

Curricular Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate

MEMO

To: The UVM Faculty Senate

From: Curricular Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate, Colby Kervick, Co-Chair

Date: December 2, 2021

Re: Approval of a proposal from the Rubenstein School for the Environment and Natural Resources for a no-contest deactivation of the BS in Environmental Studies

On December 2, 2021, the Curricular Affairs Committee approved the actions recommended in the following memo.

The Curricular Affairs Committee approved a proposal from the Rubenstein School for the Environment and Natural Resources for a no-contest deactivation of the BS degree in Environmental Studies. This proposed deactivation is articulated within an MOU describing interrelated cross-unit curricular changes across CALS, RSENR and CAS that were agreed upon by faculty, Deans, and unit-level curriculum committees within each unit. The goal of the proposed deactivation of the ENVS major in RSENR is to meet the Provost's charge to streamline offerings in the study of the environment at the undergraduate level and to transition cross-unit degrees in ENSC and ENVS to single degrees offered in RSENR and CAS as well as to build new synergies and opportunities across undergraduate education in the environment at UVM. As per this agreement, if the related curricular proposals are approved by the CAC and faculty senate, RSENR would retain the BS in Environmental Sciences degree.

ENVS and ENSC faculty discussed the proposals at meetings on September 22 and 24. After those discussions, both sets of faculty were asked to vote to approve or reject deactivation proposals for the relevant degrees. The result of the vote in ENSC was as follows: in CAS, 6 in favor, 4 opposed. In RSENR, deactivating the ENVS major passed with 30 in favor, 1 opposed, and 5 abstentions.

RSENR faculty present voted on October 12, 2021, to approve the no-contest deactivation of the ENVS BS degree. 25 faculty voted to approve, 1 voted to oppose and 5 abstained and additional 5 votes to approve were received by electronic ballot bringing the total for approve to 30. This vote was preceded by a unanimous vote of the RSENR curriculum committee and was supported by the Dean. Zero public comment was received during the 30-day circulation. The CAC vote was 16 approve, 0 oppose and 1 abstain.

Rationale for Deactivation

Currently, Environmental Studies and Environmental Sciences majors are offered in three different colleges. Each program offers a unique perspective to the study of the environment. However, the Provost and Admissions have voiced concern that such duplication creates confusion for incoming students interested in this area of study. This cross-unit structure further complicates curricular administration and flexibility given that changes to degree requirements, course offerings and staffing have to be approved-separately- by all three units. As part of the negotiated agreement, RSENR would deactivate its BS in ENVS and retain a BS in ENSC. While RSENR does currently have a significant number of ENVS majors (195 of the 430 current ENVS cross unit majors), the negotiated agreement was to solely locate ENVS within CAS.

The Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources will continue to be involved in the delivery of ENVS courses and extracurricular opportunities for students in areas of faculty expertise. Individual faculty MOU's, and regular conversations between ENVS Program Directors and the Associate Dean for Curriculum in RSENR will ensure that faculty involvement in the delivery of ENVS curriculum continues to

meet ENVS curricular needs, student interests, home unit needs, and faculty FTE (Full Time Equivalent). RSENR will also continue to provide interdisciplinary, natural, and social science opportunities for students to study the environment in existing majors, including Environmental Science, Forestry, Natural Resource Planning, Natural Resource Ecology and Natural Resources Integrated Studies, Parks Recreation and Tourism, and Wildlife and Fisheries Biology.

There is no anticipated impact on faculty/staff as faculty who currently teach courses in ENVS and ENSC will continue to be able to do so across units as articulated in the MOU. All ENVS courses currently located in RSENR will continue to be offered and available to ENVS majors. All students currently enrolled in ENVS major in RSENR will be able to complete their degrees in their home unit. The university wide ENVS minor will remain unchanged but will be administered through CAS.

There are several key components of the negotiated agreement to note:

- Cross-unit teaching will continue
- Both ENVS (CAS) and ENSC (RSENR) will have co-directors, one from the new home unit and one from outside
- Both ENVS (CAS) and ENSC (RSENR) will have curriculum units that include faculty from across units who teach in those disciplines
- Advising plans are articulated in the MOU
- Program faculty designation will be available for faculty who are teaching regularly for a particular degree even if they are not assigned to the home unit of the degree.
- Re-envisioning of the Environmental Program: Transition the current Environmental Program (as a home for the ENVS major) into a coordinating body to support environmental research, outreach, internships, course offerings, seminars and other opportunities for undergraduate students in environmental majors across campus and elevate the visibility of the UVM environmental brand.
- Creation of a UVM Green Team: Create clearer coordination at the highest levels of the university to bring together leaders of undergraduate academics, research, campus sustainability, community outreach and the Foundation in order to create common messaging, mission and outreach

Further, in implementing these curricular changes, the MOU articulates the goal of budget neutrality. To monitor the budget impacts there is a plan articulated in the MOU to conduct yearly financial analysis involving the business managers from each unit to track and make necessary adjustments as needed for the next four years of the transition. The MOU also indicates plans to conduct yearly cross-unit review of the curriculum. Program Directors will prepare an annual report that assesses student success, persistence, and enrollment trends, in addition to student satisfaction. This includes a survey of undergraduate students to seek their input on their advising and satisfaction with the delivery of the degree program. In similar fashion, faculty will be asked to provide feedback on the new structure of the program on an annual basis until 2025. There will also be a comprehensive review at year 3.

If approved by the Faculty Senate the no-contest deactivation of the ENVS BS degree in RSENR would go into effect in Fall 2022.