



# Cyclical Program Review Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan for the Academic Programs Offered by the School of Environmental Studies

## Programs Reviewed

### **Undergraduate**

- BA, BScH Environmental Science (major)
- BA, BAH Environmental Studies (major, joint honours, minor)

### Subjects of Specialization:

- BScH Environmental Biology (with the Department of Biology)
- BScH Environmental Chemistry (with the Department of Chemistry)
- BScH Earth System Science (with the Department of Geography and Planning)
- BScH Environmental Geology (with the Department of Geological Sciences & Geological Engineering)
- BScH Environmental Life Sciences (with the Department of Biomedical & Molecular Sciences).
- BScH Environmental Toxicology

### **Graduate**

- MES, PhD Environmental Studies  
Two variants of the Master of Environmental Studies (MES) are offered; research-based and course-based.

## Overview

In accordance with Queen's University Quality Assurance Processes (QUQAP), this final assessment report (FAR) provides a synthesis of the external evaluation, internal responses, and assessment of the above programs. This report identifies the significant strengths of the programs, and opportunities for program improvement.

An implementation plan (IP) is attached that identifies:

- How the recommendations will be implemented.
- Who is responsible for acting on and monitoring progress on the recommendations.
- Resource and governance implications resulting from the recommendations.
- Timelines for implementation of the recommendations.

## Final Assessment Report: Executive Summary

### Summary of Review

- 1) The School of Environmental Studies (SES) produced a self-study document that was reviewed by the Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science, the Vice-Provost and Dean, School of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs, and the Vice-Provost (Teaching and Learning). The self-study was approved on October 25, 2024.
- 2) The review team visit took place on March 24-25, 2025. The review team members were:
  - i. Dr. Steve Easterbrook, Director and Professor, School of the Environment, University of Toronto.
  - ii. Dr. Derek Armitage, Director and Professor, School of Environment, Resources and Sustainability, University of Waterloo.
  - iii. Dr. Gema Olivo, Professor, Department of Geological Sciences and Geological Engineering, Queen's University.
- 3) The visit included meetings with
  - i. Students (undergraduate and graduate)
  - ii. Faculty
  - iii. Staff
  - iv. School Director, Undergraduate and Graduate Chairs
  - v. Heads of Cognate Departments
  - vi. Librarian
  - vii. Dean and Associate Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science
  - viii. Vice-Provost and Dean, School of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs
  - ix. Vice-Provost (Teaching and Learning)
- 4) The review team reported on April 16, 2025. The School Director, Faculty Dean and the Vice-Provost and Dean (School of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs (SGSPA) provided responses to the review team report by December 2, 2025.
- 5) The Senate Cyclical Program Review Committee (SCPRC) considered the review team report and a draft Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan at its meeting on January 26, 2026. The Report and Plan was approved at that meeting.

**The following strengths were noted:**

- Highly engaged faculty, staff and students (graduate and undergraduate) strongly motivated and committed to the success of the SES program.
- The quality of the faculty is exceptional, as indicated by research intensity, commitment to teaching and overall engagement.
- Faculty regularly engage in team-teaching, using a strong collaborative model. This has a positive impact on the student experience.
- The intellectual quality of student experience is strong.
- Undergraduate enrolments are strong.
- There is clear evidence that the School offers a unique interdisciplinary environmental program that can continue to serve as a model intellectual hub of integrative teaching and scholarship.
- There has been a conscious effort to increase Indigenous content throughout the program via guest speakers, case studies and inclusion of courses from Global Development Studies.
- The programs align closely with the missions of the university and the Faculty of Arts and Science.

**The following opportunities for enhancement were noted:**

- Planning for the maintenance of the programs' high quality in light of upcoming faculty retirements and budgetary challenges.
- Ongoing communication among the School's instructors and with allied programs on how program learning outcomes are mapped into course syllabi.
- In rolling out the new modular degree structure, continue to work with the Departments of Chemistry and Geological Sciences and Geological Engineering on satisfying accreditation requirements in the relevant specialist programs.
- Reflection on times to completion for the course-based and research-based streams of the master's program. The average time to completion for course-based students is only marginally shorter than for thesis-based students.

**Summary of Review Team Recommendations**

The reviewers made ten recommendations in the following areas. For a full list of the recommendations, please see the Implementation Plan.

- Protect the School's ability to hire an Indigenous faculty member, with flexibility in the hiring process recognizing the commitment needed to long-term relationship building.
- Address the impending gap in faculty resource (due to retirements) in applied resource governance, environmental planning/assessment, and environmental philosophy, to ensure the programs maintain their balance across the sciences, social sciences and humanities.
- Additional capacity to support staffing for the School, which has a positive impact on the student experience.

- Additional sources of funding to support graduate students should be a priority for fundraising.
- Strategic assessment of field course opportunities.
- The School's research and teaching should be further recognized as a model of effective implementation of interdisciplinary approaches.
- Continue the review of core courses, addressing some potential overlaps or repetition in course content and further ensure balance in the delivery of social and natural science perspectives and perspectives from Indigenous ways of knowing.
- Confirm/extend strategies to enhance students' enrolment access to desired courses.
- More regular coordination and communication with allied programs/academic units.
- Reconnect students with available library resources and support.

### **Status**

The academic programs in the School of Environmental Studies have been approved to continue.

Dates monitoring reports due: August 2027 & February 2030

Date of next review: 2030-2031 academic year

Prepared by Vice-Provost (Teaching and Learning), School, Faculty Dean and Dean, SGSPA:  
May – December 2025

Approved by the Senate Cyclical Program Review Committee: January 26, 2026



## Implementation Plan: Programs Offered by the School of Environmental Studies

**Recommendation 1:** Protecting and *maintaining the ability of the School of Environmental Studies (SES) to hire an Indigenous faculty member* beyond the current timeframe is crucial. The self-study revealed an administrative time constraint on the completion of the hiring process. However, hiring an Indigenous faculty member takes time and requires a *commitment to long-term relationship building* and recognition of the different ways in which Indigenous candidates may demonstrate impact. A lack of flexibility in the hiring process will undermine the ability of SES to meet their EDII commitments and advance reconciliation, and to the interdisciplinary ethos of the School. This recommendation also aligns with identified opportunities for future enhancement of SES programs by enhancing Indigenous curriculum in coursework and research.

Planned Action(s)	Deans' Contributions to Plan, where appropriate:	Person(s) Responsible for Leading Implementation.	Resource and/or Governance Implications	Timeline and Milestones
<b>Action A:</b> Interview short-listed candidates and identify the preferred candidate	Faculty Dean: no specific Faculty Dean role in this action plan	Joint SES/BIOL appointments committee (chaired by Acting Director Winn)	None.	Interviews to proceed in Fall 2025; identify preferred candidate and

	Vice-Provost and Dean, SGSPA: No role in the action plan.			negotiate hiring terms shortly thereafter
<b>Action B:</b> In case of failed search, request extended timeline from Provost Evans	Faculty Dean: Support the work of SES in seeking a request to repost.  Vice-Provost and Dean, SGSPA: No role in the action plan.	Director of SES (Danby/Winn) with support of FAS Dean (Lemieux)	Additional search costs borne by SES and BIOL.	If search fails then request would be made immediately, likely November 2025.

**Recommendation 2:** The self-study process and site visit has made clear that several expected retirements within a short time frame will significantly constrain the ability to deliver key social science and humanities components of the program curriculum. Consistent with recommendation 2, planning for this eventuality should commence as soon as possible, and in particular, to ***address the impending gap related to applied resource governance, environmental planning/assessment, and environmental philosophy***. Given the hiring freeze and other budgetary challenges, an actionable recommendation is difficult to offer. However, the self-study and subsequent conversations highlight a recognition of this priority and a need for greater collaboration across units, and strategic use of opportunities such as the Canada Research Chairs program to ensure these programs maintain their balance across the sciences, social sciences and humanities.

Planned Action(s)	Deans' Contributions to Plan, where appropriate:	Person(s) Responsible for Leading Implementation.	Resource and/or Governance Implications	Timeline and Milestones
<b>Action A:</b> Explore potential to hire a faculty member in applied resource governance and/or	Faculty Dean: Support SES with requests for new TT appointments.	SES Director (Danby/Winn)	Any new faculty position will require money for salary	2025/26 academic year and onwards.

environmental assessment outside of the regular faculty hiring freeze, including possible submissions for CRC or QNS.	Vice-Provost and Dean, SGSPA: No role in the action plan.		and start-up funding.	
<b>Action B:</b> Engage in discussions with other departments to gauge their interest in joint positions and draft description where appropriate.	Faculty Dean: no specific Faculty Dean role in this action plan  Vice-Provost and Dean, SGSPA: No role in the action plan.	SES Director (Danby/Winn) in consultation with other FAS department heads	None.	2025/26 academic year and onwards.

**Recommendation 3:** There is clear evidence that SES staffing levels do not reflect the complexity and scope of SES program delivery (i.e., across both graduate and undergraduate programs). Despite the demands on their time, *the positive impact on and contribution of SES staff to student experience* emerged as a strong theme during the site visit. As FAS continues to experiment with administrative hub models, **additional capacity to support SES staff is warranted and may include additional support for marketing and communications and program advising.**

Planned Action(s)	Deans' Contributions to Plan, where appropriate:	Person(s) Responsible for Leading Implementation.	Resource and/or Governance Implications	Timeline and Milestones
<b>Action A:</b> Continue working with FAS to take advantage of intended efficiencies associated with recently centralized services including research finance and marketing and communications.	Faculty Dean: Support SES with the staff support challenges they face in the context of needs across the Faculty.	SES Director (Danby/Winn)	None.	Ongoing, with an informal assessment to be completed in Spring 2026.

	Vice-Provost and Dean, SGSPA: No role in the action plan.			
<b>Action B:</b> Explore ways of improving efficiencies and fairness of resource sharing within FAS Administrative Hub #6.	Faculty Dean: no specific Faculty Dean role in this action plan  Vice-Provost and Dean, SGSPA: No role in the action plan.	SES Director (Danby/Winn) in consultation with heads of Biology, Psychology, and Kinesiology.	None.	Ongoing, with a 2-year post- implementation assessment recommended sometime in 2026

**Recommendation 4:** The graduate program is increasingly vulnerable given reductions in funding and TA support. The vulnerability stems in part from the intake of graduate students being linked to supervisor funding availability, and the increased pressure on faculty to meet funding guarantees. Differences in availability of funding and funding models across natural and social sciences adds additional levels of uncertainty and vulnerability. **Additional sources of funding to support graduate students should be a priority for fundraising**, to establish new graduate scholarships and/or a boost to the unit’s trust funds, to help cover gaps and inequities in graduate funding levels. This could be a key target for advancement, and SES alumni might be interested in helping support the graduate program.

Planned Action(s)	Deans’ Contributions to Plan, where appropriate:	Person(s) Responsible for Leading Implementation.	Resource and/or Governance Implications	Timeline and Milestones
<b>Action A:</b> Develop a strategy to revise graduate student funding allocations with the intent of increasing funding for research-based students. Three components are expected:	Faculty Dean: Support SES with advancement initiatives  Vice-Provost and Dean, SGSPA: The SGSPA would	SES Director (Danby/Winn) and Graduate Chair (Goebel) in consultation with	None foreseen for developing the strategy <i>per se</i> . However, finances from fundraising efforts and	(1) Engage with advancement during Fall 2025 and implement

<p>(1) work with Queen’s and FAS Advancement to bolster fundraising;  (2) revise internal policy on supervisory financial support; and  (3) assess potential for growth and/or restructuring of course-based master’s program.</p>	<p>be more than happy to consult as requested by the SES.</p>	<p>SGSPA, FAS, and Advancement.</p>	<p>additional supervisory research grants will take time to acquire. Growth of the course-based MES could require additional teaching capacity.</p>	<p>strategy in 2026;  (2) Implement revised policy for Fall 2026 graduate student admissions cohort;  (3) Begin assessment in Fall 2025. Implement changes for 2026/27 academic year if possible.</p>
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**Recommendation 5:** Access to regular field course opportunities and other experiential learning activities was identified as a priority for SES students and core faculty. There appears to be a strong alumni network and opportunity for external support to augment experiential course delivery options within a reasonable distance from campus. A ***strategic assessment of field course opportunities*** and the manner in which they can be integrated into the core course spine and/or replace some of the overlap previously identified will enhance student experience and augment the program learning outcomes. This recommendation is consistent with the value and importance of practical application as identified in the future enhancement section of the self-study.

Planned Action(s)	Deans' Contributions to Plan, where appropriate:	Person(s) Responsible for Leading Implementation.	Resource and/or Governance Implications	Timeline and Milestones
<p><b>Action A:</b> Examine the feasibility of expanding field courses and field trips available to ENSC/ENVS students. To this end:</p> <p>(1) Examine feasibility of adding a dedicated field course to the roster of ENSC courses and implement if reasonable;</p> <p>(2) Identify potential for increasing the number of field trips in existing ENSC undergraduate and graduate courses; and</p> <p>(3) Inquire about opportunities for ENSC students to enrol in dedicated field courses offered by cognate units.</p>	<p>Faculty Dean: no specific Faculty Dean role in this action plan</p> <p>Vice-Provost and Dean, SGSPA: No role in the action plan.</p>	<p>SES Director (Danby/Winn) and Undergraduate Committee Chairperson (Brown)</p>	<p>Addition of a new course would likely mean not regularly offering another course unless budget for an adjunct or overload appointment could be found.</p> <p>An approach to offset added costs to students could be necessary.</p>	<p>(1) Fall 2025 with the possibility of submitting a new course addition to FAS curriculum committee for review in November 2025.</p> <p>(2) Fall 2025 and Winter 2026 with intent of additional field trips offered in 2026/27.</p> <p>(3) Fall 2025 and Winter 2026 with hope of identifying course options for students in the 2026/27 academic year.</p>

**Recommendation 6:** The self-study revealed a consistent message across different constituents (e.g., senior administration, affiliated faculty and students) that SES was *a unique and thriving academic hub of interdisciplinary activity* that embodies the very principles and practices associated with the Queen's strategic plan (i.e., advancing mission driven, interdisciplinary research). At the same time, there remains some disconnect (real and/or perceived) that the centrality of SES to this university-wide mission is undervalued. To address this concern, SES research and teaching (UG and graduate) should be *further recognized as a model* of effective implementation of interdisciplinary approaches, noting the strong connections to organizing frameworks such as the SDGs, enquiry-based learning and the development of place-based living labs around which student experience can be enhanced. SES administrators, staff and faculty are taking action to elevate this important message but further support from senior administration can augment these efforts.

Planned Action(s)	Deans' Contributions to Plan, where appropriate:	Person(s) Responsible for Leading Implementation.	Resource and/or Governance Implications	Timeline and Milestones
<p><b>Action A:</b> Promote Environmental Studies within the Queen's community as a model of interdisciplinary teaching and research.</p> <p>School to present at a faculty forum on interdisciplinarity and/or pedagogical approaches such as team teaching.</p>	<p>Faculty Dean: Continue to promote SES as a model of interdisciplinary work. Invite School to present at faculty-level forum.</p> <p>Vice-Provost and Dean, SGSPA: The SGSPA would be happy to promote SES student research.</p>	<p>SES Director (Danby/Winn) and FAS Dean (Lemieux)</p>	<p>None.</p>	<p>Presentation by end 2027.</p>
<p><b>Action B:</b> Encourage SES faculty members to sit on Faculty and University service committees to increase visibility of the unit on campus.</p>	<p>Faculty Dean: no specific Faculty Dean role in this action plan</p> <p>Vice-Provost and Dean, SGSPA: No role in the action plan.</p>	<p>SES Director (Danby/Winn)</p>	<p>Potential erosion of service capacity within SES when resources are already stretched thin.</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p>

**Recommendation 7:** There is strong alignment between program-level learning outcomes and the structure of the program. However, the site visit affirmed an opportunity for SES to continue its *review of the core courses* (i.e., the spine) and address some potential overlaps or repetition in course content, and to further ensure a balance in the delivery of social and natural science perspectives and perspectives from Indigenous ways of knowing.

Planned Action(s)	Deans' Contributions to Plan, where appropriate:	Person(s) Responsible for Leading Implementation.	Resource and/or Governance Implications	Timeline and Milestones
<p><b>Action A:</b> Review content of core spine of undergraduate courses to identify and remedy potential overlaps while ensuring that an appropriate balance between natural and social science perspectives is maintained.</p>	<p>Faculty Dean: no specific Faculty Dean role in this action plan</p> <p>Vice-Provost and Dean, SGSPA: No role in the action plan.</p>	<p>SES Director (Danby/Winn), Undergraduate Committee Chairperson (Brown), Instructors of ENSC230 (Hall) and ENSC330 (Goebel and Hall).</p>	<p>none</p>	<p>Spring 2025 (completed): Solicit input from faculty members on proposed changes to ENSC230 and ENSC330.</p> <p>Fall 2025: Implement revised curriculum in ENSC230.</p> <p>Winter 2026: Implement revised curriculum in ENSC330.</p> <p>Spring 2026: Review and assess changes as implemented. Adapt and refine for 2026/27 academic year.</p>

**Recommendation 8:** SES undergraduate students expressed some relatively minor issues in gaining access to desired courses. The issue is one that is recognized by program administration and efforts have been made to address the concern. Further efforts by SES to *confirm/extend strategies to enhance enrolment access* is recommended (e.g., enhanced communication with students about timing and options for enrolment in desired courses, negotiating to set aside enrolment space in key courses in other units).

Planned Action(s)	Deans' Contributions to Plan, where appropriate:	Person(s) Responsible for Leading Implementation.	Resource and/or Governance Implications	Timeline and Milestones
<p><b>Action A:</b> Continue discussions with cognate departments around the prospect of reserving some seats for ENSC/ENVS students in core undergraduate courses offered by these other units.</p> <p>Analyse where enrolment challenges occur to establish if there is a pattern that would guide future action.</p>	<p>Faculty Dean: Support SES in these conversations.</p> <p>Vice-Provost and Dean, SGSPA: No role in the action plan.</p>	<p>Undergraduate Committee Chairperson (Brown)</p>	<p>None to SES.</p>	<p>Ongoing, with the goal of acquiring some reserved seats for 2026 course registration.</p> <p>February 2027</p>

**Recommendation 9:** SES administration (and faculty) meet on an ad hoc basis to address program challenges and improve delivery of curriculum. This level of coordination is evidence in the self-study and related documentation. However, during the site visit, it was apparent that more *regularly scheduled coordination and communication from SES with allied programs/academic units* would be beneficial. In this regard, a bi-monthly (or convened as appropriate) FAS coordination group of the SES Director and allied academic unit heads is warranted to address emerging coordination challenges (e.g., opportunities to align environmental/physical geography curriculum in SES and Geography), program delivery needs, and the role of SES in supporting other interdisciplinary efforts across the Faculty.

Planned Action(s)	Deans' Contributions to Plan, where appropriate:	Person(s) Responsible for Leading Implementation.	Resource and/or Governance Implications	Timeline and Milestones
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<p><b>Action A:</b> The SES Director will participate in ongoing meetings with department heads from Geography &amp; Planning, Global Development Studies, and Geology and Geological Engineering to discuss opportunities for greater departmental collaboration and coordination. Heads from Biology and Chemistry will be consulted as necessary.</p>	<p>Faculty Dean: no specific Faculty Dean role in this action plan</p> <p>Vice-Provost and Dean, SGSPA: No role in the action plan.</p>	<p>Respective department heads and FAS Associate Deans.</p>	<p>No financial implications. However, scheduling demands should be recognized.</p>	<p>Regular meetings are planned for the 2025/26 year, likely having a bimonthly frequency.</p>
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**Recommendation 10:** The library liaison noted that opportunities to support SES UG students through in-class workshops has not been fully reestablished post-COVID. *Reconnecting SES students with available library resources* and support, particularly in core courses and seminars will facilitate academic integrity objectives and support program learning outcomes.

Planned Action(s)	Deans' Contributions to Plan, where appropriate:	Person(s) Responsible for Leading Implementation.	Resource and/or Governance Implications	Timeline and Milestones
<p><b>Action A:</b> Invite the library liaison to a monthly SES faculty meeting to provide an overview of in-class services available for undergraduate and graduate courses, as well as an overview of more general research services available for faculty and graduate students. Expand this to a more in-depth session at our annual departmental retreat if necessary.</p>	<p>Faculty Dean: no specific Faculty Dean role in this action plan</p> <p>Vice-Provost and Dean, SGSPA: No role in the action plan.</p>	<p>SES Director (Danby/Winn)</p>	<p>None.</p>	<p>Fall 2025: Presentation by library liaison to faculty members.</p> <p>Spring 2026: In-depth workshop at annual retreat (if necessary).</p>

<p><b>Action B:</b> Regularly remind course instructors of opportunities to engage with library at monthly departmental meetings and via email.</p>	<p>Faculty Dean &amp; Vice-Provost and Dean, SGSPA: No role in the action plan.</p>	<p>SES Director (Danby/Winn)</p>	<p>None.</p>	<p>Implemented for Fall 2025 and ongoing thereafter.</p>
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