

Biological Aspects of Conservation Assessment Update  
March, 2009

The overall mission of the Biological Aspects of Conservation (BAC) undergraduate major program is to provide undergraduate students broad training in the biological and related disciplines most relevant to conservation biology and policy. This science-based program emphasizes basic knowledge of natural history, whole organism biology, ecological interactions and conservation biology.

We have implemented routine “exit surveys” of graduating students to get insights into how they assess the BAC program. These surveys, as well as informal discussions with students and information obtained during our decadal L&S Program Review (completed in 2007), have generated two initiatives. First, the intercollegiate character of the BAC programs presents challenges for students to negotiate the requirements of the major and, possibly more importantly, take advantage of academic opportunities at UW-Madison. BAC’s intercollegiate character makes it similarly challenging for faculty advisors to help students with advice about the major and academic opportunities. Therefore, BAC has started a BAC seminar designed for recently declared BAC majors. The goals of the seminar are to (i) address how best to use the flexibility of the BAC major to further student’s academic learning, (ii) provide career coaching in how best to tailor an undergraduate education to the student career goals, and (ii) foster connections among students to develop a sense of BAC community.

The second initiative is to better coordinate advising between the Institute for Cross-college Biology Education (ICBE) staff and the BAC faculty advisors. This initiative is in the early planning stages. Currently, the ICBE staff provide excellent advice about the rules of the BAC program, and the BAC faculty advisors do a good job breaking those rules to accommodate students with specific needs. However, it is often not clear from the students’ perspective where to go to get done what they need to get done; through this initiative, we hope to devise a clear plan, and explain it clearly to students and advisors, where students should turn with different types of questions.