

# MSU Departmental Assessment Report Spring 2008

Department: Land Resources and Environmental Sciences

Department Head: Jon Wraith

Assessment Coordinator: Cathy Zabinski

Date: June 30, 2008

## Degrees/Majors/Options Offered by Department

Non-teaching Minor in Soil Science

Non-teaching Minor in Entomology (participating department)

Non-teaching Minor in Water Resources (participating department)

B.S. in Environmental Sciences

Environmental Biology Option

Soil and Water Sciences Option

B.S. in Land Resource Sciences

Land Resources Analysis and Management Option

Agroecology Option

B.S. in Land Rehabilitation

M.S. in Land Resources and Environmental Sciences

M.S. in Land Rehabilitation

M.S. in Entomology (participating department)

Ph.D. in Ecology and Environmental Sciences (cross-college)

Update Report: Student Outcomes Assessment Plan  
Land Resources and Environmental Sciences Department  
June 30, 2008

The Department of Land Resources and Environmental Sciences (LRES) implemented our student outcomes assessment plan during Spring, 2004. The Plan included preparing tools for dissemination to undergraduate and graduate students to obtain feedback concerning their perceptions regarding the quality and effectiveness of our curricula, courses, instructors, and advising. These tools have been used for the past four years. Our Instructional Programs Coordinator (staff person) continues to take the lead in contacting students to request that they complete our assessment instruments (outcomes, advising). Student participation is a consistent constraint to our assessment process, with between 15 and 50% of graduating seniors returning completed instruments (below). Graduate student participation is greater, typically >50%, because we are able to (say we will) hold off on signing their thesis and other required paperwork.

|             |                          |     |
|-------------|--------------------------|-----|
| <u>2004</u> |                          |     |
| Grad:       | 16 students: 9 returned  | 56% |
| <u>2005</u> |                          |     |
| Undergrad:  | 28 students; 10 returned | 36% |
| Grad        | 14 students; 6 returned  | 43% |
| <u>2006</u> |                          |     |
| Undergrad:  | 31 students; 9 returned  | 29% |
| Grad:       | 8 students; 4 returned   | 50% |
| <u>2007</u> |                          |     |
| Undergrad:  | 18 students; 9 returned  | 50% |
| Grad:       | 13 students, 3 returned  | 23% |
| <u>2008</u> |                          |     |
| Undergrad:  | 7 students, 1 returned   | 15% |
| Grad:       | 5 students, 3 returned   | 60% |

We continually obtain useful information concerning student learning outcomes during our annual two-semester capstone course, where students undertake research projects that require a synthesis of what they have learned (and are learning concurrently) in their disciplinary courses. These projects include preparation of written summary reports and public oral presentations, helping us to further evaluate their communication abilities.

The LRES Curriculum Committee Chairperson is on sabbatical during AY2007-08, so the Curriculum Committee did not meet this year, and therefore did not address outcomes assessment. At the February 12, 2008 LRES Faculty meeting, we discussed the issue of student completion of the LRES Advising Assessment forms (see meeting agenda, below). We generally experience low participation (in terms of completing and returning the questionnaire) by student advisees, in spite of the fact that LRES Instructional Programs Coordinator Linda McDonald sends out multiple communications and this year we offered incentives for student participation. We concluded that we

should not include this metric as one of the criteria to be considered in the updated LRES RSCSP document, and further that there does not appear to be any obvious means to obtain greater participation by students, given the efforts to date. We similarly discussed the relatively low participation in student exit interviews, also without identifying a compelling solution.

As a result of information gained through direct student feedback mechanisms, the Capstone course, and faculty observations, we continue to adjust our degree course requirements, and to develop new courses to address aspects of our curricula that we consider as comprising 'gaps' in (potential) student learning.

The topic of Outcomes Assessment will be taken up again by the Curriculum Committee during AY08-09.

**LRES Faculty Meeting**  
Tuesday, February 12, 2008  
12:00-2:00 p.m., 110 Linfield

**AGENDA**

**Information and Updates:**

Recent Awards and Recognition

Bauder: SSSA Soil Science Education Award, ASA Agronomic Extension Award

Jones: SSSA Excellence Award for Extension Urea Pub.

Lawrence: Chair of AmericaView

Riveros: AGU Horton Research Award

Others to announce/remind?

Budget updates

Instructional funds redistribution formula: -\$23k to college, -\$10k to LRES (base budget cut)

LRES 500 Spring semester: Sharlene Sing

New MT DNRC Restoration coordinator

LRES Newsletter – geared to alumni, friends, stakeholders

Improved contact with former students; help in outcomes assessment, etc.

Submit ideas, news, info, notables/achievements, etc.

**Discussion:**

Student outcomes assessment

LRES plan, mechanisms, results

Dissertation and course credits for LRES doctoral degree

New faculty positions

Graduate stipends to initiate new doctoral students

**Other**

Peer review of teaching: faculty evaluation/feedback on proposal, with planned initiation Spring semester 2008

Provide JW with input on course categories, other aspects of Ecology and Environmental Sciences website (handout)

Updates/information from 12/17/07 department heads' meeting:

Commencement speaker ideas solicited (ASAP, to JW)

Federal initiatives update (handouts, Tuesday newspaper story)

Electronic Proposal Clearance Forms: add comments to explain non-typical aspects (budget, IDC, etc.)

MSU cost-share policy: reminder of emailed document

(MSU/MUS?) Spatial Sciences Center (Rick Lawrence)