

Continuing Internal Academic Program Review for  
THE GRADUATE PROGRAM ON THE ENVIRONMENT  
THE EVERGREEN STATE COLLEGE

August 2008

**Degree:** Master of Environmental Study (CIP # 03.0103)

**Year of last program review:** 2004

### **Documentation of Continuing Need**

Since the Evergreen State College began its Graduate Program in Environment Studies in 1984, public awareness of critical environmental challenges – such as climate change and the degradation of Puget Sound – has significantly increased. There is now widespread acknowledgement that our society faces unprecedented problems that demand a highly educated public, prepared to effectively reduce these threats through a combination of efforts in the private, public and non-profit sectors. In the most fundamental sense, this constitutes the continuing and increasing need for this graduate program.

No other college or university in the Puget Sound Region has a master's program like that of The Evergreen State College. Environmental master's degrees in more specialized fields are available at the University of Washington and Western Washington University. While these are highly valuable, a complementary master's program must also remain available for those students who desire to work across specializations to address environmental problem solving in a more holistic manner. Our program integrates the study of the biological, physical and social sciences with public policy and leads to the Master of Environmental Study (MES) degree. The program aims to produce graduates who combine an interdisciplinary understanding of the social and natural sciences with the skills and wisdom to intelligently address environmental problems. The program is centered on highly participatory evening classes that accommodate full- or part-time students. Many alumni are employed in the public, private, and non-profit sectors, while others continue their graduate study in related Ph.D. programs. The perspectives of the MES program are national and international, but extensive use is made of the environmental issues in the Pacific Northwest.

## ***MES Curriculum***

The MES curriculum consists of three closely integrated components, which are (1) 4 required core programs; (2) electives, offered to provide more specialized training in subjects related to environmental studies; and (3) thesis work, which often takes the form of applied research. Students are also encouraged to undertake internship and independent learning activities in their second year. An MES degree requires 72 quarter-hours of credit, including 32 credits of core work and 8 or 16 credits of thesis, along with 24 or 32 credits of electives. The exact mix of elective credits and thesis credits will vary according to which of two thesis options a student selects. Students enrolled full time (12 hours per quarter) can complete all degree requirements in six quarters.

The MES program is designed so working students can attend part time. Core and elective programs meet in the evening and late afternoon. Students who enroll for 8 hours per quarter require a minimum of 9 quarters to complete the MES degree. These students usually take the core sequence before enrolling in electives or beginning the thesis project. Electives and thesis work are also available in the summer.

The MES core sequence starts with a general view of environmental study, in the course “Political Economic and Ecological Processes.” This program provides a framework for understanding current environmental issues from an interdisciplinary perspective. Students begin to develop the skills to become producers of new knowledge, rather than being strictly learners of information already available. Multiple methods of data acquisition and analysis are introduced through examples drawn from many fields of study. The philosophy of science and the problematic relationship between science and policy are also introduced.

The second core course is “Ecological and Social Sustainability.” This course addresses central issues in contemporary sustainability studies on theoretical and practical levels. Emphasis is on ways to promote both environmental and social sustainability. Areas covered may include environmental quality at regional, national and global scales; energy use and alternative energies; resource availability and access to resources; social and cultural issues of sustainability; and indicators to guide policy. As part of this program, students write and present a research paper to provide evidence of their readiness to advance to candidacy.

The third core course is “Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis for Environmental Studies.” In this course, students learn how to integrate the use of inferential statistics and qualitative data analysis to conduct rigorous examinations of the social, biological, and physical aspects of environmental issues. This knowledge prepares students for their own research and for understanding and critiquing research articles and reports in fields of their choosing.

The final core course is “Case Studies and Thesis Research Design,” in which students apply and strengthen the skills they gained in their first year of MES core studies, by

carrying out individual or small group projects. Students and faculty also work together to apply what has been learned throughout the core sequence about interdisciplinary environmental research to design individual thesis research plans that will be ready to carry out by the end of the fall quarter of the student's second year.

Four-credit electives offer students the opportunity to study a specific subject in more depth than is possible in core programs. Current electives are listed at <http://www.evergreen.edu/mes/electives.htm>. MES students may also enroll in MPA electives and apply the credits earned toward their MES elective requirements. Additionally, students can take up to 8 elective credits of course work in the form of internships and individual contracts.

The MES program offers two ways to fulfill the thesis requirement, namely the 8-credit "Thesis: Essay of Distinction" and the 16-credit "Thesis." Both require the student to engage in research on a significant topic and consider its political, economic and scientific aspects. It can be an individual or a team effort. The project preferably should be of value to an external client or organization as well as meeting high academic and theoretical standards. Primary differences between the two thesis options lie in the scope of the problem examined and the manner in which the research is conducted. The Thesis: Essay of Distinction reviews and analyzes an existing body of information and does not involve substantial original field or survey research. This thesis option is written in a workshop setting during winter and spring quarters of the student's final year. Students selecting this option take 8 hours of thesis credits and 32 hours of elective credits. The 16-credit thesis option represents a substantial research project conducted independently by the student with the support and guidance of a three-person thesis committee. It offers the opportunity for extended fieldwork, data collection and analysis. The thesis committee includes 2 Evergreen faculty members plus an outside reader appropriate to the topic. Students selecting this option take 16 hours of thesis credits and 24 hours of elective credits. As the culminating act of the thesis project, students share results with faculty and students in a public, oral presentation.

Starting in the Fall of 2006, the Master in Environmental Study and Master in Public Administration Programs at The Evergreen State College began offering a combined MES/MPA Degree (CIP 03.0299). This joint program is designed both for environmental professionals who wish to improve their administrative skills and for public administrators and public policy professionals who want to gain expertise in the analysis of environmental issues. Three students enrolled in the joint degree pathway in AY 2007-08 (1.6 annual average FTE). The first joint degree will likely be awarded for spring 2008. All of these students have started out as MES students, before applying to become joint MES/MPA students.

Joint-degree students must complete a total of 96 credits in both programs to obtain the degree, including core coursework and electives in both programs. Electives should be approximately equally divided between MES and MPA. If a student is in the MPA-Tribal program, s/he must take five MPA-tribal concentration courses. The MPA and MES Directors must approve students' educational plans for elective work. All joint-degree

students are required to complete an 8- or 16-credit MES thesis instead of the MPA capstone or thesis. The MES/MPA thesis prospectus requires approval by both the MPA and MES Directors. Students may choose either the MES or MPA research methods/design programs in the MES or MPA core.

### ***MES Faculty and Administration***

There are 5 faculty members serving exclusively in the MES program at any one time and they all have doctoral degrees and practical experience in their fields, representing a range of natural and social sciences. A balance of these disciplinary fields is maintained in the teams of 2-3 faculty members who teach each of the 4 required, "core" courses. MES faculty members rotate in and out of the graduate program from the undergraduate program, typically remaining in MES for two to three years at a time. At Evergreen, it is not possible for faculty members to teach both graduate and undergraduate courses at the same time because of time commitments of teaching a full-time undergraduate program. Service of 2 years at any one time in the MES program allows faculty members and students to get to know each other and to form close working relationships for purposes of research and thesis writing. There is a total of 5.0 faculty FTE teaching in MES annually.

The MES Director is a faculty member who typically teaches an 8-credit, core MES course in the fall quarter, teaches a 4-credit MES elective in the winter quarter, serves as a thesis reader throughout the year, and works as a half-time administrator in the summer. An MES faculty member reviews applications and makes detailed admissions recommendations to the Director, who then makes final admissions decisions. The Director also makes decisions about the acceptability of transfer credits. A full-time MES Assistant Director is responsible for providing services to alumni, and to prospective and current students. The AD is also responsible for recruitment, marketing and community outreach. The key focus of the AD is to (1) support outreach efforts to prospective students, which will result in recruitment to the Program; and (2) provide student-service assistance (advising, internships, financial aid, employment and careers, personal) to existing students, in order to increase retention to graduation. The position also supports efforts to cultivate the involvement of alumni, an Advisory Board, and members of the community in the Program's affairs.

There is also a work-study student who serves as Program Assistant. This position provides administrative and clerical support to the Assistant Director and Director.

The MES Program budget is adequate and is currently as follows:

#25101, MES Support:	\$88,827.00 total
Account 6100 - Salaries and Wages:	\$58,152.00
Account 6200 - Benefits:	\$15,515.00
Account 7230 - Goods and Services:	\$10,360.00
Account 7250 - Travel:	\$ 4,800.00
 #25102, MES Academic:	 \$ 9,800.00 total

Account 7230 - Goods and Services:\$ 9,800.00

### ***MES Students***

The MES program admits up to 40 students each year. All MES faculty are involved in revising admissions or graduation requirements. Program policies and regulations are distributed at orientation and are always available on the program web site (see MES Student Policy Handbook at <http://www.evergreen.edu/mes/messupport.htm>). All admissions and graduation requirements are clearly posted on the program web site (<http://www.evergreen.edu/mes/>) as well as being spelled out in the Student Policy Handbook and the Thesis Handbook. These handbooks are revised and updated annually by the MES Director and Assistant Director.

Each entering class takes the core sequence as a group during their first 4 quarters. Students develop a cohesive and cooperative approach to learning that cannot be matched by taking a scattering of individual courses. Continuing students work to integrate their first-year colleagues into a strong, supportive learning community of about 80 – 90 students overall, dedicated to increasing their knowledge and understanding of the many facets of professional environmental work. About two-thirds of Evergreen's MES students have undergraduate degrees in the natural sciences, primarily biology or environmental studies. The remainder has degrees in the social sciences and humanities. Some come directly from undergraduate work. Many bring to the program work or volunteer experience in diverse areas. MES students have ranged in age from 22 to well over 60. We are also privileged to have 2 – 3 international students enroll each year. The students and faculty members report that this diversity of backgrounds, experience and ages contributes significantly to their overall learning. Each year, approximately 25 students graduate with their master's degrees.

The following data, compiled by Laura Coghlan, Director of Institutional Research and Assessment for The Evergreen State College, provide more details about the composition of the MES student body during the period between this internal program review and the previous review. These data show a continuing demand for the program among students during this period of time. Among other things, the data also show that, to a significant degree, the MES Program serves Washington residents and students of low income levels.

**Masters of Environmental Studies**  
**Demographics of Enrolled Students Fall Quarters 2003 to 2007**

Fall Quarter *	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
<b>TOTAL STUDENT HEADCOUNT</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Male</b>	36	37	40	35	32
<b>Female</b>	54	39	45	47	51
<b>% Female</b>	60.0%	51.3%	52.9%	57.3%	61.4%
<b>African-American</b>	1	0	0	1	2
<b>Asian/Pac Islander</b>	5	3	1	1	2
<b>Native American/Alaskan Native</b>	1	2	1	2	1
<b>Hispanic</b>	3	2	2	0	3
<b>White</b>	68	60	73	71	70
<b>Not Indicated/Other</b>	12	9	8	7	5
<b>SUBTOTAL STUDENTS OF COLOR</b>	10	7	4	4	8
<b>% Students of Color</b>	11.1%	9.2%	4.7%	4.9%	9.6%
<b>Average Age</b>	33	33	33	35	33
<b>Washington Resident</b>	74	63	70	70	74
<b>Non-resident</b>	16	13	15	12	9
<b>% Washington Resident</b>	82.2%	82.9%	82.4%	85.4%	89.2%
<b>Regular (degree-seeking)</b>	89	75	82	77	77
<b>Special (non-matriculated)</b>	1	1	3	5	6
<b>Low Income (≤ 150% of federal poverty level)</b>	29 32.2%	29 38.2%	39 45.9%	35 42.7%	36 43.4%
<b>First Generation (per FAFSA or application)</b>	11 12.2%	13 17.1%	9 10.6%	14 17.1%	12 14.5%
<b>Disability (reported)</b>	2 2.2%	1 1.3%	2 2.4%	4 4.9%	4 4.8%

\*Source: PCHEES 10th day enrollment reports

## Assessment

MES assessment is a continuing process that includes assessment of student work, of faculty performance, and of program effectiveness. Student work is assessed in detail during and at the culmination of each course through feedback on assignments and through the narrative evaluation process. Student/faculty evaluation conferences and narrative evaluations are carried out in the same manner as in Evergreen's undergraduate program. Since the maximum student/faculty ratio is smaller in the MES

program (15/1) than in the undergraduate program (25/1), we have close working relationships and excellent opportunities for assessment. Students also provide assessment of faculty and program performance through this process. The MES Director and Assistant Director regularly seek and receive informal assessments of program performance from students at all points in their academic trajectories. This is done mostly through personal meetings but also through correspondence. Faculty performance is assessed by the MES Director through regular communications with faculty and students and through formal evaluation conferences between the Director and adjunct faculty.

An intensive, two-day program assessment was conducted in September of 2005 in a “summer institute” called, “The Future of Graduate Environmental Studies at Evergreen.” The purpose of the summer institute was to assess where the MES program had been, where it should be going, and how to get there. Readings, presentations and working groups were organized to foster creative thinking about strengthening the MES program. MES was assessed within the broader context of the evolving field of graduate environmental studies programs and, for that reason, Dr. Will Focht was invited to assess our program (see his report to the Provost, attached) and to participate in the summer institute as a resource person and facilitator. Dr. Focht, who is Director of the Environmental Institute and Director of the Environmental Science Graduate Program at Oklahoma State University, has many years of experience leading a comprehensive survey of environmental studies and science programs offered in U.S. universities. Participants in the summer institute included every previous MES Director except one; many current, former and future MES faculty members; current students, alumni, and MES support staff. These participants formed working groups to developing recommendations for the MES program from a variety of perspectives.

These assessments found that the ways in which we taught research methods were overdue for reform and a number of improvements were needed in the content and consistency of our other offerings as well. Instruction in research methods needed to be integrated into the entire sequence of required courses, which has now been done. Instead of teaching only quantitative data analysis, as was the practice in the recent past, introductions to both qualitative and quantitative methods has now been instituted in the core sequence. The old case studies core course was assessed as not serving an essential, generic function and the thesis writing process needed to be strengthened as well, by starting the process earlier and by providing greater instruction in research methods. To solve this problem, the old case studies course was replaced with a new “Case Studies/Thesis Research Design” course, which was highly successful in its first iteration in the fall of 2007. Finally, it was found that there should be more fieldwork throughout the curriculum and this is being addressed with more field-based electives and some field\work has even been introduced into the core classes.

## Plans for improvement

The assessment process will be strengthened in the coming academic year. The Assistant Director is currently developing a series of instruments for gathering student input at the beginning, midpoint, and termination of their paths through the program. These will consist of questionnaires and interviews. The information gathered in these ways will be used by the Assistant Director and Director to inform all aspects of the program.

An evaluation process and continual record of program performance is also planned, in order to keep systematic records of the performance of the recently-revised curriculum along with suggestions for improvement. This will be modeled along the lines of the evaluation process used by the Tribal: Reservation-based/Community-determined Program (RBCD), which produces a documents they call "Gleanings" that provides a historical record of performance over time. This new MES program assessment process will be useful both internally and for a variety of people and institutions elsewhere who may be interested in what we are learning about how to deliver a strong, interdisciplinary, graduate-level, environmental studies program.

It is very important to strengthen the process of building institutional memory and learning from experience. As a first step in this assessment process, the faculty teams for each core course will compile narrative and statistical documentation of what and how they are teaching in their courses, along with their assessments of how well it went, and their recommendations for future instructors of those courses. The Director will build upon that by interviewing each instructor to develop additional narrative and critique. Student input distilled from the Assistant Director's assessment process (described in the previous paragraph) will be incorporated into this MES evaluation process as well.

Finally, the MES Advisory Board will be reactivated in 2009. The last time the Advisory Board met was in May 2005. Reengagement with the Advisory Board is very important for purposes of external review and advice. Moreover, Board members will be called upon for assistance with external funding, student recruitment, cultivations of internships opportunities, and related needs.



**APPENDIX**

Source of appendix data: Institutional Research and Assessment

**MES Admissions History**

Completed Applications	Fall 2003	Fall 2004	Fall 2005	Fall 2006	Fall 2007
<b># completed applications</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>48</b>
# completed applications from <b>students of color*</b>	6	6	3	4	3
# completed applications from <b>WA residents</b>	26	24	31	29	31
# completed applications from <b>non-residents**</b>	26	23	22	13	12
# completed applications from <b>contested residency</b>	5	7	8	1	5

Admission	Fall 2003	Fall 2004	Fall 2005	Fall 2006	Fall 2007
<b>Total # offered admission</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>% admitted</b>	<b>93.0%</b>	<b>92.6%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>95.3%</b>	<b>97.9%</b>
# students of color offered admission	5	5	3	4	3
<b>% SOC admitted</b>	<b>83.3%</b>	<b>83.3%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
# WA residents offered admission	24	22	31	27	30
<b>% WA resident admitted</b>	<b>92.3%</b>	<b>91.7%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>93.1%</b>	<b>96.8%</b>
# non-residents offered admission	24	22	22	13	12
<b>% non-resident admitted</b>	<b>92.3%</b>	<b>95.7%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
# contested res offered admission	5	6	8	1	5
<b>% contested residents admitted</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>85.7%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Enrolled	Fall 2003	Fall 2004	Fall 2005	Fall 2006	Fall 2007	Ave. yield rate 64.7%
<b>Total New MES # enrolled</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>34</b>	
<b>yield from admission</b>	<b>49.1%</b>	<b>68.0%</b>	<b>68.9%</b>	<b>65.9%</b>	<b>72.3%</b>	
# students of color enrolled	2	3	1	3	3	
<b>SOC yield from admission</b>	<b>40.0%</b>	<b>60.0%</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	<b>75.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	
# WA residents enrolled	15	19	27	23	25	
<b>WA resident yield from admission</b>	<b>62.5%</b>	<b>86.4%</b>	<b>87.1%</b>	<b>85.2%</b>	<b>83.3%</b>	
# non-residents enrolled	9	11	9	3	6	
<b>non-resident yield from admission</b>	<b>37.5%</b>	<b>50.0%</b>	<b>40.9%</b>	<b>23.1%</b>	<b>50.0%</b>	
# contested res enrolled	2	4	6	1	3	

\*Students of Color in this presentation include African-American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American/Alaskan Native, and Hispanic/Latino students.

\*\*Non-residents include non-residents and international applicants.

## MES Entering Cohorts: Retention and Graduation

Fall Quarter New Students	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
# of New Degree-seeking MES Students	26	34	42	27	34
Fall-to-Fall Retention	F03-F04	F04-F05	F05-F06	F06-F07	F07-F08
# of New MES retained to 2nd fall qtr	21	25	32	23	not available
<i>Retention rate to 2nd fall quarter</i>	80.8%	73.5%	76.2%	85.2%	not available

*retention adjusted for graduation in such anomalous situations.*

Graduation Rate for New MES Admits	Degree by summer 05	Degree by summer 06	Degree by summer 07	Degree by summer 08	Degree by summer 09
# of New MES who earned degree within 2 yrs	6	10	10	not available	not available
<i>Graduation rate within 2 years</i>	23.1%	29.4%	23.8%	not available	not available
	Degree by summer 06	Degree by summer 07	Degree by summer 08	Degree by summer 09	Degree by summer 10
# of New MES who earned degree within 3 yrs	10	17	not available	not available	not available
<i>Graduation rate within 3 years (cumulative)</i>	38.5%	50.0%	not available	not available	not available
	Degree by summer 07	Degree by summer 08	Degree by summer 09	Degree by summer 10	Degree by summer 11
# of New MES who earned degree within 4 yrs	10	not available	not available	not available	not available
<i>Graduation rate within 4 years (cumulative)</i>	38.5%	not available	not available	not available	not available

*\*Retention and Graduation data (awarded degrees only) updated as of 08/08/08.*

## MES Degree Awards

Academic Year	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08
Total # of MES Degrees Awarded*	40	19	22	21	not available

*\*Number of MES degrees awarded fall through summer of each academic year, run as of 08/08/08*

## MES FTE Enrollment

MES Annual Average FTE* History	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07**	07-08
Actual Annual Average FTE	68.7	55.9	69.2	60.5	62.2
Target Annual Average FTE	55.0	55.0	55.0	55.0	55.0
<i>difference: actual FTE - target FTE</i>	13.7	0.9	14.2	5.5	7.2

*\*Annual Average FTE includes only state-support FTE (state employee waivers excluded)*

*\*\*Beginning in 06/07, TESC degree-seeking employees are admitted as full status degree-seeking students, and are counted toward FTE targets.*

## Dual Degree Master of Environmental Study and Master of Public Administration

### Demographics of MES/MPA Students Fall Quarters 2006 to 2007

Fall Quarter *	2006	2007
<b>TOTAL STUDENT HEADCOUNT</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Male</b>	0	1
<b>Female</b>	0	1
<i>% Female</i>		50.0%
<b>African-American</b>	0	0
<b>Asian/Pac Islander</b>	0	0
<b>Native American/Alaskan Native</b>	0	0
<b>Hispanic</b>	0	0
<b>White</b>	0	2
<b>Not Indicated/Other</b>	0	0
<b>SUBTOTAL STUDENTS OF COLOR</b>	0	0
<i>% Students of Color</i>		0.0%
<b>Average Age</b>	<i>N/A</i>	34.5
<b>Washington Resident</b>	0	2
<b>Non-resident</b>	0	0
<i>% Washington Resident</i>		100.0%
<b>Regular (degree-seeking)</b>	0	2
<b>Special (non-matriculated)</b>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>
<b>Low Income (≤ 150% of federal poverty level)</b>	0	0 0.0%
<b>First Generation (per FAFSA or application)</b>	0	0 0.0%
<b>Disability (reported)</b>	0	0 0.0%

### MES/MPA Dual Degree Awards

Academic Year	06-07	07-08
<b>Total # of MEA Degrees Awarded*</b>	0	0

\*Number of MEA degrees awarded fall through summer of each academic year, run as of 08/07/08.

Note: 1 student has applied for graduation effective spring 08 pending final transcript review and degree award).

### MES/MPA FTE Enrollment

MEA Annual Average FTE* History	06-07**	07-08
<b>Actual Annual Average FTE</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1.6</b>
<b>Target Annual Average FTE</b>	0	0
<i>difference: actual FTE - target FTE</i>	0.0	1.6

\*Annual Average FTE includes only state-support FTE (state employee waivers excluded)