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## Curriculum Council Response to Environmental Sciences Action Plan

In general, the Curriculum Council found that the Action Plan, created in response to the 2019 Environmental Science undergraduate program review, was positive and responsive to the program review. Representatives of the Curriculum Council, Dr. Rebecca Mathern and Dr. Carol McKiel, who reviewed the Action Plan, appreciated the follow up information provided by Associate Dean Michael Harte and program director, Dr. Larry Becker. The Curriculum Council Co-Chairs, Dr. Dana Sanchez and Inara Scott, followed up a number of times with Associate Dean Harte as well, and appreciated his timely responses and the information he was able to provide. However, with regard to one specific item identified in the program review—a need for additional FTE for program leadership—the Curriculum Council was unable to document program improvements. While there has been activity *toward* this goal, including posting for a new position, in two years there has not been any actual increase in FTE. As a result, we cannot recommend approval of the action plan. Please see below for more details.

### Action Plan Issues and Response from Curriculum Council:

1. In a follow up email to questions about the Action Plan, Dr. Becker reported a clear strategy for recruiting Black and Indigenous students and students of Color, which is a goal in the self-study report, supported in the review report, and included in the Action Plan. While recruiting plans are strong, Environmental Science faculty could strengthen their plans for retaining the current students from underrepresented communities. There has been some work done to develop retention strategies. In his follow up email, Dr. Becker wrote about conversations with Jane Waite from Social Justice Learning and Engagement as well as graduate students leading a seminar series, *Unpacking Diversity*. The Curriculum Council strongly recommends that this initial work continues and faculty and staff monitor the progress of students from underrepresented communities as well as continue to ask for their input on what they need to succeed. *No further response to the council is necessary until the next program review.*
2. A retention strategy identified in the review report and included in the Action Plan is to help students identify as a cohort in the Environmental Science program. Environmental Science is an interdisciplinary program with students taking a variety of courses to finish their degrees. While this allows students to follow their interests, it does not help them receive the support that comes with a cohort model. To address this concern, the faculty planned for four courses, one each year, to provide students with a “pathway” through the program. In addition to this strategy, the program reviewers recommended limiting some of the course offerings because a large majority of the students were taking the same courses anyway. Additional “pathway” courses could be added by requiring some of these popular courses that the vast majority of students take anyway and exceptions can be made for students who truly have a different path. The idea is to create a bit more structure without losing the flexibility of the program. The Curriculum Council is concerned that one common course a year may not be enough to build the camaraderie students get from taking courses together as a cohort and suggests identifying additional pathway courses that could serve that same purpose. Additionally,

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the Council suggests reviewing the cohort efficacy after several cohorts go through the program. *No further response to the council is necessary until the next program review.*

3. In the self-study report, Environmental Science should be commended for exploring ways to grow the students' involvement with the Hatfield Center. In his follow up email, Dr. Becker identified strategies for increasing enrollment at Hatfield. While there are financial and logistic hurdles to this goal, the Curriculum Council supports and encourages the faculty to continue to find ways to connect students to this wonderful educational resource. *No further response to the council is necessary until the next program review.*
4. In their report to the program, the reviewers strongly recommended that the FTE for the program leadership be increased significantly. Beyond the reasons for increasing the FTE cited in the self-study, program review, and Action Plan, the Curriculum Council expressed concern over this too. This concern stemmed from the data in front of them about the growth of the program but not the FTE for supporting it, the increase in enrollment of Ecampus courses that support this program, and the fact that a program of this size needs more support. While Dr. Larry Becker, director of the Environmental Science undergraduate program, deserves praise for providing leadership of a program that has consistently shown double-digit growth for the past 3 years while having much less FTE provided to previous program directors, his current level of FTE is not sustainable. This is particularly concerning given the increase in graduation rates, likely to hit more than 100 this year; a first! It's apparent that the program is hugely successful under Dr. Becker's leadership. In addition, the continued success and critical mentorship support for students recruited from underrepresented communities and follow up to diverse students requires an appropriate level of FTE. It is worth reiterating that the external and internal reviewers were astounded that Dr. Becker has been successfully running the program with such a low FTE, and the program faculty and staff all noted that the current level of FTE is not a sound practice for the future health of the program. The reviewers recognized that the program is relying on Dr. Becker's strong dedication and goodwill which is not sustainable or fair or ultimately equitable to the students being recruited. Quite simply, more FTE is needed, and has been needed for years.

While the program has stated its intention to increase FTE for program leadership, this has not occurred. Although the program has set numerous goals for adding FTE to the program leadership, including a goal of having these changes in place by the end of Spring 2021, these goals have not been met. Currently, we understand the program is seeking candidates for an assistant program director position (at .2 FTE), but this position may not be filled as per the intended timeline. While we understand the many challenges that programs encounter in making personnel changes, the program review was completed in 2019 and there have been no actual increases in FTE since that time, despite stated intentions to do so. We do not believe it is appropriate to continue to let this process continue indefinitely, and believe it is necessary to close the review of the action plan while noting that this goal has not been met.

In conclusion, while the Curriculum Council approves the Action Plan for items 1 to 3 above, it cannot approve the Action Plan overall, based on the lack of movement on item 4 concerning

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the program director FTE. The Curriculum Council has worked with the Environmental Sciences program during AY 2020-2021 to try to have this issue resolved. We can only report that changes to FTE have not been made, and this item, which received a strong emphasis in the 2019 program review, has not been addressed.