

New Environmental Studies & Sustainability Course

By Mariah Wagner

This fall, UCCS offered an exciting new course taught by Dr. David Havlick. Environmental Studies & Sustainability (GES 1500) is the introductory course in environmental sustainability offered through the Geography and Environmental Studies department. We interviewed Professor Havlick to learn more about the course.

Mariah Wagner: How did this course come about?

David Havlick: I created the course in response to a couple different needs. The Department of Geography and Environmental Studies has long recognized a need to add more courses relating to environmental studies; an introductory course seemed like an important step in addressing that. For the campus-wide minor in Sustainable Development, which I direct, we also were looking to add an introductory course to bring students into the minor in a way that consolidated a basic understanding of key principles. Finally, an introductory course to environmental studies and sustainability promised to contribute to the new Compass Curriculum's required component in Sustainability, so that made it timely as well.

MW: What makes an introductory course so important?

DH: An introductory course is important because of the breadth of material it can cover to introduce students to a variety of issues and concepts relating to environmental studies and sustainability. Breadth can also be a source of frustration, as it can feel like we're covering a lot of ground at times, but ideally a course like this exposes students to material that they can pursue in more depth as they continue their studies. Another goal is to position students who minor in Sustainable Development to come into the capstone course for the minor with a much stronger foundation of knowledge.

MW: What topics are covered in this course?

DH: I'm using a book, *Humans in the Landscape: An Introduction to Environmental Studies*, which covers a wide reach of topics and ideas. I've also built a number of field trips into the course. So far we've visited the Bestway materials recycling facility and the wastewater treatment plant here in town, and we'll also be going to the potable water treatment facility that Colorado Springs Utilities operates, and

hopefully a power plant and the UCCS Greenhouse and Farm later in the semester. The course includes fundamentals of environmental science - nutrient cycling, trophic levels, biodiversity, energy flows - as well as attending to the role of environmental policy, markets, collective action, affluence, and environmental education as strategies to respond to "grand challenges" we face such as climate change, urbanization, and social inequality.

MW: Who is encouraged to take this course?

DH: Anyone who is curious about environmental, social, and economic issues that relate to sustainability ought to consider this course. It's designed for students who haven't necessarily had a lot of prior coursework in these areas, but I have several upper-level students in this fall's course and they're contributing a lot to the class discussions. So, really, I'd welcome anyone who can bring an open mind and genuine interest to the material.

MW: How does this fit into the general education requirements of Compass Curriculum?

DH: The course is approved to fulfill both the Sustainability and Inclusiveness components of the Compass Curriculum.

MW: What do you expect students to take away from this course?

DH: It's funny: I had a student in the first day of class ask, "Is this course supposed to turn us into tree huggers?" I said, no, but I hope it will help you understand why people might choose to hug trees, and decide whether that's something you would want to do or not. Course goals by the end of the semester are for students to be able to explain how environmental challenges emerge, describe the key environmental challenges we currently face, connect these broader concepts to local issues and context (including social and economic dimensions), and identify strategies people and institutions are using and proposing to address these challenges.

If you're looking to be introduced to the interdisciplinary issues concerning the environment and sustainability, this class would be a great way to start! If you would like to find out more about the GES 1500 Environmental Studies & Sustainability course or have any additional questions about the Sustainable Development minor, you can contact David Havlick at: dhavlick@uccs.edu