

A Guide to ENV5 401: Environmental Studies Senior Seminar

Course Overview

Environmental Studies Senior Seminar (ENV5 0401), the capstone course for the Environmental Studies major, follows a service-learning model. At its core, service learning is a form of experiential learning that combines collaborative work with a community organization, scholarly reading, classroom discussion, and reflective writing. The goal is to create an excellent applied environmental and interdisciplinary learning experience that simultaneously addresses community needs and helps advance the work of community entities. To achieve this goal, students integrate and apply their previous experience, academic knowledge and skills—including those developed throughout the ES major—and information and ideas developed through seminar readings and discussions, to “real life” environmental issues and topics in the community. Through a sense of community service and responsibility, we strive for students to take their learning to a deeper and more meaningful level. In addition to advancing students’ education, this seminar places strong emphasis on being in service to the needs of the communities / community organizations we partner with. We aim to make these experiences reciprocal and mutually enriching interactions amongst students, faculty, and community partners. Furthermore, we intend for their service-learning group projects to help students to develop leadership, cooperation, and collaboration skills that are needed to work effectively in a professional setting.

Commonalities in the ES capstone experience

Although ~10 faculty rotate through the course and each is encouraged to imprint the course with their own ideas, scholarly interests, and pedagogical approaches, we have collectively agreed upon a core set of features and goals of the course that provide some section-to-section and year-to-year commonality and uniformity in the fundamentals of the course. These agreed upon commonalities include

- a focus on community-connected projects involving substantial interaction with members of the community and/or community partner/organizations;
- a focus on local or regional issues, communities, and community partners/organizations;
- students working in groups on projects;
- a set of projects for a given section that collectively draws on / incorporates the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences;
- group projects that each have sufficient breadth/complexity that students within a group are challenged to draw on perspectives and/or methods from multiple academic divisions; and
- production and sharing of a final product in a format mutually agreed upon with the community partner, often a written report, website, poster, map, or video. Regardless of the agreed upon format, a written Executive Summary of the project will be prepared and a public presentation of the project will be held.

Support for the ES capstone experience

The ES capstone experience is supported in many ways that are somewhat unique, including via

- the position of the Coordinator for Community-Based Environmental Studies (CCBES) held by Diane Munroe, described further below;
- the participation of a broad group of ES faculty and Environmental Affairs staff in a mid-semester project feedback/working session to provide the students with multi- and interdisciplinary perspectives (in the form of questions, ideas, contacts, etc.) that may improve the interdisciplinarity, effectiveness, and reach of the students’ projects;
- the FECH Studio space (HLD 200), which is dedicated to the course and to which students (in all sections in a given semester) are given 24-h access for their project work; and
- an endowed fund that pays for most course-related expenses, such as van rentals for field trips, mileage reimbursement for student travel, honoraria for guest speakers, access/purchasing of course materials, color/poster printing, conference travel, etc.

Among other contributions to the ES program, the CCBES is available to coordinate all logistics associated with the service-learning approach incorporated in the Environmental Studies Senior Seminar (ENVS 401). This includes, but is not limited to, networking with a variety of community and campus partners; developing and maintaining a body of service-learning project opportunities; keeping current with local/regional/state print, web, and radio media on environmental issues; maintaining an archive of relevant articles and reports; serving as a liaison between students and community partners; aiding in the publication and dissemination of project results to a variety of audiences in a variety of formats; and spearheading the formal assessment (separate from course response forms) of the capstone experience. The CCBES can help faculty with project and community partner development, as well as share syllabi, schedules, writing prompts, and successes/best practices gleaned from student and faculty feedback on past offerings. Additional logistical support for ENVS 0401 includes overseeing field trip, guest speaker, presentation, and resource acquisition details. See the *ENVS 401 Teaching Guide* below for additional detail on CCBES support.

Responsibilities and Relationships with Community Partner/Organizations

We aim to make the projects in ENVS 401 mutually enriching and reciprocal interactions among students, faculty, and community partners. “Reciprocity” in this sense refers to the shared responsibility for defining the question, problem, topic and for creating new knowledge, as outlined in the right panel of the table below from Saltmarsh et al.¹ Although full reciprocity may not be realized on every project or with every community partner, attending conscientiously to the relationship and responsibilities associated with community collaborations is a crucial foundation for success. At a minimum, expectations include

- adhering to the “course commonalities”, described above
- community partners participating actively in the project design
- community partners being invited to visit with the class to share project-related context and content
- final project statements and dates of involvement with seminar (both for routine project check-ins and any higher-level interactions) shared with community partner at least one month prior to start of semester

Comparing Civic Engagement Frameworks

	Civic Engagement (Focus on Activity and Place)	Democratic Civic Engagement (Focus on Purpose and Process)
Community Relationships	Partnerships and mutuality	Reciprocity
	Deficit-based understanding of community	Asset-based understanding of community
	Academic work done <i>for</i> the public	Academic work done <i>with</i> the public
Knowledge production/research	Applied	Inclusive, collaborative, problem-oriented
	Unidirectional flow of knowledge	Multi-directional flow of knowledge
Epistemology	Positivist/scientific/technocratic	Relational, localized, contextual
	Distinction between knowledge producers and knowledge consumers	Co-creation of knowledge
	Primacy of academic knowledge	Shared authority for knowledge creation
	University as the center of public problem-solving	University as a part of an ecosystem of knowledge production addressing public problem-solving
Political Dimension	Apolitical engagement	Facilitating an inclusive, collaborative, and deliberative democracy
Outcome	Knowledge generation and dissemination through community involvement	Community change that results from the co-creation of knowledge

Importantly, the role of the students to the project and to the community partner is as an advanced environmental studies major who will engage with the agreed-upon project in a scholarly manner – which is to say that although we agree ahead of time with the community partner on what the students will explore, research, and inquire into, we in no way promise to deliver any particular finding, recommendation, or interpretation. In other words, our students are in no way “hired” to come to a particular conclusion on behalf of our community partner. The process of disagreeing with a community partner, if that’s where their inquiry leads them, can provide students a powerful learning experience in terms of challenging them to support their views with strong evidence and compelling reasoning and to express their views professionally.

¹ Saltmarsh, J., Hartley, M. and P.H.Clayton (2009) *Democratic Engagement White Paper*. Boston, MA: New England Resource Center for Higher Education.

ENVS 401 Teaching Guide CCBES Support, Deadlines, and Timelines

In the past, faculty have availed themselves of the support provided by the CCBES to varying degrees and for different tasks and aspects of the course, as appropriate and helpful to their particular running of the course. This extensive, if not exhaustive, list of support that can be provided by the CCBES, course deadlines and timelines is intended to guide conversations between the faculty member and CCBES and ensure smooth administration of the course. Faculty members are strongly encouraged to take advantage of the CCBES's expertise and experience in community-based learning, and specifically in ENVS 401, but as in any course, the faculty member—within the constraints of agreed upon course commonalities (see above)—is ultimately responsible for the course, its pedagogical approach, and execution. The CCBES may not carry out standard faculty course responsibilities, such as making decisions regarding course content, selecting course readings, leading class in the faculty member's absence, etc.

Ongoing CCBES Responsibilities

- Network with the range of local and regional organizations addressing environmental issues to develop a body of viable community partners (CPs) and project ideas
- Stay current with local legislative action as well as regional and national policy for contextualizing project work
- Attend state and regional conferences for both project ideas and best practices for project and course design; share current body of best-practices literature
- Administer formal assessment of student and community partner experience in ENVS 401 and, with the aid of the Director of Assessment, Adela Langrock, provide assessment data and statistics to ES faculty
- Develop and adjust ENVS 401 assessment tools and practices in consultation with the ES Director, based on ES faculty's needs and interests
- Maintain evaluation data on ENVS 401 both from student assessment, informal end of the semester de-brief conversations, sections of the standard course response forms, as well as from the project partners' evaluations of the process of working with an ENVS 401 class.

Planning the Course

Faculty members are advised that ENVS 401 requires more extensive planning prior to the start of the semester than many other types of courses. Course planning should take into account important deadlines set for CCBES support and related timelines. An [initial meeting in early October for the spring term and in early March for the fall term](#) allows for a 4-month planning / design process that is needed when working with CPs. This schedule takes into account the fact that the CCBES is a 10-month position (2 months of summer unpaid leave). This first meeting allows the CCBES to home in on the faculty member's interest in various course themes, types of projects, and potential CPs, and for the CCBES to follow up with more narrowly focused, faculty-directed research into CP and project possibilities. More intensive/high level community collaboration generally requires greater lead-time and greater faculty involvement earlier in the process.

CCBES Support	Deadlines/Comments
Research and identify community organizations / agencies working in areas that match faculty member's semester theme/topic	All tasks in this cluster begin in October (for Spring offering) and March (for Fall)
Coordinate and schedule preliminary project scoping phone calls / meetings with potential CPs	
Follow-up with related parties outside of primary partners to ensure key individuals and stakeholders are on-board with / are supportive of project work	
Draft and share meeting minutes for conversations between the CCBES, faculty member, and CPs	
Capture faculty member and CP ideas into first draft of project statements;	

incorporate faculty / CP edits to create the final version	
Recommend / consult on syllabus schedule based on >10-yr archive of student, faculty, and CP experiences and successes	
Schedule dates for CP to work directly with class, typically in Weeks 1, 6, and 10 for project introduction and check-ins, but could involve more extensive interaction / collaboration	Dates should be requested from CPs 1-2 months prior
Help incorporate “value-added” experiences to enhance project work, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommend relevant guest speakers and field trips • Arrange public speaking, interviewing, and project scoping skills workshops • Recommend readings from a body of “more practical” literature • Share discussion paper topics from archive of paper topics from past sections • Work to incorporate a colloquium speaker linked to the ENVS 401 theme each semester 	
Design and populate Moodle course website (or equivalent)	

Basic Course Logistics

CCBES Support	Comments
Provide student roster and duplicated sets of project statements and syllabi for distribution on first day	
Share archived list of “first day” and “first lab” logistics with faculty member	
Arrange studio access: code for room, working with public safety for student 24/7 access to Hillcrest	
Media support, including for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conference calls, long distance access codes; photocopy codes; printer and computer maintenance / updating; media storage space • photocopy / scan readings for faculty; post readings to class Share folder or Moodle site; set up small group project email distribution lists / project groups on Moodle 	Need to receive readings for scanning 1 week prior to start of semester
Reserve, pick-up, and drive vans for any field trips	Vans need to be reserved 7 days prior to trip. To ensure availability, best to reserve 1-2 months in advance
Schedule final public presentations and coordinate logistics	Campus rooms or off-campus space should be reserved 2 months in advance
Oversee and manage Berger Fund <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Order / process reimbursements for students for purchases / conference fees / travel • Process mileage and honorarium for guest speakers • Funds for final presentation receptions / dinners 	

Facilitating Relationships with Community Partners (CPs)

CCBES Support	Comments
Obtain starter data / references / resources from CPs necessary to launch projects	
Participate in class and in project progress report/feedback sessions in order to enhance projects and share / mediate any issues or concerns with CPs	
Coordinate formal check-ins with CPs	
Read and respond to work plans, progress reports, drafts with an eye toward monitoring / facilitating progress towards mutually defined project goals, overcoming project roadblocks, and development of new student-driven project directions	
Share work plans and progress reports with CPs for their feedback	
Check-in periodically with CPs	

Enhancing Student Projects

CCBES support for student projects is improved when the CCBES can observe and interact with the students directly (e.g., by attending class, participating in feedback sessions, etc.), but takes some coordination, only more so in semesters when multiple course sections are offered. Please discuss expectations/schedule for class attendance in advance of the semester.

CCBES Support	Comments
Research, recommend, and arrange installation/purchase/licenses for specialized software (e.g., video and audio editing, citation management, survey, and statistics) and project management tools (e.g. Gantt charts, IDEO resources)	
Arrange technical sessions with LIS reference librarians (e.g., for using literature databases, citation management software)	
Read and respond to work plans, progress reports, and drafts with an eye towards sharing contacts, resources, and references that will enhance project work and to suggest edits that will enhance the professionalism of the final report / product (and make the final polish edit less onerous!)	
Identify and troubleshoot emerging problems with projects or sub-group dynamics	
Actively share relevant current events (e.g., via web feeds, newspaper clippings, etc.)	
Share anonymous peer feedback with students from their team-members at mid-point and end of the semester	

Project publication and dissemination

CCBES Support	Comments
Final polish edit of student reports / products	Final reports and products need to be shared with CPs within 1 month after end of exams, so any final faculty edits need to be shared with the CCBES 1 week after the end of exams
Post final reports and products, videos of final presentations, etc. to ENV5 0401 website	
Archive all files and materials that support final products (e.g. all GIS files for maps, interview transcripts, etc.)	
Share all project materials and final reports / products with CPs	
Maintain ENV5 0401 web site	
Write 401 piece for annual newsletter	
Share 401 projects with College Communications and Advancement offices, local media	

Student & course assessment

CCBES Support	Comments
Read student discussion papers to assess how students are engaging with projects and class materials, with an eye toward improving future course offerings and projects	
Participate in discussions related to the faculty member's final assignment of grades	