

CUSP Resolution 2005-2006B
Resolution to Approve New Degree “Humanities, Science, and Environment”
Bachelor of Arts from the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences

Approved by CUC:	November 29, 2005
Approved by CUSP:	December 12, 2005
First Reading University Council:	February 6, 2006
Second Reading University Council:	February 20, 2006
Approved by the President:	February 20, 2006
Approved by the Board of Visitors:	March 27, 2006
Effective Date:	Fall 2006

WHEREAS, with the increasing complexity of environmental challenges, employers are seeking graduates with a well-rounded understanding of the issues, who are able to act as effective communicators across different fields and interest groups; and

WHEREAS, education is vital in preparing us to respond to environmental issues, and university curricula, in particular, can train students in leadership roles; and

WHEREAS, an interdisciplinary approach to the scientific, technological, and socio-cultural dimensions of the issues can provide the requisite knowledge and skills; and

WHEREAS, this degree concurs with Virginia Tech’s Strategic Plan that “the creation of new knowledge will benefit society [and] new areas of scientific investigation are interdisciplinary in nature”; and

WHEREAS, the degree draws on faculty and courses from 22 departments and programs within a number of colleges; and

WHEREAS, substantial interest has been expressed by students and program advisors for such a degree; and

WHEREAS, numerous employment and graduate opportunities will be available for graduates with this degree;

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Bachelor of Arts in Humanities, Science, and Environment, be approved and the proposal forwarded to the President, the Board of Visitors, and State Council of Higher Education (SCHEV) for approval.

PROPOSAL SUMMARY

Bachelor of Arts in Humanities, Science, and Environment

Scientists and policy analysts maintain that the 21st century will be the “environmental century.” The directions humanity takes will be crucial vis-à-vis sustaining biodiversity, ocean fisheries, agricultural productivity, fresh water availability, and other natural resources. Education is crucial in preparing us to respond to environmental challenges at both global and local levels. University curricula, in particular, can provide a broad body of knowledge and train students to play innovative roles in this regard.

Environmental professionals and scholars must be knowledgeable about the multifaceted nature of environmental issues, have the training to communicate effectively, and be able to work well in collaborative settings. An interdisciplinary approach to the scientific, technological, and socio-cultural dimensions of the issues can provide the requisite knowledge and skills.

Our degree in Humanities, Science, and Environment offers students such an approach by drawing on disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Housed in Science and Technology in Society, pedagogical emphasis will be on understanding the role of science and technology in shaping the interactions between people and environment. What has been the impact of technological developments on the environment? How can technology be used to address problems? In what ways does scientific knowledge shape public understanding of the issues? What is the role of scientists in environmental policy-making? Knowledge of these dimensions of science and technology will be complemented through students exploring humanistic perspectives—such as the role of cultural beliefs, religion, literature, and ethics in expressing and shaping the human-nature relationship.

The range of courses in our proposal offers the breadth of learning necessary for understanding environmental issues, while allowing students to focus more intensively on particular subjects. By selecting appropriate required courses and electives, students can deepen their knowledge in specific areas of interest. Advising will be a significant component of our program, since students will need guidance to tailor their choices from a curriculum that provides multiple options.

The major components of the Humanities, Science, and Environment requirements are: 15 hours in Science and Technology in Society, 15 hours in Humanities, 24 hours in Social Sciences, 24 hours in Natural Sciences, and 6 hours in Communications.

We have researched the student interest in this degree. We have been encouraged about the prospects for a healthy undergraduate program by four sources: the Department of Biology, with about 1,400 majors (professor Jeff Walters and chair Bob Jones); Interdisciplinary Studies, with about 350 majors (Carol Sue Slusser and Michael Herndon); University Studies, with about 1,200 students (Elaine Matuszek and Kimberly Brown); and a positive response from a university-wide student survey. A substantial

percentage of students may be actively seeking, or potentially interested in, this undergraduate program.

Our goal is to provide an intellectual foundation, as well as marketable skills, for successful environment-related careers whatever options our graduates pursue. Upon completion of their undergraduate degree some graduates will enter the work force while others will attend graduate school. The range of suitable jobs, or graduate programs, will vary depending on students' choices from among the course options available to meet the degree requirements. Employment opportunities for our students will be enhanced by supervising student internships with local organizations and companies, by working closely with Career Services here at Tech, and by maintaining ties with established national organizations such as the Environmental Careers Organization. Through our research into comparable degree programs across the nation we have found that a degree in Humanities, Science, and Environment can prepare graduates for occupations in the following areas: education; environmental consulting; nongovernmental organizations; local or regional government; and private industry.