February 24, 2012

CST is going to end its Environmental Studies minor so there is less confusion and inconsistency between the CST and CLA minors.

The Environmental Science program committee discussed the possibility of creating a minor in Environmental Science because there is a minor in Environmental Studies. This idea has been considered by our committee at least two other times and rejected. Once again we decided that a minor in Environmental Science is not appropriate.

Our reasoning is as follows.
1. A minor allows a student to probe another subject, just not as deeply as a major. However, some depth provided by focused set of courses is expected. The problem is that the interdisciplinary nature of this topic does not allow any depth. Once the student takes a few courses in geology and biology and some policy, there is no room for depth. Students can minor in geology and get depth. They can minor in biology and get depth. They can’t do both.

2. Furthermore, the Environmental Studies minor allows students to specialize in geology or biology along with a dabbling in other areas (see attached summary of the minor in Environmental Studies). Thus, a set of courses already exists with the suggested theme, and is appropriately called “Studies” rather than “Science” because it doesn’t provide sufficient depth in science. There will soon be a Sustainability certificate as well. There doesn’t seem to be a need to introduce yet another option when viable ones are available to our students.

3. Although students may feel that having a minor in this topic makes them more marketable, word from the environmental consulting field is that this is not a good selling point. The major and minors with the word “environmental” are so ambiguous that employers are somewhat skeptical of these degrees. They certainly aren’t going to care if the minor says “studies” or “science”. It might be best if we didn’t oversell this and mislead students.

Our committee was unanimous in its decision not to develop a minor in Environmental Science.

Laura Toran
Program Director, Environmental Sciences
Committee members: Laura Toran EES, Jonathan Nyquist EES, Robert Sanders Bio, Brent Sewall Bio, Amy Freestone Bio, Erik Cordes Bio.
Minor in Environmental Studies: Natural science track is shaded

3 credits GUS 1051 or 1951 Environment and Society (cross listed Env-Stud 1051)

3-4 credits One course from this list (plus any prerequisites 6 to 8 cr)
   Biology 2227 Principles of Ecology (pre req Bio 1112 and 2112)
   Geology 3021 Introduction to Hydrology (pre req EES 2001)
   GUS 3062 Fundamentals of GIS (cross listed Env-Stud 3062)
   Economics 3596 Energy, Ecology and Economy (pre req Econ 1101 and 1102)

3 credits One policy course from approved elective list

9-12 credits Three topics courses from approved list (may include natural science)

Total credits needed for the minor 18-22 (plus possible pre-reqs)