

OIS Advisory Board (October 2007)

Invitation to Develop Courses and Position Proposals Related to “Environmental Challenges and Responses”

The Advisory Board of the Office of Interdisciplinary Studies invites faculty members to explore curricular development and expansion and possible EKI faculty appointments that support topics related to “Environmental Challenges and Responses.” The Advisory Board expects that expanding our offerings in topics related to this area will entail a combination of existing faculty members offering new courses and the appointment of new faculty members bringing pertinent expertise and/or freeing up existing faculty members to develop and teach these courses. Topics related to the broad area of “Environmental Challenges and Responses” include:

- ❖ Cultural and artistic responses
- ❖ Energy
- ❖ Environmental policy
- ❖ Ethics
- ❖ Public health
- ❖ Resource distribution and consumption
- ❖ Sustainability and sustainability science

In addition to the topics listed above, proposals for other related topics are welcome. Faculty should consult guidelines for developing new areas of interdisciplinary study and EKI faculty position proposals at

<http://www.grinnell.edu/offices/dean/eki/facultyresources/>.

Rationale:

The 2004 survey of faculty interests in interdisciplinary teaching identified issues relating to the environment, development, and sustainability as a potential area for expansion of the curriculum. Subsequent meetings and Common Ground lunches have confirmed a significant interest in this area.

Environmental issues cross all disciplines. They address pressing concerns of today, offer opportunities to explore the historical record, and invite interdisciplinary collaboration of faculty and students in teaching and learning. They directly address the goals for interdisciplinary and integrative learning outlined by the Advisory Board in its Guidelines for Developing New Areas of Study under the Expanding Knowledge Initiative at Grinnell College (see the link above). The Advisory Board conceives of “Environmental Challenges and Responses” in broad terms that can support proposals from every division and can cross divisional lines. This area is pertinent to a number of existing concentrations (e.g. Environmental Studies, Global Development Studies, and Technology Studies), the curricular elements of our three centers, on-going curricular projects such as the Humanities Core and HHMI-sponsored interdisciplinary science, as well as areas of developing interest (e.g. international relations, Middle Eastern studies, peace studies, and policy studies). As such, the impact of this initiative on the curriculum is potentially broad and deep.

Some Clarifying Examples:

Cultural and Artistic Responses to the environment can apply to the performing arts and creative writing, the history and theory of literature and the arts, religious studies and anthropology. Steve Andrews led summer MAPs exploring literary responses to Yosemite, and the teaching and creative work of Lee Running (Art) and Jon Chenette (Music), and the outreach work by Tilly Woodward (Faulconer Gallery) exemplify existing interest in this topic.

Energy is a key issue for the twenty-first century. This topic can be addressed from a number of perspectives, including public policy, international relations, the science of nuclear energy and renewable sources of energy, issues of productivity, city planning, environmental degradation and sustainability, development, and resource distribution.

Environmental Policy can be approached from many perspectives, particularly from those of science, the economy, and public policy. It can build on strengths already present on campus, the Grinnell-in-Washington program, and the Rosenfield and Wilson programs. It also can support a growing on-campus interest in policy studies. For example, this fall, two shared-theme Tutorials are being offered on “Climate Change and Policy,” one from a social science perspective (by Bill Ferguson) and one from a scientific perspective (by Elaine Marzluff).

Ethics and their application to the study of environmental challenges and responses can be addressed by humanities. The topic can also be explored from the perspective of the sciences and public policy.

Public Health can address emergent diseases as well as the health issues arising from the degradation of the environment. Public health policy is also pertinent to this area. This topic invites an approach integrating science and social studies.

Resource Distribution and Consumption can integrate approaches of all three divisions and relates to many of the other topics listed here. Issues of gender, race, ethnicity and class are important to the study of all of these topics, but none so much as this one.

Sustainability and Sustainability Science address increasingly pressing issues in society and for our environment. The National Academic of Sciences recently recognized sustainability science as a distinct field, unified by its subject (coupled human-environment systems) rather than its diverse disciplines (encompassing broad areas of science and social studies). These areas can speak to global and local environmental issues, culture and political systems, and the ways in which economies are organized.

Next Steps

The Advisory Board will hold a Common Ground lunch on Nov. 8 to help interested faculty members identify areas of interest and potential partnerships for developing courses, course clusters, and course modules and for position proposals.