April 2, 2013

To: Dean Bev Nagel

From: Kim Smith, Director of Environmental Studies

RE: Proposal to Add a Tenure-Track Position in Environmental Studies

Dear Dean Nagel,

On behalf of the Environmental Studies program, I’d like to request permission to hire a tenure-track faculty member with credentials in physical geography or a similar interdisciplinary science program. The description of the position, which is very similar to the post-doc position we hired last year, is below.

We view this request as the solution to a pressing long-term need for additional FTE in ENTS. As you know, ENTS has 2.8 FTE (with the recent change in my position). Since we established the ENTS major in 2009, our number of entering majors has grown. This year we expect to have about 20 new majors, as we did last year, and we think it’s reasonable to expect the major to stabilize around that number. Thus, we can expect to have about 40 majors each year. That would give us a ratio of majors to FTE of about 14 to 1, which is much higher than most other majors. Indeed, ENTS has fewer FTE than most of the other majors on campus, even very small ones like Theater & Dance.

We are fortunate that we can rely on faculty outside the department to offer electives and even some required courses. Cooperation and coordination with Biology, Geology, Chemistry, Economics, and our other contributing departments has been very good. But even with the generous support of these departments, our courses have been experiencing enrollment pressures. Indeed, a survey of our faculty reveals that most ENTS courses have long waitlists, especially in the natural sciences.

- The ENTS program would benefit significantly if we could offer more courses in the area of climate and energy, which are central to much of contemporary environmental politics and policy. At the moment, we have surprisingly few upper-level natural science courses that fill this need. Melissa Eblen-Zayas provide valuable support in offering one course related to energy, but climate courses recently developed by members of the Chemistry department will probably not be offered as frequently as our program needs require, because of other departmental course needs that take precedence.
- A number of science electives in our Food and Agriculture focus (especially plant biology and entomology) are experiencing significant enrollment pressures. This is worrisome because Food and Agriculture has become one of our most popular foci; we expect to have continued strong demand for courses in this area.
• Students pursuing our Water Resources focus have been finding it challenging to complete their environmental science requirements, mainly due to the infrequency with which those courses are offered. Currently three of the five science electives in that track are 300-level seminars that are typically offered only every third year.

• We are also concerned about staffing our research methods and GIS courses when Mark Kanazawa and Tsegaye Nega are on leave. Next year Mark Kanazawa will be on leave for 2 terms, and so unable to offer the methods course (I will be filling in).

We would ask the person filling this position to offer courses in at least one and probably two of these critical areas, and would thus provide critical curricular support for ENTS and relieve enrollment pressures in other departments. The kind of courses we have in mind include environmental problem analysis and policy formulation (a course that takes up an environmental problem, investigates its scientific dimensions, and takes the students through a policy analysis), energy and society (a course offered in most environmental studies programs), food security and climate change, or water resource development and climate change. We would also expect this person to have strong GIS skills and be able to teach research methods.

We have experienced some of the benefits of a hire like this with our post-doc, Mikaela Schmitt-Harsh. Mikaela has taught only two courses for us so far, agroforestry and remote sensing. Those courses occupied the unforgiving 1,2c time slot, and the agroforestry course was scheduled against a required course for seniors, so it’s not surprising that they didn’t attract large numbers. In addition, because half our junior majors participating in Tsegaye’s OCS, we had lower numbers in many of our courses this winter. However, Mikaela’s courses are generating considerable student interest and we expect that her courses next year will relieve some of our enrollment pressures. In addition, Mikaela has provided critical support to comps while Tsegaye was off campus, serving as a reader for one comps and helping the two groups using GIS. If we had someone with her skills full-time, we could cover research methods, comps advising, and ensure that the electives we need are offered regularly.

In addition, this position would help with other important program needs, including academic advising, graduate school and career advising, our summer internship program, and on-going assessment and program development. With only 2.8 FTE and three joint appointments (two of whom have similar responsibilities in another department), we are finding it to be a major challenge to devote sufficient attention to all of the needs of the program.

A new faculty member from an interdisciplinary environmental program could help ensure leave coverage for comps and academic advising, as well as helping to administer the summer internship program, provide fresh eyes and input in program assessment, offer an up-to-date perspective on graduate school and career advising of one who has recently been through the process, and contribute to the intellectual life of the ENTS community that we have been working to cultivate.

Furthermore, this hire could help support the College’s on-going campus sustainability initiatives. ENTS faculty are often asked to serve on the committees responsible for implementing sustainability measures (such as the EAC, the Climate Action Plan committee, and the Sustainability Revolving Fund committee). We are also usually asked to speak to trustees, donors, parents, prospective students, and alums about sustainability at Carleton. We appreciate the opportunity to provide leadership on campus sustainability, but we could use more help carrying out this important service for the campus.
Finally, this position would also support our aspiration to become a truly interdisciplinary program. By bringing the perspective, approach, and tools of an interdisciplinary graduate program, such a faculty member could help us negotiate a transition from a multi-disciplinary to a truly interdisciplinary curriculum, integrating the sciences, social sciences and humanities more intimately both within and across courses. Our experience with first three years of the ENTS major has convinced us that we can achieve this goal. With the contribution of the faculty position described, we can create a model for undergraduate interdisciplinary environmental education that will secure our position as a national leader in environmental studies.

We are conscious of the need to support faculty research, and we are confident we can offer the kind of support that this position will require. The sort of scholar we envision typically focuses not on small-scale lab experiments but on modeling, which allows them to address large-scale policy problems. We might have to acquire some new software, but the GIS lab is already set up for such research. That belief is confirmed by our experience with our post-doc, Mikaela Schmitt-Harsh, whose lab requirements have been very modest.

There are several well-established physical geography and interdisciplinary environmental graduate programs producing the kind of candidates we are seeking. University of Michigan’s School of Natural Resources, for example, awarded 65 PhDs in 2010, and the majority of them sought jobs in academia (ending up at such institutions as University of Wisconsin, Dartmouth, and University of Virginia.) The Yale School of Forestry, the Nicholas School at Duke and the Brenner School at UC-Santa Barbara are also producing exceptional interdisciplinary environmental scholars. Our post-doc search generated a field of 30 well-qualified applicants; we expect this job to generate a large and talented applicant pool.

I am happy to discuss any of these issues further. Thank you for considering this request.

Respectfully submitted,

Kim Smith
Director, Environmental Studies
Proposed language for the job ad:

The Environmental Studies program at Carleton College aims to recruit a tenure-track faculty member in physical geography or a similar interdisciplinary field in environmental science, whose research addresses one or more aspects of global environmental change, water resources, and/or biogeography. The position will begin in September 2014. The successful candidate should be trained in and take an interdisciplinary approach to human-environment relations. We are particularly interested in candidates who focus on energy, climate, ecosystems, sustainability, and/or food, as well as the ability to teach an introductory course in GIS and research methods in the social sciences. The successful candidate must demonstrate a commitment to teaching in an undergraduate Environmental Studies program.