Proposal for an Interdepartmental PhD Emphasis in Environment & Society

Academic Senate Sustainability Working Group
Winter 2012
To be implemented in Fall 2013

I. Objective

The Academic Senate Sustainability Working Group, a standing committee of faculty from across the UCSB campus, proposes the creation of an Interdepartmental PhD Emphasis on the Environment & Society (IEES). The concept of sustainability has gained much traction in recent years, but working toward sustainability requires a deep understanding of how environment is changing, how those changes affect human societies, and how political, economic, and cultural forces in turn affect the environment. The goal of the emphasis is to create a means for UCSB doctoral students enrolled in traditional academic degree programs to benefit from our campus’s extraordinary strengths in environmental studies and sciences, and develop the integrative thinking and problem-solving skills necessary to lead the next generation of environmental scholars.

II. Scope

For the purposes of this proposal, we define “environment and society” as encompassing the diverse, dynamic, and complex interactions among human societies and their biophysical surroundings, over time and space from the local to the global. This includes environmental change, environmental politics, and environmental problems and solutions, as well as critical theories of environmental thought, perception, representation, and action. The emphasis will place particular value on interdisciplinarity in environmental scholarship, particularly on work that bridges natural and human systems. Research conducted within narrow disciplinary frameworks or that treats human and natural systems as separate and distinct will fall outside the scope of the emphasis.

III. Rationale

UCSB is one of the country’s leading institutions for interdisciplinary environmental teaching and research that bridges human and natural systems. The Environmental Studies Program is one of the largest of its kind with more than 800 undergraduate majors, the Bren School has a thriving professional master’s program (MESM) and a smaller PhD program, the Interdepartmental Graduate Program Marine Science ranks among the best of its kind, and the Geography Department is known worldwide for its strengths in quantitative physical and human geography. Among UCSB’s more traditional disciplinary departments, English has become a national leader in the study of literature and the environment, Political Science has launched a graduate-level focus area on environmental politics and policy, and UCSB ranks among the world’s top universities for environmental economics, ecology, and earth science. Additional faculty who work on environmental issues are based in numerous other campus units—including the colleges of Engineering and Creative Studies, and the departments of Anthropology, Film and Media Studies, Global and International Studies, Sociology, and
History. Around 50 percent of UCSB’s academic departments offer at least one course on the environment or sustainability.

Despite the impressive scope of environmental research and teaching at UCSB, our campus lacks a formal mechanism for doctoral students—most of whom are studying toward degrees in traditional disciplinary departments—to expand their environmental training, connect with fellow students, and work with faculty outside their home academic units. This is particularly true for the dozens of doctoral students working on environmental projects outside the core environmental graduate programs. These students make significant contributions to the campus’s environmental community, but they are poorly served by the current institutional arrangement. They have few mechanisms to broaden their training outside their normal departmental requirements, and those who try may encounter difficulties developing relevant intellectual communities, identifying receptive faculty, and enrolling in appropriate courses.

Many students in the core environmental units could also benefit from a campus-wide PhD emphasis that gives them structured opportunities to engage with scholars from humanistic, social science, or natural science fields not represented in their home units. Roadblocks that hinder such interactions are always regrettable. But they are particularly troublesome at a time when scholars throughout the university, and the academy more generally, are recognizing the importance of training young researchers to develop new interdisciplinary approaches for solving urgent environmental problems. To maintain its place of prominence as a world leader environmental scholarship, it is important for UCSB to develop mechanisms that integrate its diverse strengths and resources.

To address these needs, we propose to create an Interdepartmental PhD Emphasis on the Environment & Society. The emphasis would build on UCSB’s organizational structures and longstanding disciplinary strengths while furthering the university’s goal of promoting innovative, interdisciplinary scholarship. It would encourage new collaborations, enable departments to pool their resources, bolster UCSB’s reputation as a global center for environmental research, and provide a forum for participants to build an exciting intellectual community. It would also enrich our ability to attract top students, and confer significant advantages to our graduates on the academic and professional job markets. UCSB’s environmentally oriented faculty and programs, though diverse and distinguished, are widely distributed across campus and have often lacked connection and coherence. Yet this situation presents a unique opportunity. The proposed emphasis would represent an important step—one long anticipated by UCSB faculty, including the authors of the 2005 Environmental Issues Task Force Report chaired by Professor of Geography Keith Clarke—in the direction of more campus-wide cooperation and integration on environmental issues.

This proposal emerged from the Faculty Senate Sustainability Working Group, which brings together participants from fields as diverse as history, geology, geography, education, sociology, political science, and engineering. It also includes faculty from UCSB’s three core interdisciplinary environmental units: the Bren School, Geography Department, and Environmental Studies Program. Once established, however, the proposed emphasis will not be affiliated with the Working Group. Broader support for the emphasis is indicated in letters from faculty and department chairs who have agreed to participate, as well as letters and feedback from current graduate students (see Appendixes A, B, and C).
IV. Student Benefits

Because the emphasis is designed to attract diverse students, it will confer diverse benefits to those who participate. In this section, we discuss student benefits by describing the pedagogical goals for the emphasis and explaining the results of a survey of current graduate student interest conducted during the fall and winter of 2013. Appendix C includes letters from current PhD students whose experiences illustrate the challenges of interdisciplinary environmental work for those enrolled in traditional disciplinary programs as well as their enthusiasm for the proposed emphasis.

**Pedagogical Goals**

This emphasis was designed with two pedagogical goals:

First, the emphasis seeks to provide student participants with the interdisciplinary tools—including methods, concepts, vocabularies, analytical frameworks, and critical thinking skills—necessary to communicate across disciplines and undertake dissertation projects that address complex environmental issues. The emphasis will seek to introduce participants to new ways of thinking and provide them with guidance on how to integrate these perspectives into their research and writing. The core seminar, elective requirements, dissertation focus, committee requirement, symposium, and community-building activities all work together to advance these overarching goals.

Second, the emphasis seeks to prepare student participants for a challenging academic job market. Although announcements for environmental teaching and research positions are increasingly calling for scholars with interdisciplinary perspectives, most such opportunities remain, at least in part, tied to specific disciplines. Many job market observers have thus concluded that one of the best ways to increase competitiveness is to give doctoral students a firm grounding in an established discipline while providing a secondary path for training in interdisciplinary environmental studies or sciences. In a review of current job listings in geography, conducted as part of this proposal writing process in December 2012, we found that for between one-third and one-half of all listed positions applicants would likely benefit from interdisciplinary environmental training and credentials beyond their geography degree programs. (In Appendix D we provide a sample of current job announcements that exemplify the job market benefits of the proposed emphasis.) The proposed emphasis would provide a structure for UCSB students to increase their competitiveness by retaining their disciplinary identities while diversifying their training, expanding their skills, and demonstrating their commitment to interdisciplinary thinking and collaboration.

V. Related Emphases

There are currently 13 doctoral emphases at UCSB representing a remarkable diversity of topics and participants. In the process of developing this proposal, we consulted with and solicited input from directors, faculty, staff, and students associated with several of these emphases. Administratively, some other emphases have much in common with the proposed Emphasis on the Environment and Society. Thematically, the only emphasis with any relation to this proposal is the PhD Emphasis in Economics and Environmental Science, a joint effort
of the Bren School and Department of Economics that focuses specifically on environmental economics and is only available to students in those two departments.

VI. Curriculum & Requirements

Relationship to Departmental PhD Curricula

Participation in the emphasis is generally independent of the doctoral curriculum and degree requirements established by a student’s home department or campus unit. There are, however, two exceptions to this rule: The first exception involves the dissertation topic and committee requirements discussed below, which are modeled after those already in place for several other PhD emphases. The second exception involves cases in which electives taken for the emphasis may also fulfill departmental outside field distribution requirements. In such cases, decisions about granting appropriate credit for overlapping courses will be made by the appropriate faculty and staff within the student’s home unit.

Core Seminar

The 4-credit Core Seminar will meet each year during the fall quarter. The Core Seminar will be taught or team-taught by faculty participating in the emphasis. The seminar will have an official number in the course catalog and will be cross-listed in the participating departments. Students should register for the course in the home department of that year’s instructor(s), so that the instructor(s) receives appropriate credit.

The goal of the core seminar will be introduce students to key environmental theories, concepts, and methods from the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Students will read about, reflect on, and discuss the contributions of various disciplines and epistemic frameworks to understanding of complex environmental issues, discuss current research, consider the challenges of innovative, interdisciplinary work, and identify models for further integration. The seminar instructors will develop a list of foundational readings, and invite affiliated faculty from across the university to participate in seminar meetings as guest discussants. During the course, students will develop a succinct description of how they plan to integrate interdisciplinary environmental concepts and methods into their research. This document should be integrated in or appended to their dissertation prospectuses.

Elective Courses

In addition to the Core Seminar, students will be required to take three courses from campus departments other than their own led by faculty members from outside their disciplines. For example, it would be appropriate for an ecology student from EEMB to take an elective course in the English Department or an economics course in the Bren School, but it would be inappropriate for the same student to take a course offered by a fellow ecologist in the Bren School. Elective courses may be completed at any time during the student’s graduate career.

Some graduate emphases have divided their elective courses into distinct intellectual areas to ensure breadth through distribution requirements. We anticipate that many students in the environmental emphasis will sign up for interdisciplinary courses that each encompass aspects of the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Imposing categories or distribution requirements on already interdisciplinary courses would therefore be artificial,
burdensome, and complicated. For this reason we feel that the choice of elective courses should be based on each individual student’s needs and interests, within the parameters of the emphasis and under the guidance of participating faculty, and the student’s dissertation committee.

The Geography Graduate Program Manager (see Administration section below) will maintain a list of qualifying elective courses based on recommendations from participating faculty. Students may petition for other courses to count as electives with appropriate justification. Electives should be graduate courses, but students may request to count one upper-division undergraduate course. For example, a political science student might wish to take a course in climate science—or vice versa—in which cases an upper division undergraduate class might be more appropriate than an advanced graduate seminar. The Geography Graduate Program Manager will review all petitions, and provide advice about which elective courses are best suited to each student’s goals in consultation with participating faculty and the dissertation chair.

All elective courses must have a strong environmental component and be offered on a regular basis, normally at least once every three years. Decisions to approve new elective courses will be made by the steering committee on a case-by-case basis through a review of the course syllabus and any other supporting documents or correspondence. In many cases, it will be obvious which courses will qualify; courses focused on environmental history, politics, economics, or literature are obvious examples. In other cases, the instructor of record for the course in question may be asked to provide additional information, including a letter describing how the course fits into the goals of the emphasis, before it is included in the list of qualifying electives. For example, courses such as Theories of Markets (ES 293) might not immediately appear appropriate. Upon closer inspection, however, we would learn that a participating faculty member from the Environmental Studies Programteacher the course with a strong focus on environmental cases, concepts, and problems—and thus it clearly qualifies. Courses with only vague or general connections to environmental issues will not qualify.

The courses below constitute a preliminary list of a few examples of qualifying electives. This list remains under development, since faculty are still signing-on as participants with elective course additions. By the time the emphasis begins, we expect an initial list of at least three-dozen approved course electives.

History 208A,B. Environmental History (Alagona)
Geography 241B. Population, Development, and the Environment (Lopez-Carr)
Political Science 294. Environmental Politics and Policy (Smith)
Sociology 265EC. Earth in Crisis (Foran)
Environmental Studies 293. Theories of Markets (Pulver)
Earth Science 205. Earth’s Climate: Past and Present (Lea)
Global & Intl. Studies 221. Global Political Economy, Develop., and Envit. (Staff)
Film and Media Studies 242MG. Media and Geography (Walker)
Symposium

Each fall, the previous year’s students will come together for a one-day symposium where they will give presentations on their research. This is a time when many students will be writing their first articles or draft chapters and preparing their dissertation proposals. The symposium will provide an opportunity to receive constructive feedback from a supportive audience at an important juncture, and it will encourage students to continue to think in an interdisciplinary manner as they design their research projects. Students will be encouraged to speak not only about the methods and content of their work, but also its broader implications. The new cohort of students will attend the one-day symposium and contribute to the discussion with the previous year’s students.

Extracurricular Events

Throughout the year, the Geography Graduate Program Manager will organize occasional social gatherings, guest lectures, field trips, or other events to build community, promote the participating students’ professionalization, and foster their intellectual development. The Manager will also maintain a schedule of environmental events at UCSB, and circulate announcements to encourage emphasis participants to engage in the campus environmental community.

Dissertation Topic

Students who participate in the emphasis must include a strong environmental focus in their doctoral research and writing. This means that a substantial portion of the dissertation itself should be dedicated to environmental issues, broadly conceived. To be accepted into the emphasis, each student should submit a letter of support from his or her dissertation chair indicating that the chair understands the all of the requirements, including the dissertation topic requirement. The chair should work with the student to design an appropriate topic that satisfies the requirements of the home department, dissertation committee, and emphasis Advisory Board. The emphasis Core Seminar instructor and outside committee member (see next section below) will provide students with advice and feedback as they develop their projects, including at the time of their symposium presentations.

Dissertation Committee

All students in the emphasis must have at least one member of their dissertation committee from outside their home department who is a participating member of the emphasis. That “outside member” will consult with the student throughout and ensure that the student’s prospectus and dissertation conform to the requirements of the emphasis. Upon completion of the dissertation, this committee member will inform the Geography Graduate Program Manager that the student has completed an appropriate dissertation. If the student has completed the other requirements, then the Manager will file the appropriate paperwork with the Graduate Division.

VII. Participation

Students
The emphasis will be available to students from any participating campus unit, and will take the form of supplementary work in addition to their regular degree programs. There will be no prerequisites other than an intention to conduct environmental research at the doctoral level as demonstrated in the application materials and letter from the student’s dissertation committee chair. The emphasis will accept applications each spring for a new cohort to begin the following fall. Students will normally apply during their first or second year of study at UCSB, and then complete coursework requirements during their second or third year, although exceptions will be made with proper justification. Students will be encouraged to continue participating in emphasis sponsored activities and events even after they have fulfilled all of the course requirements.

Academic Units
Any campus academic unit (departments, schools, etc.) with a doctoral program can apply to join the emphasis. To join, the unit’s faculty must vote to apply and submit a letter of request, and the emphasis’s Advisory Board must approve the application. Prospective units must agree to establish a graduate level course that can be cross-listed as the emphasis’s core seminar, and faculty must agree to ensure that, as dissertation chairs, they will work with the emphasis’s Director to ensure that participating student fulfill all requirements.

The following campus units have voted to join the proposed emphasis. Letters of support from the chairs of these campus units appear in Appendix A.

1. Interdepartmental Graduate Program in Marine Science
2. Department of Political Science
3. Department of Film and Media Studies
4. Department of English
5. Department of Ecology, Evolution, and Marine Biology

The following campus units have not voted to join the proposed emphasis, but have expressed interest.

6. Department of Sociology (vote forthcoming)
7. Department of History (requested more information)
8. Department of Geography (requested more information)
9. Department of Anthropology (vote forthcoming)
10. Environmental Studies Program (vote forthcoming)
11. Bren School of Environmental Science and Management
12. Department of Earth Science
13. Department of Black Studies
14. Department of East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies
15. Global and International Studies

Faculty
The emphasis will include faculty from all participating campus units. Ladder faculty wishing to serve as participants must be members of participating units, and should agree, when appropriate, to allow their graduate seminars to serve as listed electives for students in the emphasis. Participating faculty may agree serve as guest discussants in the Core Seminar, or contribute further as advisory board members or even future directors.

Prospective participating faculty members should submit a letter of interest and CV to the emphasis Director, and once the emphasis is underway must be approved by the advisory board. Founding participating faculty members, most of whom were involved in the drafting of the proposal or served as liaisons to participating campus units, are listed below. Letters from these participants appear in Appendix B.

(This list is under construction.)
Bruce H. Tiffney—Dean, College of Creative Studies; Professor, Earth Science
Peter S. Alagona—Assistant Professor, History and Environmental Studies
David Lopez-Carr—Associate Professor, Geography
John Foran—Professor, Sociology
Josh Schimel—Chair, Environmental Studies; Professor, Ecology, Evolution & Marine Biology
Simone Pulver—Assistant Professor, Environmental Studies
Janet Walker—Professor, Film and Media Studies
Eric R.A.N. Smith—Professor, Political Science

VIII. Administration

Administrative Structure and Responsibilities
The Department of Geography, with its longstanding focus on environmental issues and outstanding graduate student support and advising capacity, will be the home academic unit for the program. The Department of Geography’s Graduate Program Manager will administer the day-to-day operations of the emphasis with the support of the emphasis Director, Core Seminar instructor(s), and Advisory Board. The Manager will maintain all emphasis records, compile a list of qualifying elective courses, file appropriate paperwork, and monitor students’ progress. The Manager will also post a calendar of campus environmental events, and organize occasional social and professional development activities.

The Director may come from any participating campus unit and will serve for a one-year renewable term. The Director will coordinate with the Geography Graduate Program Manager to administer the yearly application process. The Director will sign off on all paperwork, including elective petitions, prospectus approvals, and completion documents. The Director will also help organize the spring symposium. Finally, the Director will compose a yearly report on the status of the emphasis, to be reviewed by the Advisory Board at its spring quarter meeting. The Academic Senate Sustainability Working Group will select the first emphasis Director. In subsequent years, the Advisory Board will appoint directors and Core Seminar instructors whenever those positions become vacant.
The Core Seminar instructor(s) must be faculty participants in the emphasis, and will be appointed by the Advisory Board for a one-year renewable term. The instructor(s) will be responsible for teaching the fall Core Seminar, will work with the Director to organize the spring symposium, and will serve on the Advisory Board.

The emphasis will have an Advisory Board comprised of one representative from each of the participating campus units. The Advisory Board will meet once each quarter and provide support to the Director and Core Seminar instructor(s) when requested. The Board members should attend the fall symposium and agree to serve as outside members on participating students’ dissertation committees. In that capacity, board members will review dissertation prospectuses and ensure that the students they advise fulfill all emphasis requirements. The Academic Senate Sustainability Working Group will select the first Advisory Board. In subsequent years, the emphasis Director will appoint new Advisory Board members when participating departmental representatives step down.

Monitoring and Review

Before the spring quarter meeting, the Director will submit an annual report to the Advisory Board. The Board will review the report and make recommendations for improvement; those recommendations should be submitted in writing to the Director from the Advisory Board by the end of the year. The Director should address the extent to which those recommendations have been addressed in the following year’s report.

Costs

The proposed emphasis will draw from and build on current course offerings, and will seek to deliver the greatest benefit at the lowest cost. Costs for the emphasis will come in two forms: time and money. Time will be required of the emphasis Director—an average of two to three hours per week, based on estimates from current emphasis directors—particularly during the spring application review period and leading up to the fall symposium. The Core Seminar instructor(s) will be asked to make the Core Seminar the focus of their Graduate Teaching for the year(s) they do it to avoid a teaching overload. Advisory Board members will meet once a quarter, attend the fall symposium and other occasional community-building events, and provide support to the Director when appropriate.

The emphasis will request an annual budget of $5,000 to pay for events, guest speakers, and other related costs. This request is based on estimates from staff and directors of other emphases.

IX. Appendixes

Appendix A. Letters of Support from the Chairs of Participating Campus Units

Forthcoming.

Appendix B. Letters from Participating Faculty

Forthcoming.
Appendix C. Letters from Graduate Students

Elizabeth Calloway, English, working with Stephanie LeMenager (received)
Grayson Maas, Anthropology, working with Susan Stonich (received)
Jessica Marter-Kenyon, Geography, working with David Lopez-Carr (forthcoming)
Roger Eardley-Pryor, History, working with Peter Alagona

More forthcoming.

Appendix D. Examples of Current Job Announcements...

Northwestern U., Environmental Social Science
U. Chicago, Environmental Ethics

More forthcoming.

Appendix E. Members of the Academic Senate Sustainability Working Group

Chair:
Bruce H. Tiffney, Dean, College of Creative Studies, Professor, Earth Science

Voting Members:
Peter S. Alagona, Assistant Professor, History and Environmental Studies
David Lopez-Carr, Associate Professor, Geography
David Cleveland, Professor, Environmental Studies, 2009-2010 Sustainability Champion
John Foran, Professor, Sociology
Bruce Kendall, Associate Professor, Bren School of Environmental Science & Management
LeeAnne Kryder, Continuing Lecturer, Writing Program, Chair of Campus Sustainable Communications Committee
Ann – Elise LeWallen, Professor, East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies
Eric Matthys, Professor, Mechanical Engineering, 2010-2011 Sustainability Champion
Dar Roberts, Chair, Geography
Josh Schimel, Chair, Environmental Studies, Professor, Ecology, Evolution & Marine Biology
Sussannah Scott, Professor, Chemical Engineering
Eric Smith, Professor and Chair, Political Science

Advisors and Staff (Non-Voting Members):
Lisa Berry, Instructional Consultant, Instructional Development
Deborah Karoff, Executive Director, Academic Senate
Mo Lovegreen, Executive Director, Geography and Campus Sustainability Director
Katie Maynard, Sustainability Coordinator, Geography, Staff to SWG
George Michaels, Executive Director, Instructional Development