

Environmental Studies Departmental Handbook

Table of Contents

updated 26 October 2022

- I. Administration of the Department
 - II. Life of the Department/Departmental Culture
 - III. Mentoring
 - IV. Departmental Curriculum/Teaching
 - V. Faculty Hiring
 - VI. Faculty Personnel Processes
 - VII. Instructional Staff/Departmental Staff
 - VIII. Students
-

I. Administration of the Department

How are chairs selected? How is the transition to a new chair done? What are the responsibilities of the chair?

The chair in ENST is a tenured faculty member in the department and the term is two or three years. The department has established a file for recording the chair rotation and planning for the future, which lives in the [departmental shared Dropbox folder \(Chair rotation\)](#). The transition of chairs happens on 1 July and involves communication between the outgoing and incoming chairs and meetings with the ADC.

See also information on the Provost's website for the compensation policy for service as chair: <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/547910>

Specific duties of the chair include:

- Sets the departmental meeting agenda, runs meetings and prepares minutes
- Oversees the departmental budget (expenditures are approved by the full faculty, see below)
- Manages departmental course planning to ensure that introductory and core required courses are staffed and offered each year
- Works with new faculty to orient them to the college and department, including providing information about department and all college meetings and available resources for teaching and research (e.g., Center for Teaching & Learning, Quantitative Center, Center for Community Engagement, Grants Office, Academic Intern program, etc.) and assistance in learning college systems (e.g., computing & IT requests, ACData, Workday, etc.)

- Organizes departmental mentoring efforts (class visits/swaps, mid-semester check-ins, end-of-semester evaluations, annual conversations)
- Runs orientation sessions for the department and meets with students interested in Environmental Studies (ENST)
- Grants approval for new students declaring the ENST major and assigns major advisees to faculty
- Communicates with students in the Honors Program regarding deadlines, expectations, funding opportunities, presentations.
- Serves as the chair for FTE searches
- Oversees reappointment and tenure cases
- Collaborates with the ADC (and other faculty and students) to plan departmental events
- Communicates with the administration regarding departmental business including attendance at chairs meetings organized by the Provost

How are department meetings organized? How are minutes of department meetings handled? With whom are they shared?

The ENST faculty typically meet every other week unless more frequent meetings are needed (e.g., conducting a search, tenure/promotion deliberations). The chair organizes a meeting time and sets the agenda with reference to upcoming college deadlines (e.g., course approvals, teaching times, advising/pre-registration week, reappointment/tenure cases, search procedures, etc.). Agenda items are also contributed by faculty in the department.

Copies of the agenda and any materials associated to the business at hand are available (and archived) in the [departmental shared Dropbox folder \(Meetings\)](#).

The chair in ENST is responsible for writing and circulating minutes following faculty meetings. Minutes are circulated to all contributing faculty (tenured, tenure-line, lecturers, and visitors) and the departmental coordinator and are available on the departmental shared Dropbox resource.

How are department records and records of department decisions and policies maintained?

The department maintains several departmental folders accessible via Dropbox. Folders for various subsets of faculty are maintained, including a main folder accessible to all contributing faculty (tenured, tenure-line, lecturers, and visitors), another to tenured faculty members in ENST (used for reappointment and tenure cases), and a third to full professors in the department (used for promotion cases).

The departmental coordinator maintains records of past searches and reappointment, tenure, and promotion cases in a separate archived folder available only to the ADC to protect anonymity.

As part of the ENST faculty folder, the department maintains records of meeting agenda items & minutes (described above), advisee assignments and advising information for faculty, past/current/future course planning, Study Away or Five College credit awarded for major credit, and Honors thesis information. Policy changes are also updated on the ENST website by the chair or departmental coordinator.

Who communicates with the provost and dean of the faculty's office about departmental matters?

The chair and ADC are the primary contacts with the Dean of Faculty/Provost's Office regarding departmental matters. The Dean of Faculty hosts a luncheon with the academic coordinators twice a year to share and discuss academic department issues.

How are faculty leaves planned and coordinated?

The department maintains a list of leave eligibility for faculty along with course planning information. This helps us anticipate semesters in which a visitor might be requested.

Relevant links:

- Departmental planning for faculty leaves – <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/482517>
- Requesting a sabbatical or leave of absence – <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/83119>

What is the process for preparing the annual budget?

The chair prepares the budget in consultation with the ADC and with input from colleagues if needed. The ENST budget can be viewed in Workday under the Financial Dashboard (AMH BVA by Cost Center); select 'actual' for review of current year expenditures.

Relevant link:

- Dean/Provost's website with instructions to chairs regarding budget, space, and equipment in the department – <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/482524>

How are department accounts and expenditures overseen?

Requests for departmental funds are approved at the departmental level as part of our regular meetings (or via e-mail if urgent or otherwise outside of regular meeting times). Occasionally, the chair may approve smaller (up to \$250, uncontroversial requests, and then inform the department about the decision and level of support. The departmental coordinator manages the budget and consults the chair as needed.

How are space needs determined and addressed?

The departmental coordinator solicits teaching room assignment information from faculty and manages room reservations for special departmental events.

How are departmental spaces overseen?

Environmental Studies does not have departmental meeting space (e.g., a conference room). The departmental ADC has an office in Beneski and is also the ADC in Geology. One faculty member in ENST has a laboratory in the Science Center, whereas all other science faculty in ENST have laboratories in a second department (Biology or Geology).

How is laboratory and student safety monitored?

All protocols for laboratory and student safety, student/faculty training, and laboratory monitoring are handled through the Environmental Health and Safety Office and are coordinated at the level of the building (either Beneski or Science Center).

Relevant links:

- Environmental Health and Safety – <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/46953>
- Laboratory Safety – <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/470806>

How does the department oversee lab equipment?

Individual faculty who have purchased equipment related to teaching in ENST are responsible for maintaining that equipment. A list of equipment purchased using departmental funds is maintained by the ADC.

Equipment that is part of a faculty member's research laboratory is maintained by that faculty member.

II. Life of the Department/Departmental Culture

Who organizes departmental social events?

Departmental events are initiated and organized by the ADC, students or faculty who are willing to help organize and host gatherings. The ADC reminds the department of the typical timeline of events on campus (e.g., fall, family weekend, end of year gatherings), and helps to organize and arrange space and catering needs for events. Given that many have joint appointments in other departments, ENST sometimes jointly hosts (e.g., along with Biology or Geology) events during the semester.

How are new colleagues welcomed and supported?

Colleagues are encouraged to participate in the new faculty orientation program sponsored by the Provost's office and also the college matching/mentoring program in which new faculty are paired with senior colleagues at Amherst outside their home department.

The ADC & chair prepare materials for new faculty with information about obtaining a college ID, keys to academic spaces, computing services, parking permits, building access, college systems (ACData, Moodle, Workday), Dropbox access, etc. New faculty in ENST have offices that are co-located near other departmental colleagues and this facilitates interaction (& informal mentorship) among faculty in the department.

Relevant link:

- Welcoming new colleagues: chair checklist – <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/565533>

How are departmental decisions made?

Departmental decisions are discussed and determined at regular faculty meetings. Some examples include: reappointment/tenure/promotion, budgets, academic planning, search procedures/policies, FTE and visitor requests, etc.

Curricular decisions (e.g., approval of thesis proposals, level of Latin honors, approval of external course credit, curricular decisions) are also handled at regular meetings. That said, some decisions (e.g., approval for study abroad course credit or reimbursements for thesis expenses) can sometimes be addressed via email.

How is departmental service assigned?

All members of ENST contribute to service components as needed by the department. Although all members of Environmental Studies participate in FTE searches, only a subset (the chair and those faculty with half-time or greater positions in ENST) have been involved as a sub-committee to search for visitors. For jointly appointed faculty, the total advising load of faculty is taken into consideration when assigning ENST majors to faculty advisors. Advising of honors students in Environmental Studies is not often equally distributed (often for the same reason, honors advising commitments as part of a second department), but all faculty serve as thesis committee members.

How are students' complaints about faculty performance (including grade disputes) addressed?

To our knowledge, this has not occurred in ENST.

How are conflicts among faculty and other faculty, among faculty and staff, and among staff and other staff resolved?

To our knowledge, conflicts requiring mediation have not occurred in ENST.

III. Mentoring

What is your mentoring program for new faculty members? All tenure-track faculty members? Visitors?

The chair (in consultation with tenured members of the department) pairs tenure-line faculty or visiting faculty members with a tenured faculty member who serves as a mentor. The chair, in combination with the appointed mentor make up the mentoring committee for the tenure-line (or visiting) faculty. All colleagues are available for advice and pre-tenure faculty are encouraged to reach out to multiple colleagues.

In terms of course development, tenured & tenure-line faculty share syllabi with new colleagues, including information about scheduling of courses (& laboratories), and remind new faculty of available resources to assist their teaching including the departmental library liaisons (e.g., for E-reserves), Center for Teaching & Learning, Writing Center, Quantitative Center, Office of Community Engagement, Book & Plow Farm, Office of Sustainability, and Information Technology.

New faculty members are offered opportunities to visit colleagues' classes and are also asked to arrange class visits (or sometimes "class swaps") with tenured colleagues each semester. Tenured colleagues also provide support and discussion around new course

proposals prior to submission to the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) or proposals associated with internal funding opportunities like the Dayton Environmental Science Fund. The chair reminds all faculty, including tenure-line faculty, of upcoming college deadlines (e.g., Drop/Add period, mid-semester grade submissions, pre-registration information, new course proposals, Academic Intern applications, etc.).

The chair speaks with incoming colleagues about the role and procedures surrounding class visits, student evaluations, and the annual conversation, as well as the timing regarding standing for reappointment and tenure. The chair also shares information about the role of the Grants Office in supporting external funding, as well as internal opportunities for student research (e.g., Academic Interns) or teaching development (e.g., Dayton Environmental Science Fund).

At the college level, new colleagues are encouraged to participate in the new faculty orientation program sponsored by the Dean of Faculty/Provost's office and also the college matching/mentoring program in which new faculty are paired with senior colleagues at Amherst in different departments. Tenure-line faculty are reminded of the external mentoring program run through the Dean of Faculty/Provost's office and are encouraged to participate in in-house programs

Relevant links:

- Faculty mentoring – <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/438755>
- Supporting tenure-track colleagues, Mentoring checklist for chairs – <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/565535>
- Supporting visiting faculty – <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/561635>
- Mentoring program for new advisors – <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/482523>

IV. Departmental Curriculum/Teaching

How is curricular planning and assessment undertaken?

Course planning proceeds by confirming teaching assignments in the introductory course (ENST-120), the capstone senior seminar (ENST-495) and the core offerings in the major. We then confirm that sufficient elective courses are available across disciplinary divisions (Natural Sciences and Humanities / Social Sciences).

How are decisions made about offering new courses, first-year seminars, and cross-listed courses?

Courses to be cross-listed in ENST must be taught by a member of ENST, but credit towards the ENST major occurs regularly for a number of non-ENST listed courses (e.g., courses in Biology, Geology, History, Sociology, Statistics, etc.). Non-ENST courses that count towards the major are listed in the catalog as “Related Courses” and updated for students to view on the ‘Major Requirements’ page on the Environmental Studies website.

Relevant links:

- Curriculum in Environmental Studies (i.e., the Curriculum tab on the Courses page) – https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/departments/environmental_studies/courses?display=curriculum
- Course requirements in ENST – <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/576778>

How are teaching times determined? Do pre-tenure colleagues receive priority?

Teaching days/times are solicited from faculty, reviewed by the chair, and discussed in faculty meetings to avoid or minimize overlap between courses with particular attention to the needs of pre-tenure colleagues. The chair and ADC maintain a schedule on Dropbox, available to all faculty, with available teaching days/times.

How is the work surrounding external reviews accomplished?

Environmental Studies became a department in spring 2014 but has not undertaken an external review since that time.

Relevant link:

- Guidelines for external reviews – <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/483850>

V. Faculty Hiring

How are requests for new faculty FTE positions decided?

Discussions around potential FTE and visitor requests happen in regular meetings and requests are approved by the department. All members of the department participate in searches for new tenure-line colleagues. In contrast, only a subset of the department including the chair and those members with half-time or greater positions in ENST have been involved in a sub-committee to search for visitors.

How are requests for visiting positions and one-course hires done?

Discussion about whether to request visiting positions or one-course hires happens during regular faculty meetings.

How is faculty hiring done?

The most recent search in Environmental Studies followed the best practices as outlined on the Dean of Faculty/Provost's website, including an initial departmental meeting with the Dean/Provost and the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. In short, the advertisement is drafted and approved by members of the department prior to sending to the administration for approval. The ADC and chair organize distribution of the job ad and colleagues work to advertise the position as broadly as possible via their own networks. At the first meeting of the semester, the department finalized a search schedule and agreed on meeting times for the semester. We developed rubrics that were used in application assessment and developed a shared script to use for Zoom interviews. Candidates invited to campus met with faculty and students in Environmental Studies (and colleagues in related fields), members of the administration (Dean/Provost, Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion), and presented a research seminar to the college community. The chair of the department is also the chair of the search committee. All materials associated with the search are archived as a resource for future searches in the department.

Relevant links:

- Faculty hiring – <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/330504>
- For departments conducting searches – <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/330515>

VII. Instructional Staff/Departmental Staff

Academic Departmental Coordinator

The ADC in Environmental Studies includes a five hour per week commitment to Environmental Studies, with remaining hours in the position dedicated to the Department of Geology.

The ADC completes administrative tasks for the department including entering course information, preparing course evaluations, reappointment/tenure/promotion cases, course catalog editing, and budgetary functions. In addition, the ADC communicates directly with students regarding upcoming events. The ADC also helps to organize and support departmental gatherings and functions.

How is the hiring of new staff done?

Environmental Studies does not have staff that are hired through the department.

Relevant link:

- Staff hiring – <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/482892>

How are staff members' work schedules coordinated and supervised?

The ADC and chair communicate directly regarding work schedules.

How are annual performance reviews done?

Environmental Studies does not have staff that are formally evaluated through the department. Instead, the ADC's primary position and evaluation lies in the Department of Geology. In some cases, the Chair of Geology reaches out to Environmental Studies concerning the review of the ADC.

How are responsibilities and tasks determined and assigned to the ADC?

The chair and the ADC communicate directly regarding responsibilities.

Relevant link:

- Staff supervision (links) – <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/482893>

VIII. Students

How is the coordination of student advising/engagement in the major handled? How is the advising of majors coordinated? How are advisees assigned?

The chair (& often other colleagues) participate in first-year orientation sessions for students thinking about taking courses in the department. Prior to pre-registration, the chair holds an information session for students potentially interested in majoring in ENST.

The chair meets with students prior to major declaration to make sure they are on track with requirements, to provide information about departmental resources and opportunities, and to learn more about new majors.

The chair re-assigns advisees when colleagues go on leave and assigns advisors to new majors in proportion to the total number of advisees that a faculty member holds. Faculty members in their first year at the college are not assigned major advisees.

Relevant link:

- Assignments of majors to advisors – <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/482518>

How are theses evaluated?

Students undertaking Honors research in ENST have an advisor and two committee members and are encouraged to schedule committee meetings to discuss their plans for research and obtain feedback regarding work to date. After submission of the final thesis, the student along with the advisor and committee participate in a “committee defense meeting” in which the faculty ask open-ended questions about the research, the specific arguments, implications of the work, etc. Following the committee defense, candidates for Honors also prepare an oral presentation delivered to students and faculty in the department that is also open to the wider college community. Following these events, the full faculty in ENST meet to discuss the cohort of Honors candidates, including grades and levels of honors.

Relevant link:

- Honors Program in ENST – <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/115554>

How is student placement organized?

Credit is not offered for advanced placement in Environmental Studies. However, students who have taken AP Statistics or AP Micro and Macroeconomics can sometimes place out of these core requirements with permission from the department. Students who place out of a required course must replace that course with an additional elective.

At our 8th April 2022 meeting, we approved several placement policies; these are kept current and communicated to students on the “Curricular Policies” page on our website – <https://www.amherst.edu/mm/671747>

