

Report from the ENTS Internal Review Committee

May 19, 2004

Introduction

In this report, we will first discuss what we see as the strengths of the ENTS program, followed by a list of what we believe to be the major issues facing the program. Finally, we will make some recommendations. Many of our comments will be in the form of questions for which we do not have answers. In posing these questions, we hope to clarify issues that ENTS faculty and students need to address in the immediate future. Along with some of our comments, we will present possible options and alternatives, and we will report on what we heard from students and faculty.

Our committee consisted of two students, Ellen Acree and Lauren Miller, and three faculty, Barbara Allen, Bill Titus, and Qiguang Zhao. We began meeting in the middle of winter term and our last meeting was held on May 19. Ellen and Lauren conducted four, 1.5-hour interviews: two sessions with 5 nonconcentrators who had taken two or more ENTS courses, and two sessions with 8 concentrators. Around 7 students who did not participate in the interviews responded to the interview questions via email or gave informal verbal feedback. Barbara, Bill, and Qiguang met for 11, one-hour sessions with 11 faculty and 2 staff people: Kim Smith and Kelly Kollmann, Julie Klassen, Phil Camill, Tsegagye Nega, Tami Little, Arijit Guha, Bev Nagel, Will Hollingsworth and Deborah Gross, Mike Kowalewski, Gary Wagenbach, and Mary Savina.

We want to state right at the beginning of this report that we strongly support and endorse the ENTS program at Carleton. We believe it should continue as at least a concentration and that it could, perhaps, emerge as a department with or without a major under favorable conditions. ENTS is at a crossroads. The program must have a clear commitment from the administration to maintain its current strength or develop into a department. The program also must have a clear commitment from its faculty and students for program and organization planning. Both a commitment to planning and resources comes at an opportune time because of the upcoming capital campaign and the possibilities of including requests in that campaign for new FTEs, funding, and new physical space.

Strengths of the Program

ENTS is a microcosm of the Carleton community, drawing faculty and students from across disciplines, in particular from the humanities, social sciences, and the natural sciences. It is what the liberal arts should be all about. And it focuses on a central societal concern in today's world: environmental issues and the interaction of science and society. The courses taught and the faculty's intellectual interests are at the borders of disciplines, quite different from traditional departments, but on the crest of the wave in which more and more disciplines are following.

The program is very important to students. It gives them exposure and training in a truly interdisciplinary area and entry into a community of students with similar interests, helping them build a sense of direction and identity here at Carleton. It is a source of environmental activism

on campus and a potential area of future studies and careers after graduation. The program is flexible and students can take as much out of it as they want. The students interviewed were unanimous in stating that the extremely strong student enthusiasm for ENTS was one of major strengths and distinguishing features of the program here at Carleton.

Likewise, the program is very important to participating faculty. It provides connections to colleagues from disciplines outside their own areas and entry into a well-established intellectual community. Faculty especially appreciated this aspect of the program during their first few years at Carleton. ENTS allows for interdisciplinary collaboration in teaching and research, and gives exposure to innovative examples of different types of teaching styles and pedagogy. The enthusiasm shown by faculty for the program is impressive; many faculty members are more than willing to give extra, uncompensated time to support ENTS.

Major Issues Facing ENTS

We see two overriding themes that need to be addressed. First, there must be a broad consensus among the participating faculty and students as to what ENTS means at Carleton and what should comprise the program, its educational goals, and its teaching philosophy. Reaching this consensus is not an easy task, especially considering the diversity in interests of people in the program and the difficulty to develop a practical and theoretical framework to effectively integrate so many different disciplines. But this integration is essential for an active and productive program and, if successful, would serve as a local and national model for how a variety of disciplines can effectively work together and develop a coherent program.

Second, ENTS, in close collaboration and consultation with the administration, needs to develop a three to five year plan on how to reach these goals. This plan would deal not only with staffing issues, but also with the basic organizational and curricular structure of ENTS, and the possible need for additional physical space and funding.

Here are the questions that we believe need to be addressed, but for which we, in general, do not have answers.

What is the ENTS teaching philosophy?

In addition to the usual departmental teaching tools and philosophy, we see five aspects of teaching that are especially important to ENTS: team teaching, place-based learning, interdisciplinary work, service-learning, and internship programs.

Although there was not a consensus from the students or faculty interviewed on the importance of team teaching, more support it than not. Those that do support team teaching appreciate having different perspectives presented in class and the emphasis on interdisciplinary connections. However, some students commented on the lack of organization and sometimes-subsequent confusion that can often occur with team teaching.

Place-based learning, with its active laboratory and field trip components, was especially appreciated in the ENTS 110 course and strongly supported by students. Students found such experiences educational, memorable, and an effective way to achieve hands-on, first-

hand experience in field. It gave them a realistic context for academic material and a good introduction to the local environment, something that was especially appreciated by first-year students.

The students unanimously voiced extraordinary enthusiasm for the interdisciplinary nature of ENTS; many even used the word “awesome” in the focus group discussion. However, one student expressed concern about lack of clarity in the role that science plays in the program, especially with “soft science” presented in the same manner as “real” science. Many students, while they liked the combination of disciplines, still wanted clear delineation. While the students appreciated cross-listed classes, some were concerned that certain courses from the humanities, social sciences, and sciences do not contain sufficient material related directly to ENTS, and it was questionable whether those courses should even be cross-listed.

There was strong student support for service-learning, although not everyone recognized the term or was fully aware of its role as a specific teaching style. Students enjoyed accomplishing something in addition to studying and learning about a topic. Generally, students felt there was a good balance between the amount learned and the amount of service done. Many students appreciated the opportunity for activism and community outreach and involvement.

Students also deeply appreciate the internship program. Such experiences are an extremely effective way in which to observe and experience interdisciplinary work in a non-academic setting and then to share those observations and experiences with others in the program during the academic year.

Should ENTS be a program or a department?

If a decision is made to create a department, the rationale should be clearly stated. Recently, resources, respect, and space have been used at Carleton as a justification for a need for departments. But these reasons seem weak to us and may signal that something is wrong with respect to the way in which resources are allocated to programs and concentrations and the way in which faculty and the administration view program, concentrations, and departments. One advantage of a department would be that it would impose a dependable organizational structure and limit the sense of needing to reinvent that structure every few years. Department status might also allow improved negotiation with other departments as to what courses are taught and when those courses are offered. (Presently, the course schedule for ENTS is made up after departments have decided on their own schedule.) Finally, a department could offer the springboard from which a major might evolve, although there are programs at Carleton that are not departments but nevertheless have majors. If ENTS decides to remain a program, it needs to have a well-defined organizational structure, where roles and responsibilities are clearly spelled out and understood by all.

Should there be an ENTS major?

There is extremely strong student support for a major, a point that cannot be emphasized enough. The students voiced a nearly universal belief that an ENTS major would be an important advance for several reasons. (One participant in the focus group did not specifically comment on the question; students who were not able to attend interviews, but

emailed or verbalized their views in separate meetings, supported the idea of a major.) Students felt that a major would give the program more weight and motivate the college to allocate more resources. Some students wanted a major because it best represented their strongest academic and future professional interests. A major would also provide a better preparation for environmentally oriented careers (local, national, and international) and careers in secondary school education. Some also suggested that such a major would draw students to Carleton who are now going elsewhere for environmental work. Many students qualified their support for the major with recognition that considerable work would need to be done in order to make the program suitable for a major in terms of resources and organization.

Faculty appear to be ambivalent about the creation of a major. Some ENTS faculty did not think that the pros and cons of a major were sufficiently discussed during the review process. There also seems to be some tension between environmental studies and environmental science, and a concern that a major would not have enough depth to serve the students well after they leave Carleton. A number of faculty, however, felt that a major would offer more variety in the ENTS curriculum, attract more applicants to the college, enhance cross disciplinary studies, and share the load of the departments that have many majors. According to one faculty member who has been a significant player in ENTS, four years ago, had they been asked the question of whether there should be an ENTS major, the answer would have been an emphatic “No way.” But now, the answer has shifted to one of uncertainty. This is a significant change and a major may be both feasible and necessary in the near future.

What should be the organizational and decision making structure for ENTS?

We had difficulty determining how decisions are made in the program and, indeed, what exactly is the current organizational structure of ENTS and the plans for it in the future.

In the abstract, one could imagine a loose confederation of individuals where the connections between individuals were of prime importance. Alternately, there could be a more top-down, federal approach where the program was the dominant factor. But whatever the organization, it needs to be structured to allow for both short and long-term commitments from faculty to the ENTS program.

Both approaches also require that administrative and leadership roles are clearly specified and understood by all. These roles could be rotating or permanent ones. If rotating, for how long a time period and among how many people? If permanent, do the faculty come from inside Carleton or from outside the College? If from the outside, at what level? A number of faculty talked about bringing in outside, midlevel-career people, and we wonder if there is a hidden message from those individuals that ENTS needs some outside authority to solve local administrative or academic problems. Or does it signal that something is not operating correctly with respect to the way in which resources and attention are allocated to the program? Should there be an associate director(s)? For example, one could imagine three associate directors, one each from the humanities, social sciences, and sciences, or a single associate in training to become the next director/chair. There are numerous Carleton models for directors and associate directors (American, Asian, Woman, and Cross Cultural Studies) that could be drawn upon.

We see a need for a mechanism for broad faculty participation in the program to allow for coherence, ownership, long-term planning, and some guarantee that faculty will not feel disenfranchised from the process. One possibility would be an active steering or executive committee that would include faculty from the three disciplinary areas represented in ENTS.

Finally, a strong and active curriculum committee composed of faculty, staff, and students would be an important asset to the program, not only during the planning phase, but also on an ongoing basis.

How should the curriculum for concentrators be organized?

The ENTS 110 course and the other gateway courses need to be closely examined. Is this the best way to introduce students to the program? Should a single gateway course be offered instead of several? One advantage for the former might be that it gives students a common background and sense of community right at the beginning of their entry into the program. A disadvantage might be that it requires too focused an introduction; for example, only exposure to a local view of environmental issues and not a global one. It also may not give a sense of the overall structure of the discipline, something that might be very important for beginning students. If there were a single course, it would be essential that it be taught at least twice during the academic year to allow multiple entries into the program. Should the introductory course(s) have a lab component (something strongly recommended by students), even though it is expensive to do so in terms of FTEs? How should the course(s) be structured to allow a large fraction of the ENTS faculty to participate in the course(s)? Should the course(s) be placed-based? Such placed-based learning is strongly supported by students.

The junior colloquium, with only one credit per term and taken on a pass/fail basis, seems weak and the students report very little commitment to the course. Should the course give more than one course credit per term? Faculty definitely need to get teaching credit for this responsibility and it is not appropriate that it is done on a voluntary basis. Should there be an expectation that the colloquium is project oriented? Students find projects with some practical application or service-learning component most engaging, with less support for a reading project where very little time is spent together in class. We see this course as a very important one in which community can be built and students from a variety of majors and disciplines can interact at a mature intellectual level.

The senior capstone experience needs close examination. Students seemed confused about what it exactly entails. Some students describe it as a mini-comps, but often not taken as seriously as comps. Some students expressed a desire to put more time into the project, but felt, due to the low credit involved and their other time commitments, that there was not an opportunity to do so. Students desired more guidance, even if that only entailed a good description of the course emailed out to concentrators and included in any ENTS pamphlets. As with the junior colloquium, faculty need to get teaching credit for their contributions to this part of the program, especially since the faculty are involved in comps within their own departments.

Students varied in their perception of the cohesiveness of the ENTS community, but agreed that they would like to see more. Is physical space important for that community? Should

there be a more common set of courses taken by ENTS concentrators? Can more field trips help build a sense of community as it does in geology? Would more frequent department social gathering or interdisciplinary ENTS speakers help? Social gatherings and a tighter ENTS community are one aspect that some students feel is presently missing from ENTS. They would like to see more effort placed on building an academic environment-oriented community.

In general, students raved about the guest speakers and want more of them. They enjoy the interdisciplinary aspect of talks and the opportunity for more perspectives and interactions from a variety of people. All the students interviewed believe that the speaker program is an extremely important feature of the department and the curriculum.

Advising within ENTS is very important since students need to work with someone on a periodic basis to insure that their individual programs have coherence and purpose. By default, the fifth-year intern has become responsible for advising, although this does not seem to be well advertised. Most students expressed confusion about whom to go to with questions, who could explain ENTS course overviews, or discuss what it means to be concentrator. Students who knew to talk to the ENTS intern were very enthusiastic about the help provided. If the fifth-year intern is indeed to do the bulk of the advising, then that role needs to be well advertised and included in the job description for the position, and some training needs to be offered. Also, the intern would need to have access to the academic records of student concentrators in order to be an effective advisor and to confirm the list of concentrators each year.

Should and can there be a methods course? Is the discipline sufficiently mature so that a unifying methodology exists or can several methodologies be grouped together, where each one concentrates on a specific ENTS focus? Could faculty ever agree as to the content of the course? A method course could provide an early grounding so that students would have a comprehensible understanding of the techniques and tools to study environmental systems and the consequences of human-environmental interactions.

Staffing?

It is not clear to us what comprises the staffing commitment from the College. For example, how many FTEs are actually associated with the program and are those positions guaranteed by the College? Where do those FTEs live? Is indeed the fifth-year intern position, as claimed in the article from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* cited in the ENTS self-study, a permanent one with the salary a regular part of the budget? Both students and faculty are concerned about effects of recent and future losses in faculty committed to the program. The program needs a staffing structure that maintains stability as key people go on leave or exit the program for one reason or another. The vast majority of students recommended hiring one to three faculty specifically devoted to ENTS rather than another department.

There are a number of possibilities for staffing options that need to be broadly discussed among the faculty and administration: flexible FTE under the control of ENTS, informal or contractual arrangement with departments for teaching ENTS or other interdisciplinary courses, or new hires with explicit ENTS commitments. The first two options would allow

more flexibility than the third and would avoid locking people permanently into a position when their interests may change over time.

Can targeted opportunities be used in a creative way for staffing purposes? For example, if faculty had time to sit in and take other people's courses, they would gain a better understanding of the ENTS program, the ability to expand what they themselves could teach, and a healthy respect for what others are doing.

Recommendations

We have a number of recommendations that we hope will be discussed and taken seriously.

1. We strongly recommend that the program evolve and develop, using the ENTS review document as a starting point. ENTS should maintain a viable concentration and undergo a self-study of the pros and cons of establishing a department and a major, consistent with the commitment given by the College. Increase in staffing level should be seriously considered; many faculty are very enthusiastic about ENTS and would devote more time to the program if they themselves could find the time to do so.
2. Whatever decisions are made with respect to the program, they must be consistent with the interests and commitments of students, the participating faculty, and the administration. They should also have the general support of the faculty as a whole since most of the faculty in the ENTS program belong to other departments. It is very important that all faculty who are interested in ENTS be able to participate in decision-making and feel like they are part of the process. Faculty who feel disenfranchised will leave the program and there is some evidence that this may be happening.
3. Before the planning process goes further, the College administration and representatives from ENTS need to meet and come to an agreement regarding the level of college resource support for ENTS, in particular, with respect to funding, staffing, physical space, and facilities.
4. We encourage ENTS to be a leader in curricular development and philosophy rather than a follower, although we do recognize that there may be outside constraints as to the curricular content of an environmental program. ENTS should maintain and expand its interdisciplinary focus of drawing faculty from the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. Economics seems like an area that could be exploited.
5. Team teaching is essential for some of the ENTS courses where it serves as a model for interdisciplinary collaboration and cooperation. The College needs to accept the fact that such courses are just more FTE intensive than typical department courses, but nevertheless deserving of support.
6. The role of ENTS in hiring, third-year reviews, tenure reviews, and even department reviews needs to be clearly spelled out in writing by the Dean of the College, in collaboration with ENTS faculty.

7. Tami Little's position should be upgraded to administrative associate, especially considering the many roles she plays. If there were an expansion of ENTS, the hours for the administrative assistant/associate would need to increase. Tami's hours are flexible and need to be respected as such by HR, especially with respect to benefits. We recommend that Tami and representatives from HR, ENTS, and the administration sit down and discuss such issues. All faculty in the program need to be aware that Tami, as well as the fifth-year intern, are key and essential players in the program.
8. We recommend that the fifth-year intern position become a permanent funded college position, with salary support built directly into the college budget. This is an extremely important position for the program and serves as a valuable bridge between faculty and students. Considering the role this person now plays in advising, the job description may need to be rewritten. Also, as with faculty, time commitments vary considerably throughout the academic year and this position needs flexible hours, consistent (on average) with a 40-hour workweek.
9. We recommend the formation of a strong and active curriculum committee composed of faculty, staff, and students that would meet on a regular basis throughout the year.
10. Faculty need to be compensated with teaching credit for all their ENTS work. It is difficult for faculty to devote time to the program on a voluntary basis, as some have done with respect to the junior and senior colloquium programs. The junior faculty's time is especially valuable. These faculty have to perform as superb teachers and as fine scholars. Too much uncompensated time may be disadvantageous for their teaching and research, and their ultimate success at Carleton. But, if the time is reasonable, compensated, and appreciated, it can also help them to learn more about the College, the program, and the academic field as well as grow as teachers and scholars.
11. The content of courses that are cross-listed with ENTS need to be examined closely to make certain they satisfy the ENTS requirement. Those that do not should not be cross-listed. Such a review would be an appropriate task for an ENTS curriculum committee.
12. Many faculty and students mentioned the necessity of physical space. Those that had used the "ENTS Shack" generally liked it as a multipurpose space and there seemed to be a sense that the space in Goodsell is not nearly as effective. Space should be a basic issue that is discussed by faculty, students, and the administration.