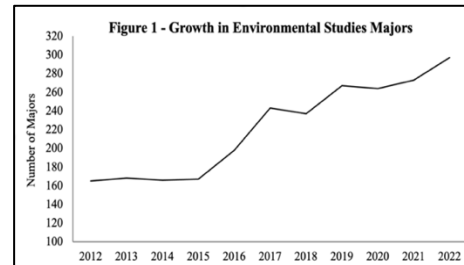




## Summary of the Academic Business Plan to create a Department of Environment and Sustainability

### Environmental Studies Program in context

- Eighth largest major in Harpur College with almost 300 students
- Steady student growth over past decade (See Figure 1.)
- 22<sup>nd</sup> largest such program among U.S. universities<sup>1</sup>
- National growth of field averaged 20.6% from 2013 to 2020.<sup>1</sup>



### Faculty challenges solved by creating a new department

- **Protect faculty by securing their tenure berth.** In Harpur College, faculty are traditionally housed in departments, where they participate in governance, achieve tenure, secure grants, and build community. Becoming a department would regularize tenure homes for 6.5 faculty members (with hiring of another underway) and two staff.
- **Provide for faculty representation.** No one on the Faculty Senate represents Environmental Studies faculty.
- **Allow for faculty self-governance.** Sitting in Environmental Studies are 6.5 core faculty (with hiring for another underway) and two staff members. However, as a program, many other faculty members across campus participate in the program's decision-making – many without the day-to-day information understood by the core faculty. A department would allow core faculty to be directly responsible for shaping the academic, intellectual, and social growth of the unit.
- **Recognize faculty grants.** The Research Foundation does not recognize programs as places for awarding grants or for returning Faculty & Administrative monies. A department fixes this so that these monies could support future research.

### Student benefits provided by creating a new department

- **Create a cohesive presence for a large and growing number of students.** Rather than faculty scattered in different units, faculty and staff in a department are co-located physically, intellectually, and socially for easier student access. A department allows us to build community among the almost 300 majors and roughly 50 minors studying in this area.
- **Develop an appropriately designed and scaffolded curriculum.** Piecing together classes from various units limits the ability to organize knowledge and skills. A department could develop coherent paths through the program for students.
- **Provide for course consistency.** With their own needs and priorities, departments providing courses to the program have changed offerings without taking into account the impact on Environmental Studies. The new department will offer more core and integrative courses, which remain consistent and focus on Environmental Studies as a framework.
- **Develop a department-related student group.** A new department will provide the administrative support and resources to develop a student group to aid in governance, student activities, course feedback, and alumni outreach.

### Scholarly reasons for creating a new department

- **Recognized globally as a distinct discipline.** Environmental Studies at Binghamton University (and at many other universities) emerged by weaving together the teaching and service of faculty in various departments. The field has moved beyond this 'quilt of classes' approach to a globally recognized and integrated study of the natural, social, cultural, and political systems involved in understanding and managing factors at the human/natural interface.
- **Complementary to neighboring fields.** Environmental Studies has an applied, problem-solving approach, which differentiates the field from others in its intellectual neighborhood. It focuses on the research into sustainability change

<sup>1</sup> Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>)

and the education of change-makers, who can “help societies and governments solve pressing technical, management, and policy problems involving natural resources, environmental quality, and social justice.”<sup>2</sup>

- **Building the university’s intellectual reputation.** Despite the program’s size, Environmental Studies has no intellectual reputation because credit for research traditionally accrued to other units, where faculty were housed. The faculty with tenure berths in the program are starting to change that. A new department will grow as a hub for university researchers, who seek to work on the management of systems at the human / natural interface.
- **Opportunity for new field-focused graduate programs.** Over time, by developing graduate programs, a new department could supply practitioners and professors to companies, governments, NGOs, and universities around the world – and would make Environmental Studies even more attractive to potential research faculty.

## Concerns raised about creating a new department

Biological Sciences, Earth Sciences, and Geography have raised concerns about creating the new department. The concerns, described below, can be raised whether Environmental Studies exists as a program or as a department. We are working with the departments and dean’s office to address concerns. We recognize each unit has differing needs to be considered.

- **Collaborating on resources.** Some fear that a new department will compete for resources. Environmental Studies already houses faculty and receives new lines as needs and resources permit; a new department will not change that. Over the past few years, Biological Sciences, Earth Sciences, Geography, *and* Environmental Studies have all hired new faculty. The program already does, and a new department will continue to, collaborate with other units to best use limited resources to push forward the university’s research and education missions.
- **Providing different perspectives.** Another worry is the potential for intellectual overlap among units. However, examining issues from different perspectives is key to healthy discourse and discovery. Environmental Studies has a different perspective with its applied, problem-solving approach. In the other units, some researchers *might have* that perspective. All faculty in Environmental Studies *must have* it by the field’s definition. Environmental Studies at Binghamton University started in the 1970s, and no concerns have ever been raised about overlap since its inception.
- **Creating a strong academic program.** Concerns have been raised about the educational outcomes. No data has been presented to support this concern. However, a limited survey of Environmental Studies alumni and another of graduating seniors indicate positive outcomes for students. Environmental Studies is working to gather better data from students and alumni. A department with dedicated faculty can do this and use that information to ensure students learn what they need for success. Nothing about our program does more or less to prepare students than any other program at the university.
- **Offering complementary classes.** Also, worry exists about overlap in classes. The program is addressing this important concern and already coordinates classes with other units to best use university resources. For example, Environmental Studies and Biological Sciences adjusted schedules of complementary field classes to best support students. Also, we collaborated on the provision of GIS courses with Geography. This coordination will continue in the new department.
- **Integrating different classes.** Another concern is that the new department will rely too heavily on classes in other units. First, in many majors, students use classes from various departments to fulfill major requirements. Second, new Environmental Studies faculty members already decrease the reliance on other departments. Finally, faculty are reviewing curriculum to ensure students have the courses needed to graduate with appropriate knowledge and skills.
- **Strengthening faculty research.** Without a PhD program, some worry the new department cannot produce top-quality research. Many units across the university have vibrant research programs without graduate students. Environmental Studies faculty already build labs and conduct innovative research (and include many undergraduate students). Faculty members are discussing the potential for a graduate program. In the meantime, the Harpur Dean’s Office provides a graduate student line to Biological Sciences to support a PhD student for Environmental Studies and faculty can advise graduate students in Anthropology. Other collaborations will follow as needed.
- **Preserving options for students and faculty.** Biological Sciences, Earth Sciences, and Geography propose MOUs to bind the Department of Environment and Sustainability in ways that other units are not. These MOUs would limit the department’s focus, require oversight of other departments when hiring, or mandate students double major in other fields. Such agreements would handicap future faculty and curtail the academic freedom of professors and students.

---

<sup>2</sup> Clark, S. G., Rutherford, M. B., Auer, M. R., et al. (2011). College and University Environmental Programs as a Policy Problem (Part 1): Integrating Knowledge, Education, and Action for a Better World? *Environmental Management* 47(5), 701–715.