

## **Innovation Credit Students Teaching Students Classes**

To whom it may concern:

This letter affirms the existence of an innovative pedagogical strategy hosted by the UVM Environmental Program to encourage and support student engagement in course development. Impetus for such courses has generally stemmed from student commitment to sustainability and environmental justice activism and reflect course content in these areas. One or two courses are approved each semester, based on subject area innovation, student interest, and faculty approval.

These courses are known in Environmental Studies as “Students-Teaching-Students,” based on an early model at Williams College. Some campuses around the U.S. (UC Berkeley, Oberlin College) offer student-directed courses but not for credit. The UVM course option offers students the opportunity to design, propose, and facilitate a seminar course as an approved ENVS *for-credit* academic course, usually 3 semester credits. The course number (ENVS 197) has been officially approved by the curriculum committees and faculties of the College of Arts and Sciences, the Rubenstein School, and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and can be used for new topics into the future. Student proposers draw on senior thesis write-ups and course readers of past courses for reference in developing assignments, readings, and pedagogical course philosophies.

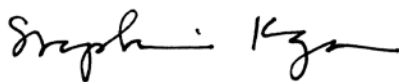
To propose a course, students (generally two co-teachers) prepare a draft syllabus and present it for approval at a general ENVS faculty meeting, along with evidence of their qualifications both as teachers and within the proposed content area (see attached guidelines). Recent sustainability-related course topics have included:

- Hunger, Leadership, and Social Change
- Emerging Communities: Building Resilience in Post-Crisis USA
- Ecological Tipping Points and World Systems Analysis
- Creating Change through Intentional Community
- Environmental Activism

Students drawn to these courses appreciate the shared model of peer teaching, the awareness of power and dominance relations, and the experiential orientation of class design. Elements of success include: well prepared syllabus and readings, clearly articulated assignments and grading rubrics, collaborative planning, weekly preparation and debriefing sessions, and clear course goals. Students work with faculty supervisors to address common challenges such as: issues of authority, leading discussions effectively, grading, and differences in teaching styles. Senior thesis course write-ups provide a rich learning field for students to build on other student teachers’ experiences and evolve the STS format.

In submitting this letter, I am verifying, both as advisor to a number of these STS courses and as Director of the Environmental Program, that our faculty support these courses and see them as enriching the diverse range of educational opportunities within Environmental Studies at UVM and providing another stimulating curriculum avenue for engaging sustainability, particularly the social and economic aspects.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Kaza, Ph.D.  
Professor and Director,  
UVM Environmental Program

**ENVS 197 Students-Teaching Students (STS) Courses**  
**University of Vermont**  
**Guidelines for Review and Approval**

ENVS 197 Students-Teaching-Students course option offers an opportunity for students to design, propose, and facilitate a seminar course as an approved ENVS for-credit academic course. The course number (ENVS 197) has been officially approved by the curriculum committees and faculties of the College of Arts and Sciences, the Rubenstein School, and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Senior thesis write-ups and course readers of recent courses are available at the Bittersweet for reference.

For a specific course to be approved for a given semester, student proposers should follow the guidelines below. Only full-time students who are in good academic standing (not on trial) may be student teachers. STS instructors may not enroll in the course while they are teaching, although they may receive either ENVS 202 or ENVS 291 credit for their efforts.

***1. Developing the course idea***

All students interested in proposing an STS course as a senior thesis capstone should enroll in ENVS 201 to develop their proposal and draft syllabus. They should consult with their 201 instructors and with the Director of the Environmental Program for assistance and resources. We highly recommend that courses be co-taught by two students who most often are ENVS majors and seniors (others are also welcome). It is very helpful if proposers have had teaching experience, particularly service as Teaching Assistant for a UVM course, especially ENVS 1 or 2. A draft syllabus should be developed, based on previous STS syllabi, and then reviewed by both the 201 instructor and the Director for preliminary approval before taking it forward for full faculty approval.

***2. Securing faculty approval***

Once a syllabus draft has been developed, student proposers will present their course idea to the ENVS faculty at its monthly meeting in either mid-October for spring courses or early March for fall courses. The following materials should be sent via email in a single attached pdf or word doc to the Director one week in advance of the faculty meeting:

(a) Syllabus, including

- course objectives
- schedule of class meetings with topics and assignments
- draft list of proposed texts and readings
- teaching plan for a typical week or session
- evaluation plan and assignment descriptions in brief

(b) Student facilitator bios, including

- copy of resume
- one page description of teaching and course experience relevant to the STS topic and methods
- explanation of role in the course and whether it will serve for a senior capstone experience

(c) Faculty sponsor agreement, i.e. who will supervise the student instructors

Students will then have 20-30 minutes to present their course ideas and answer faculty questions. Faculty may request additional information or revision before approval. Not all courses are automatically approved; they must meet faculty standards of critical thinking, challenging readings and assignments, and balanced viewpoints from multiple perspectives.

***3. Course implementation***

Once the course is approved, student instructors should continue to refine the course elements and prepare for teaching the course the following semester. They should meet regularly with their faculty

sponsor(s) until they have received faculty sponsor approval for the final syllabus. STS instructors are responsible for:

- promoting the course to encourage student enrollment
- reviewing student applications
- planning and conducting all class sessions
- soliciting student feedback on course effectiveness
- managing course budget expenditures
- evaluating student assignments
- determining final grades with the faculty sponsor