

Environmental Humanities  
Departmental Inquiry Project Grant  
December 2021

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### **Outcomes**

As outlined in our proposal, the following tasks were our focus for the semester. These were all oriented toward creating a cohesive curriculum that will better serve our students as well as stabilizing the program in the interim period before a new colleague can be brought on board. We achieved all of these goals as well as several more accomplishments.

- Conduct a review of existing course syllabi to identify our current strengths and weaknesses and identify high priority courses to be staffed by current faculty or a new hire.
- Create curricular map with clearly defined expectations for learning goals across all existing courses. Especially integrate research, argumentation, creative and analytical writing, interdisciplinary approaches across all course levels and types.
- Articulate new, assessable Learning Outcomes for the major.
- Clarify and revise Senior Assessment to correspond to new major Learning Outcomes.
- Rewrite major requirements, learning goals, catalog copy to account for curricular changes.
- Map out a multi-year plan of courses offered, plan development of new courses, redevelopment of existing courses.

We were successful in completing all of these tasks and our curricular changes are currently in the process of being approved by the faculty. Of particular value were our discussions around our desired Learning Outcomes and crafting a description of the program, which crystallized for all of us what we understand the task of Environmental Humanities to be at this moment in history and to best serve our students. The curricular map we created will be a valuable tool in

developing new courses and supporting our colleagues in creating new courses that can be affiliated in the future.

A major change we ultimately decided to make was to restructure the teaching/advising of the senior thesis project to eliminate systematic uncompensated overloads and to fold it into our teaching loads on a rotating basis. In addition, we have begun to articulate new structures for the senior oral exam/thesis defense and to better define the criteria for attaining honors in major.

Another major task we undertook was a review of administrative structures and planning for the future administration and stability of the program. Especially in light of feedback we received from the ECC around our tenure line request, we decided as a program to request the creation of a Director of Environmental Humanities and mapped out a plan for that position to be staffed for at least the next seven years while we mentor a new colleague up to and through the tenure application process. This will additionally address the historical problem of our program's lack of a departmental home - something that distinguishes EH from the other Environmental Studies majors - and ensures that one person will be overseeing the stability of the curriculum and providing support to our affiliated faculty members at all times, something that has not been done systematically in the past.

It is also important to mention that having already established an ongoing discussion about the state of the field and our program specifically allowed us to effectively and quickly respond to concerns raised by the ECC about our TT request as well as to develop and successfully apply and recruit Camile Dungy to join us as an Arnold Professor next fall semester (this last under Kate Shea's leadership).

### **Service to Students**

We are confident that the work we undertook this semester will serve our students and the overall health of the program in the following ways:

- The program is now better described and more comprehensible for students.
- The major has better-defined and updated learning outcomes that bring the program up to date and better communicate our expectations both to students and affiliated faculty.
- Our learning outcomes and major structures will ensure students have a more intentional and diverse learning experience as they progress through the major, while retaining much of the flexibility that our students prize in the current configuration.
- The project has gone a long way toward creating a stronger cohort of affiliated faculty. This will have the effect of stabilizing our course offerings and creating a larger support network for our students and any new colleagues we eventually hire.

## Limitations and Challenges

While the project accomplished all of our main goals and more, it very quickly became evident that our timeline and the amount of work to be accomplished were overwhelming. In retrospect we should have begun much earlier. However, we are confident in the outcomes of our projects. There remains one major item that we need to continue working on in the coming months and we would appreciate the opportunity to extend our student assistant budget until the end of the academic year in order to accomplish some of them.

We would like to work with Communications to update our program website to reflect the significant changes we have made. This will not only clearly communicate our new program to the campus community, but also to prospective students and donors. It will also aid us in our search for a new TT faculty member, which we anticipate will begin in summer/fall 2022. **We would like to hire a student worker to help compile alumni and current student narratives as well as serve as a sounding board for that work over the course of the spring semester 2022.**

Further, it would also be fruitful to create a continuing reading group in Environmental Humanities. Because we had to rush to address all the nuts and bolts tasks at hand, we were unable to do as much broad reading in the field as we would have liked. This would also be beneficial in terms of continuing cohort building among the more loosely-affiliated faculty and would also be a support structure for new colleagues. **We would be interested in learning about any funding sources that could compensate our faculty for this additional labor in an ongoing way.**

Finally, given our short timeline and the need to respond urgently to concerns that developed this semester (as well as COVID concerns) we ultimately did not invite an outside scholar to review and/or present to the campus about EH. **We would still like the opportunity to do so, potentially in Spring or Fall 22, and would appreciate the flexibility to still use that line in our budget if possible.** Although the PIG will be officially completed by then, it would be an excellent opportunity for us to continue these conversations as we work to invigorate the EH community and plan for a TT hire.

## Sharing our Work with the Campus

Our project was highly program-specific, but there are several ways in which we could envision sharing its outcomes with the campus community.

First, we would like to host a workshop with interested faculty members from the Humanities and Fine Arts who would potentially like to create or collaborate on a new affiliated course. This

will be a program-specific presentation of the new curriculum and an opportunity to brainstorm with interested faculty, but could also be a model for other interdisciplinary programs looking to conduct similar reviews and renewals of their curriculum.

Second, we could imagine conducting a CTL workshop or other professional development event on the use of curricular mapping to put individual course planning into conversation with a department's learning objectives. We would be excited to work with Sociology and German Studies as well as any other departments that have implemented this strategy to share how it has worked to create some pedagogical cohesion among our courses and program.

### **Brief Reflections from PIG Participants**

**Chris Leise:** It has been a real pleasure not only learning about the goals and aims of the Environmental Humanities program, but also helping to shape its future. Foremost, **I learned just how much the College has benefited from the generosity and hard work of Emily Jones and Kate Shea. Their herculean efforts must not go unremarked.** Second, learning about student interests and thinking about how to reorient courses I currently teach toward serving a second set of aims has reinvigorated my relationship with two courses that I teach for English (290 and 349), such that they can serve both English and EH equally well. Beyond developing a better sense of how my interests can help bolster EH, I also watched with great admiration as my colleagues worked collaboratively to shape a more inclusive program for the future, a reinvented EH that includes urbanists' questions as well as more familiar meditations on nature. We are continuing to interrogate the assumption that (early) modern European receptions of ancient Greece and Rome comprise "*the* meaning" of that tradition, as opposed to seeing it as its own, rather alien set of cosmologies and epistemologies. I also found fascinating our conversations about what we mean by "foundations" in EH, and how rethinking that concept can make the program better oriented toward questions of justice, equity, inclusivity, and for leaving open spaces for ideas we have not yet begun to identify as necessary, but which will surely emerge as we welcome more colleagues into the program's evolving identity.

**Kisha Lewellyn Schlegel:** It's been wonderful to connect with colleagues during a time when such connections are made more difficult. I want to echo what Chris notes, and extend my deep appreciation for the work Kate Shea and Emily Jones continue to do on behalf of the EH program, EH students, and the college. I am also thankful for the ways they structured our PIG. They created a collaborative process by which we could consider the structure of the major. I think the outcome is really innovative and something that an incoming tenure track EH professor can continue to shape. Their approach and the ways in which we have conceived of the major also have me thinking about how I structure the courses in the nonfiction strand. Our conversations also allowed me to have a better understanding of how final exams are used across the college; I feel more educated about those approaches.

**Sharon Alker:** I was very impressed with the way this group interacted productively and creatively to help us rethink the EH program in ways that are sustainable. My Romantic Lit course continues to fit in this program, but this discussion helped me see that other courses I teach could be adapted to fit the learning objectives of this revised course, particularly because we discussed the relationship between EH and space (the latter of which has been a key area research for me for the past decade) and could also include my interest in urban space. I was also able to recognize that my interest in technology could intersect with the natural world, and could result in courses in nature and technology. We were successful in this workshop in ensuring that we have achievable learning goals and a more accurate description of the program. I made it clear that in the future I am willing to take a turn as the program chair role for a regular 3 year period. I want to echo the remarkable work of Emily Jones and Kate Shea. Their leadership has allowed this program to thrive throughout a very difficult period.

**Patrick Frierson:** As someone who's been on the periphery of EH for many years, this was a really important opportunity for me to interact with other EH faculty and think at a broad level about what EH is and can be. It has made me understand much more clearly how I can contribute to EH, made me more excited about the program, and given me a greater sense of buy-in.

**Tim Parker:** From my perspective as co-director of the Environmental Studies program, the Environmental Humanities PIG has been strikingly successful. Prior to this PIG, EH had not undergone a systematic evaluation and design of its structure since it was established two decades ago. In those two decades, the faculty teaching relevant courses has changed and expanded (most notably with the addition of two tenure track members of EH – Kate Shea and Emily Jones), the ES program has evolved, the interest of ES students have changed, and the discipline of EH has grown and matured. In other words, this PIG was doing timely and important work.

My contributions to the PIG have been modest (as the only member not on the humanities faculty), but I have been impressed by the extensive work done by the humanities faculty on this committee. I expected great things from Kate and Emily and was not disappointed (though I will say that Emily's organization of the PIG was exemplary). I did not know what to expect from the other members of the PIG, none of whom had contractual obligations to the EH program, and most of whom had a limited history of engagement with the program. However, all the humanities participants made excellent contributions to the committee, and the success of this PIG is due to the contributions of all the humanities faculty members who participated. I was especially impressed with Chris Leise's willingness to volunteer to occupy the new position of EH Director this coming semester when Emily is on leave. The breadth of support for EH from across many humanities departments leaves me confident in the future of this program. I am grateful for the opportunity to have watched, and occasionally contributed, to this re-thinking of Environmental Humanities at Whitman and I am enthusiastic about the next two decades of this program.

**Kate Shea:** Emily and I have been talking about needing to revamp and update the program for a few years now. I am so pleased to have been able to work on this project with our colleagues

in English, Philosophy, and Biology, who each brought so many insights and new perspectives to the EH program. Emily has done an amazing job organizing and facilitating this PIG which has been a model of interdisciplinary collaboration. What struck me in this process is how absolutely crucial it is to have adequate faculty staffing across the curriculum, as well as the stability and freedom of tenure to explore beyond the bounds of our departments, in order to create innovative and coherent interdisciplinary programs. I'm very proud of what we have accomplished together this semester.

**Emily Jones:** I drafted the report above and so will just add here that it has been extremely heartening to feel meaningful support from so many colleagues who have had at most a peripheral relationship to the EH program. I echo what others have said above about the success of the project and leaving this project confident in the future of EH, especially as we plan toward hiring a new TT faculty member.