Institute of Environmental Studies

Strategic Plan

2014-2017
The Institute of Environmental Studies (IES) is delighted to present its Strategic Plan for 2014 - 2017. It is an opportunity for us to reflect on our strengths, identify areas for development and take the key strategic decisions needed to continue our work as a leading provider of environmental education in the Asia-Pacific region.

We offer strategic approaches to ensure that we maintain our reputation for excellence in teaching and learning, increase our interdisciplinary research and are at the forefront of public engagement with decision-makers in business, industry, government and the media. We also consider how to strengthen our established commitment to the wider environmental community – at both local and international levels.

As a Program Centre at the heart of UNSW, we make a significant contribution to the development of knowledge, learning and teaching for our students and society.

We have a proven reputation for interdisciplinary collaborations with our colleagues in the Faculty of Science, Environmental Management and Environmental Humanities and across UNSW. In 2014-2017, we will build on these networks aligning our work with the strategic plan of the University and the Faculty.

Finally, we reflect on succession planning to ensure that the IES is strategically positioned to address new challenges and respond to new opportunities in the future.

Professor Graciela Metternicht, Director

The IES is a progressive environmental studies Program Centre at UNSW. Established in 1992, it is committed to providing high-quality postgraduate education, and conducting leading edge research, with a special emphasis on integrative, multidisciplinary work.

High quality environmental education and applied research and teaching that responds to critical societal needs and influences policy and decision making is essential to provide creative responses to the multi-faceted environmental problems that Australia and the world face.

The Institute is an academic community of like-minded people with the skills and passion to make a difference through clear integrative thinking and the ability to engage people from different disciplines to understand the complex systems in which environmental issues are situated. We aim to integrate scientific research within policy and management frameworks, and to effectively communicate our research outcomes.

We are active in both our local and global community and work collaboratively with a range of government and non-government stakeholders. Our staff and Fellows provide advocacy and expertise to prestigious bodies including the UN Scientific Advisory Board, the Australia Indonesia Infrastructure Research Awards, the Australian Research Council of Experts and the Government of New South Wales.

We have developed a reputation for high quality research on: environmental management and sustainable development, including the use of geospatial technologies; conservation through sustainable use; sustainable energy management; biodiversity conservation including access and benefit sharing and integration with agricultural production for improved natural resource management; climate change adaptation and mitigation; impacts of infrastructure development on society and the environment.

The Institute will continue generating and sharing knowledge through research and education, to find solutions and influence policies that are environmentally sustainable and involve both eco-justice and social justice.

Thematic Research Areas:
- Transforming energy futures
- Tools and approaches for assessing and monitoring the state of the environment and emerging trends
- High quality environmental education
- Pathways to reconciling human well-being and conservation
- Monitoring the state of the environment and emerging trends
We aspire to:

- Be a leading environmental institute for Australia and the Asia-Pacific region, with a global outreach and influence;
- Equip our students with the high-level analytical and interdisciplinary research skills needed to address contemporary environmental policy and management challenges;
- Nurture and mentor our students to become the engaged and informed environmental management and sustainability leaders of the future;
- Build partnerships between academia, civil society and policy makers to influence and contribute to key environmental and sustainability policy debates;
- Draw on the diverse skills and knowledge of staff across UNSW to promote collaborative research and integrative thinking around sustainable development;
- Share the benefits of our research and teaching with the wider community through regular events, capacity building and outreach activities;
- Build on our strong alumni networks to support alumni career progression and identify emerging issues relevant to environmental management practitioners.

Through excellence in applied research and high-quality environmental education, we empower students, academics and decision-makers to work together towards a sustainable future.

Challenges and current strengths

- In 2013, we conducted a major review of the program, resulting in a better alignment with UNSW Environmental Management and Environmental Humanities undergraduate degrees. We maintain an ongoing exchange in postgraduate programs by coursework with the Faculty of Built Environment.
- Our program has high student satisfaction rates, and we have a large number of blended learning courses, with a plan to increase the offer in 2014.
- In meeting the challenge of increasing excellence in teaching and learning we must build skills, expertise and technical support of teaching staff, and establish clear succession planning.

There are significant challenges in enhancing the Institute’s reputation for excellence in integrative applied research. The current funding arena is complex, and to an extent falls short of supporting interdisciplinary ventures. It is increasingly important to seek alternative funding sources from the private sector and international sources or sponsorship funding. It is essential to negotiate strategically when setting the terms and benefits of the collaboration.

Our current research strengths, upon which this strategy builds, is in:

- Transforming energy futures;
- Pathways to reconciling human well-being and conservation;
- Developing and assessing tools and approaches for environmental management, monitoring, and emerging trends;
- Advancing high quality environmental education.

These themes align with the Australian Government Strategic Research Priorities, as well as major international initiatives for environmental sustainability of Asia and The Pacific Region.

Our approach to research is guided by:

- Integrative methods, with a problem-and-solution focus (rather than following disciplinary lines);
- Engaging with elements of the community, both in the work and in dissemination of research results. This includes stakeholders in the private sector, NGOs and government;
- Drawing on international as well as national experience and lessons.

This is exemplified in our work in Mitigating Global Climate Change with Sustainable Energy, where an interdisciplinary core of academics and members of community-based NGOs are developing strategies to transition Australia rapidly to almost zero greenhouse gas emissions, with a focus on technical and non-technical aspects of the transition.

- The IES has over 10 years proven expertise in delivering the Masters by Coursework and nested programmes. We recently updated and revised our programs to create a clear and multi-faceted pathway in postgraduate environmental education.
- The IES advertises its programmes across printed and digital media, produces a quarterly digital newsletter to staff, students and alumni and recently updated our website and marketing materials. We are currently working alongside the International Office and Faculty of Science to address international student recruitment needs.
- The IES works to broaden understanding about environmental issues of importance to the communities of New South Wales, Australia, and the Asia-Pacific regions. Staff and Fellows are already present across major media channels including the ABC, The Conversation, The Sydney Morning Herald and Twitter. We organise a successful public lecture program.
- In meeting the challenge to enhance our public profile and strengthening our Alumni network, we will need to ensure that effective resourcing is in place. Effective resourcing will include relevant support and/or training from UNSW marketing and communications, the Faculty of Science and IT in databases, social media and marketing strategies.
GOAL
Increase existing excellence in teaching and learning, to be recognised as a leading Australian destination for postgraduate environmental studies.

Goal Drivers
Continual improvement and reputation for excellence in teaching and learning in environment policy and management in Australia. This entails:

• Providing students with relevant set of analytical tools that can be drawn upon to address contemporary environmental and sustainability challenges, the ability to develop practical responses and a strong awareness of contemporary practice and future challenges;
• Increasing staff skills and capacity to utilise flexible education delivery modes;
• Ensuring that our portfolio of offerings reflects current and emerging requirements for environment policy and management expertise in government, business, and community;
• Using new technology to enhance teaching, where relevant.

Actions
1. Regular review of programs and courses;
2. Maintain currency in delivery methodologies to ensure flexible and blended learning approaches;
3. Establish partnerships with governments and professional organisations to offer continuing professional development courses and workshops.

Performance Indicators for 2014
1. An additional field-based learning experience is offered
2. A General Education course on “Protecting Earth’s Environment” is in place
3. One Continuing Professional development course piloted
4. Two additional courses incorporate flexible distance education mode
5. Overall student satisfaction is maintained (IEST courses have overall CATEI rating above 4.8)
6. Teaching practice is informed by research, through supporting the teaching–research nexus and promoting applied research internships.
GOAL

To enhance the Institute’s standing for excellence in applied research through a research programme that:

- Is interdisciplinary and collaborative;
- Is solution-oriented, bridging science and policy making;
- Addresses multifaceted complex environmental issues of the 21st century;
- Anticipates future challenges;
- Has a positive impact by improving policy, community, and teaching practices.
- Includes reflection and publication on environmental education practices.

Goal Drivers

- Many current environmental problems cannot be resolved by a singular disciplinary approach or science alone - multidisciplinary, integrated methods are needed. The Institute is positioned to promote collaborative research between the different UNSW Centres aiming for sustainability.
- The Faculty of Science and the School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Science are concerned with raising research profile and revenue; this research reputation also impacts on courses and programmes that are on offer at the IES. By harnessing existing talents, promoting collaborative alliances and strategic recruitment, and implementing succession planning, the IES aims for a moderate growth in research funding, capacity and profile.

Actions

Establish an Advisory Committee with clear Terms of Reference and membership criteria. The role of the Committee is to facilitate the IES becoming more strategic in planning and prioritising new research initiatives and alliances. The Committee’s work will require:

- Mapping the IES staff, Fellows and Affiliates current research landscape;
- Identifying strengths, gaps, opportunities;
- Developing capacity to ‘read the wind’ and anticipate emerging environmental priorities relevant to research for policy and management, while advancing current research strengths;
- Determining criteria for strategic high profile partnerships;
- Establishing linkages, alliances and partnerships with decision makers and with organisations that influence decisions makers.

In addition to the work of the Advisory Committee, IES staff and fellows will:

- Increase quality and impact of research output as measured by publications in peer reviewed journals and citations
- Explore opportunities to enrol new Higher Degree students
- Explore opportunities for research funding towards collaborative projects.

Performance Indicators for 2014

1. Research income increased by 10%
2. At least one new high profile collaboration or funding opportunity established in 2014
3. A framework is established and tested to assess the impact of complex multidisciplinary research on policy and decision making (translational to transformational) - turning research into practice
4. The current level of Higher Degree by Research students is maintained, and completion rates are consistent with UNSW policy
5. The quality and impact of research output is maintained
6. At least one research book published by IES staff or Fellows
7. Gaps and opportunities for collaboration are mapped, and one emerging area of research strength identified.
Goal

Goal Drivers

- To continue to attract high-calibre national and international students into our programs and to keep our programs current and anticipate the green skills requirements for a global workforce, so that we are recognised for the quality and currency of our environmental education by research and coursework.

GOAL

To enhance our public profile by effectively engaging with relevant professional associations, business, industry, government, the media and our local community. Strengthen and maintain links with our extensive alumni networks.

Actions

- Develop a successful marketing and communications strategy, in conjunction with the Faculty of Science;
- Increase media coverage across all channels – print, broadcast and digital;
- Pilot one new social media platform;
- Update Raisers Edge alumni networks database;
- Develop alliances with other faculties within the University to maintain the interdisciplinary approach to our teaching and learning;
- Provide current students with a broad local and international network to disseminate and share ideas and knowledge.

Performance Indicators for 2014

1. Raisers Edge alumni network database updated
2. Public profile is raised of relevant applied research/IES expertise through media engagement program
3. Three successful public lectures and/or seminars delivered
4. Our service to the wider community is continued with further engagement between the IES and Randwick city council, through joint activities
5. One major conference on environment and/or sustainability is hosted.
Goals Summary

**GOAL 1**

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**Goal drivers**

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  - Providing students with relevant set of analytical tools that can be drawn upon to address contemporary environmental and sustainability challenges, the ability to develop practical responses and a strong awareness of contemporary practice and future challenges;
  - Increasing staff skills and capacity to utilise flexible education delivery modes;
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- Explore opportunities to enrol new Higher Degree students
- Explore opportunities for research funding towards collaborative projects.

**GOAL 2**

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**GOAL 3**

To enhance our public profile by effectively engaging with relevant professional associations, business, industry, government, the media and our local community. Strengthen and maintain links with our extensive alumni networks.

**Goal drivers**

- To continue to attract high-calibre national and international students into our programs and to keep our programs current and anticipate the green skills requirements for a global workforce, so that we are recognised for the quality and currency of our environmental education by research and coursework.

**Actions**

- Explore opportunities for research funding towards collaborative projects.
- Continue to attract high-calibre national and international students into our programs and to keep our programs current and anticipate the green skills requirements for a global workforce, so that we are recognised for the quality and currency of our environmental education by research and coursework.
- Increase media coverage across all channels – print, broadcast and digital;
- Pilot one new social media platform;
- Update Raisers Edge alumni networks database;
- Develop alliances with other faculties within the University to maintain the interdisciplinary approach to our teaching and learning;
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“Science is crucial to the future of mankind. Scientific principles are increasingly governing our approach to understanding the world; from the success of the human genome project, through refined models of evolution and the crucial issues around climate change, to new scientific and mathematical models of economics and finance.

In teaching, where we play a crucial role in educating students from almost every other Faculty, we aspire to equip students to contribute to Australia and the world, increase our reputation through engagement both locally and internationally and drive public policy through improved information on scientific issues”

*Professor Merlin Crossley, Dean, Faculty of Science*

“The School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences will, through its individual staff and associated research groups, conduct internationally-recognised research and high quality teaching, generate and attract research leaders and innovators, and deliver advances in a diversity of pure and applied fields within the biological, earth and environmental sciences.

Teaching is an important activity of the School, in fulfilling the traditional role of universities in transferring knowledge and skills to the next generation, in generating future research students and in provision of the main source of operating funds. The teaching and learning experience should be informed by research”.

*Associate Professor David Cohen, Head of School, School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Science*