each semester, results of the surveys are compiled. Instructors of each course can then use the data to evaluate whether the students believe the class has met their course-level objectives. At the departmental level, we can evaluate whether the entire academic program is addressing each of the 34 learning outcomes at some point in the curriculum.

To evaluate the extent to which the overall program is achieving its goals, we also rely upon a second source of information: exit interviews. Graduate students are typically interviewed individually around the time of the thesis/dissertation defense, while

undergraduates participate in focus group interviews during final exam week in their last semester.

The interviews for undergraduate students typically involve 3-4 students, preferably from the same degree program. Students not only are asked about the four broad learning goals, but also what could be done to improve our success at achieving the learning goals and outcomes. Finally, they are asked what classes they thought were not particularly valuable or useful for their future careers, and how these classes might be modified to render them more valuable or useful. Students are told at the beginning of each interview that their comments will remain anonymous, and will be compiled along with those of students in other focus groups for presentation to the faculty.

Graduate students are asked only two questions:

- What did you particularly like about your educational experience at USU and therefore would like to see maintained or enhanced? and
- Where do you think the greatest opportunities for improvement reside?

As with the undergraduate students, this information is compiled and synthesized for presentation to the faculty.