

A Summary of Career Preparation for Ithaca College Environmental Students

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The Environmental Studies and Sciences (ENVS) department at Ithaca College is housed within the School of Humanities and Sciences at Ithaca College. The department offers a BA in Environmental Studies and a BS in Environmental Science and graduates 30-40 majors in the combined degree programs.

Our institution is considered liberal arts and, therefore, our students are expected to have breadth in a wide range of academic disciplines. This is accomplished through the college's recently revised core curriculum. In addition, the ENVS degree program has some breadth requirements as well as opportunities to participate in group or individual research projects as well as local internships. Taken together, these experiences should give our graduating seniors some of the "soft" skills associated with a liberal arts program (e.g., communication, critical thinking, working in group settings). These skills are independent of career-specific knowledge and are transferable to a variety of careers. However, we realize that there are costs associated with this, chief among them being a reduction in occupation- and industry-specific skills and knowledge.

In our Environmental Science program, students do gain some specific knowledge and skills that are directly applicable to environmental jobs and graduate programs. All students are required to take cognate science and mathematics coursework that provide a quantitative background. There are a limited number of upper-level courses that require students to use analytical equipment or field techniques that are common in the environmental business. We find the independent research or internships (either during the school year or during the summer) are most valuable at providing industry-specific skills. Our school provides a limited exposure to Geographic Information Systems and the department plans on increasing the availability of instruction and resources.

Our department has existed for five years so at this point there are limited data on the career paths for our graduates. This is exacerbated by a lack of any organized system to track these graduates. Nevertheless, we know that a subset of our graduating seniors have attended graduate programs in environmental science, law, and policy programs (e.g., Columbia, Tufts, UMass-Boston, Plymouth State, Cornell) while others have successfully found work in government agencies (e.g., US Forest Service, US-EPA, NY DEC), private consulting and environmental services companies, and "green" materials companies. Most recently, there seems to be a trend of students securing short-term jobs but that long-term jobs are more difficult to find directly upon graduation.