COLLEGE OF LETTERS & SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

PROGRAM OVERVIEW: Biological Aspects of Conservation.
23 May 2006
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The Biological Aspects of Conservation (BAC) program is a popular L&S baccalaureate major in which students gain broad experience in biological and social sciences related to environmental and ecological disciplines, with a central focus on applied and theoretical aspects of conservation biology. Our students are typically committed to conservation of natural resources or environmental policy development, and who prefer an overview of theoretical ecology. This is the major for students who love conservation topics, without calculus, organic chemistry, or physics. In our program, students learn the languages of environmental studies, conservation biology, and natural history, they gain expertise with the biology of at least one major group of organisms, and many of them gain hands-on experience through Directed Studies, Senior Thesis, and/or study abroad at biological field stations.

YEAR	DEGREES CONFERRED	EXIT SURVEYS RECEIVED	GPA
2002-2003	63	-NA-	
2003-2004	80	3	
2004-2005	53	19	3.14 Spring, 2.84 Summer

As BAC becomes integrated into ICBE (starting in 2004-2005), the new and exceptionally qualified staff have made major contributions to the program. For example, the major now has an up-to-date web page linked to other biological majors and resources on campus. We have initiated a majors' exit survey and we are collecting data in an organized manner. The staff handle most assignments of new majors to advisors, give advice on L&S requirements, assist in transferring and accepting credits from courses taken off campus, and advise students concerning field and lab experiences.

Learning objectives or goals

Upon graduating, a BAC major will be able to speak and write intelligently about:

- General principles of biology, chemistry, the physical environment, ecology, and evolution.
- The biology of at least one group of organisms.
- The role of human society in conservation.
- Principles of conservation biology.

Beginning in May 2005, we asked our graduating seniors to respond to an exit survey. Results of this survey were discussed at our annual faculty meeting in March 2006, and will be used on a continuing basis to redesign the faculty's offerings, expectations, and program assessments.

Strategies for measuring students' performance on program-level goals

The BAC has no courses or faculty of its own, and depends on the host departments for their assessment of the success of their courses, as well as for the faculty to teach the courses. BAC advisors contribute their time and energy to the program over and above their regular departmental responsibilities. The BAC program uses only course grades as a measure of student performance.

Students are required to choose a BAC advisor when they declare the major. Meetings with the advisor provide students with experienced guidance in their areas of interest. These meetings often result in participation in field courses, study abroad, and/or participation in laboratory research or service-learning.

Year	Average GPA of Graduates	Number of responses to Graduation Survey	Preparation for next Career Step. 1-5 scale	Overall Satisfaction with BAC. 1-5 scale
2004-2005		3	4.0	4.3
2005-2006		19	3.58	4.05

Statement on efforts to measure students' performance on program-level goals

Students have been requesting a specific BAC seminar-like course, in which they would be exposed to the broad outline of conservation biology, be given guidance as to the possibilities of the major, and develop a bond with other BAC students. A plan for this course will be discussed during the next year and at our annual faculty meeting.

The BAC capstone seminar will potentially be case-based, focused on a particular practical conservation problem. Of course, the issue here is finding the faculty willing to take responsibility for the course – because ours is a program in which faculty participate in addition to their regular departmental duties. One possibility is to enlist 1-2 of the Conservation Biology/Sustainable Development students to run it, with a titular BAC faculty person overseeing it.

We have also failed to offer the Bot / Zool 639-640 capstone course these past several years, both for lack of students (one year) and lack of faculty availability.

Thoughtful discussion:

BAC students who do not meet with their advisors regularly have been receiving little guidance in their major, other than the statement on the web site or in the Undergraduate Catalog. This works well for self-motivated students, but our graduation surveys suggest that some students would benefit from an all-majors BAC annual meeting or course. The ICBE staff have offered to organize such a meeting, and the faculty will, in the next year, be exploring the possibility of a seminar.

All data from student records and the graduation survey are communicated to all BAC advisors. The BAC chair is responsible for an annual meeting of the faculty, at which changes to the program are often discussed and acted on.

The BAC faculty is finding the graduation survey instructive, as the ICBE staff are continuing to find ways to induce greater student participation.

For several years, a group of environmentalists and environmental scientists have explored the possibility of an environmental major. The BAC chair has represented the program in this process. It is obvious that BAC, along with several environmental and ecological majors and programs in L&S and CALS, has a stake in the nature of the new environmental major or program. BAC may see changes in its goals in order to accommodate the new major.

The BAC program has at least one all-faculty meeting each year, and we have recently been meeting in February. This meeting provides the annual deadline for assessment innovations.

If you would like additional information, please contact:

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