**University of Nebraska-Lincoln Environmental Studies Programs: Goals, Strengths, and Challenges**

**Overarching goals of your program**

The Environmental Studies major at UNL is designed for students who want to make a difference and contribute to solving current as well as future environmental challenges on a local to global scale. The program requires students to acquire a broad-based knowledge in the natural sciences, social sciences and the humanities as well as develop competency in a specific discipline. UNL emphasizes a holistic, systems-based approach and a framework of sustainability. The Environmental Studies major provides students with a degree and the skills necessary to work across disciplines and to be competitive in the job market.

**Strengths Program Design**

The strengths of the program are that it: 1. uses an educational approach that is consistent with calls for improved learning in higher education based on how people learn (Zemsky, 2009; Bransford et al. 2000); 2. creates opportunities for students to develop 21st century skills that are necessary for long-term professional success, emphasizing collaboration; critical thinking/problem solving; ethics/social responsibility; professionalism/work ethic; creativity/innovation; and lifelong learning/self-direction (CISCO 2008; P21 2010); 3. support the United Nation’s vision of education (UN, 1992, 2002), that is, “linking social, economic, political, and environmental concerns” which “demands a deeper, more ambitious way of thinking about education, one that retains a commitment to critical analysis while fostering creativity and innovation;” and 4. focuses on student success whereby students are not only engaged in their own learning, but engaged with the community as well (Bransford et al. 2000).

**One or more challenges of implementing and running your program**

Our number one challenge is that the program currently is implemented by one part-time faculty who serves as program director and a full-time academic coordinator/advisor implement the program that currently consists of approximately 110 students. These two people are responsible for the facilitation of six core courses consisting of 13 student credit hours including a “capstone” senior thesis experience. Student credit hour generation has increased from around 70 student credit hours in academic year 2008-2009 to nearly 600 in 2010-2011.

**Brief summary of how the program prepares students for their future careers.**

Upon completion of the program students have been prepared to: 1. Converse in systems-based analysis related to sustainability issues and demands of global society; 2. meet the needs of employers who want employees that possess 21st century skills, especially collaboration; 3. work across disciplines and with others who have different perspectives; and 4. develop creative solutions for complex environmental challenges through a range of opportunities to practice critical thinking and problem solving skills. Our students are competitive in the job market or in accessing graduate programs.