



# Cover Memo & Proposal Summary for the Academic Business Plan to Create a Department of Environment and Sustainability

## Process updates

The proposal to create a Department of Environment and Sustainability to house the degrees and faculty currently berthed in the Environmental Studies Program was tabled at the November 2024 Faculty Senate Meeting.

Since that time, the Environmental Studies Program engaged with the Departments of Biological Sciences, Earth Sciences, and Geography as these units raised concerns. The Harpur Dean’s Office also participated.

These meetings resulted in the three units dropping their opposition to the creation of the new department. Their letters describing this are in Section 2 of the accompanying Academic Business Plan.

With the other units, we established some collaborative agreements, described in the Academic Business Plan. As part of these, the Harpur Dean’s office will host joint curricular planning to prevent duplication of class offerings; organize guidance to ensure academic advisors understand the differences between programs; and facilitate discussion about faculty hiring shared interest areas. The agreements also call for closer consultation on hiring, the new Department of Environment and Sustainability to eliminate the track structure in its major (already underway) and the removal of restrictions on courses for Environmental Studies minors in the program (already done).

Among the four units, we are building stronger avenues of collaboration. For example, Biological Sciences is hosting a second PhD student for one of our faculty’s research labs; a Geography master’s student traveled to Belize with one of our faculty to assist with research; an Environmental Studies / Geography team received Harpur research funding; geologists, biologists, and geographers have presented at the Environmental Studies Faculty Forum; and we have held a joint Environmental Studies / Geography social event for faculty mixing and discussion of research.

## Academic Business Plan updates

The attached Academic Business Plan has been updated as described below.

1. First page (“Context and Why a Department”) – Updated numbers and streamlined text
2. First section (“Justification for a New Department”) – Formatting changes only
3. Second section (“Integrating with Other Academic Units”) – Updated this section to include results of the discussions with other units. Letters from Biological Sciences, Earth Sciences, and Geography describing their dropping of opposition to the proposed department are found in this section.
4. Third section (“Diversity plans for faculty hiring/retention and students”) – Updated data and text. The updates are based on feedback from the Faculty Senate Diversity Committee.
5. Appendix I (“Evidence of consultation with related units and commentary from those units”) Moved text previously found in the Second Section into here. All other text remains the same.
6. Appendix II (“Financial Plan”) – No changes.

## Proposal Summary

### *Environmental Studies Program in context*

- The Environmental Studies/Science Program is the eighth largest major in Harpur College. (See Table 1.)
- 22<sup>nd</sup> largest environmental studies program among U.S. universities and colleges<sup>1</sup>
- From 2021-2025, green hiring grew almost 8%, twice as fast as the share of workers with those green skills.<sup>2</sup>

1.	Biological Sciences	1,310
2.	Psychology	1,020
3.	Economics	739
4.	Integrative Neuroscience	596
5.	Philosophy, Politics & Law	516
6.	Mathematical Science	368
7.	Political Science	296
8.	<i>Environmental Studies/Science</i>	226
9.	English	218
10.	Art & Design	206

### ***Faculty challenges solved by a new department (selected)***

- **Protect faculty by securing their tenure berth.** Update: We now have 7.5 faculty members and two staff sitting in the Environmental Studies Program rather than a department. In this unusual arrangement, their tenure berths are in the program. The transition to a department would regularize their appointments.
- **Provide for faculty representation.** No one on the Faculty Senate represents Environmental Studies faculty.
- **Allow for faculty self-governance.** As a program, many faculty members across campus participate in the Environmental Studies Program's decision-making. A department would allow the 7.5 core faculty and 2 staff to be responsible for shaping the unit's academic, intellectual, and social trajectory.
- **Recognize faculty grants.** The Research Foundation does not recognize programs as places for awarding grants or for returning Faculty & Administrative monies. A department fixes this so that these monies could support future research.

### ***Student benefits provided by a new department (selected)***

- **Create a cohesive presence for a large and growing number of students.**
- **Develop an appropriately designed and scaffolded curriculum.** Piecing together classes from various units limits the ability to organize knowledge and skills. A department could develop coherent paths through the program for students.
- **Provide for course consistency.** With their own needs and priorities, departments providing courses to the program have changed offerings without taking into account the impact on Environmental Studies. The new department will offer more core and integrative courses, which will remain consistent. We are discussing a revision of the major now.
- **Develop a department-related student group.** A new department will provide the administrative support and resources to develop a student group to aid in governance, student activities, course feedback, and alumni outreach.

### ***Scholarly reasons for a new department (selected)***

- **Recognized globally as a distinct discipline.** Environmental Studies at Binghamton University (and at many other universities) emerged by weaving together the teaching and service of faculty in various departments. The field has moved beyond this 'quilt of classes' approach to a globally recognized and integrated study of the natural, social, cultural, and political systems involved in understanding and managing factors at the human/natural interface.
- **Complementary to neighboring fields.** Environmental Studies has an applied, problem-solving approach, which differentiates the field from others in its intellectual neighborhood. It focuses on the research into sustainability change and the education of change-makers, who can "help societies and governments solve pressing technical, management, and policy problems involving natural resources, environmental quality, and social justice."<sup>3</sup>
- **Building an intellectual reputation.** The faculty with tenure berths in Environmental Studies have started developing the program's intellectual reputation with a strong body of scholarship, numerous research grant submissions and awards.
- **Opportunity for new field-focused graduate programs.** By developing a graduate program, a new department could supply practitioners and professors to companies, governments, NGOs, and universities around the world – and would make Environmental Studies even more attractive to potential research faculty.

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<sup>1</sup> Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>)

<sup>2</sup> LinkedIn (2025, November) *LinkedIn Green Skills Report 2025*. <https://economicgraph.linkedin.com/content/dam/me/economicgraph/en-us/PDF/2180-global-green-skills-report-v04.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Clark, S. G., Rutherford, M. B., Auer, M. R., et al. (2011). College and University Environmental Programs as a Policy Problem (Part 1): Integrating Knowledge, Education, and Action for a Better World? *Environmental Management* 47(5), 701–715.