**SOAC report to the Curriculum Committee on the Environmental Awareness Outcome**

Spring Semester 2015

The outcome reviewed in the 2013/14 academic year was the Environmental Awareness Outcome.

**Environmental Awareness**

It is the faculty's goal that students who earn a baccalaureate degree in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences will:

* explain the physical and biological interactions within ecosystems.
* explain how human activities impact the environment and how societies are affected by environmental change.

During the 2012/13 academic year the CALS Student Outcomes Assessment Committee developed a procedure and a rubric that academic programs could use to assess the Environmental Awareness Outcome. The procedure and rubric can be found at the following site: <http://www.cals.iastate.edu/assessment/assessments> . However, programs were free to use whatever method they wished to assess their student’s achievement of this outcome.

The table that follows this discussion summarizes the results from reports submitted by 18 of the College’s academic programs. Five programs, Ag B, BiolA, EnscA, Gen and GRS had not submitted reports as of this writing. The table shows 3 programs concluded their students were achieving the Environmental Awareness Outcome at the competent level (highest), 8 reported their students achieving it at the developing level (intermediate) and 7 of the reporting programs indicated their students were achieving at the emerging or lowest level.

A survey of the program action steps did not disclose a common strategy for improving student achievement in the reporting programs. In fact, most program suggestions were specific to the perceived needs of the program as dictated by the focus of their curriculum.

**Recommendations**

Most of the actions planned and recommendations made to improve student achievement were internal to the specific programs. This internal focus seemed to stem from nearly all the programs defining environmental awareness as the awareness of environmental factors specific to the programs academic discipline and not necessarily from a more global or cross disciplinary definition. While it is the opinion of the SOAC members that the improvement plans and strategies in the reports submitted are reasonable and should prove effective, committee members questioned whether the original intent of the outcome was indeed cross disciplinary in nature. Therefore, the SOAC puts forth the following recommendations:

1. **CALS faculty should enter into a discussion to more clearly define the intent of the Environmental Awareness Outcome.** Should it be defined in a more cross disciplinary way? Should we expect our graduates to be aware of how human activities impact the environment in areas outside the purview of their program disciplines? If the answers to those questions are yes, then the SOAC submits a second recommendation.
2. **CALS should design and implement a cross disciplinary plan to help our students achieve the Environmental Awareness Outcome.** One of the reasons the programs defined this outcome as they did is because the programs only control the content of the courses they teach. They have no content control of courses outside their departments nor do they receive assessment data for courses outside their departments. Therefore, if the intent is cross disciplinary, a college level cross disciplinary group must review or design courses or experiences that help CALS students achieve this outcome. Also, a mechanism needs to be put in place to either assess the outcome at the college level or feed assessment data to individual programs for assessment.

Addendum:

The preceding report is the SOAC report to the CALS Curriculum Committee. The following programs submitted their program assessments to the SOAC after the recommendations were submitted to the curriculum committee: Agriculture Business, Biology, Environmental Science, Genetics and Global Resource Systems. Questions concerning these assessments and the recommendations resulting from them should be addressed to the chair of the CALS SOAC.

Submitted to the CALS Curriculum Committee May 12, 2015

Tom Polito, Chair SOAC

