

Rural Studies Minor Proposal

Proposed by Chris Laingen (GEL/GEG) and Deb Reid (HIS) **EFFECTIVE DATE:** Fall 2015

Eastern Illinois University sits in a predominately rural and agricultural area. EIU students, whether they come from rural, suburban or urban backgrounds, prepare for careers that often take them away from rural places, a process called “brain drain.” This interdisciplinary rural studies minor is designed to help students be more informed about rural issues and be prepared, where possible, to take leadership roles in rural areas and in rural initiatives. Rural studies has rebounded recently as topics as wide ranging as slow-food, bio-fuels, and the Let’s Move initiative lead to conversations about environmental sustainability and rural stewardship. Academic interest takes various forms, including a new interdisciplinary journal, *Middle West Review* (University of Nebraska Press, launched Fall 2014), and grant opportunities for business development and social services to underpopulated and under-served areas.

The minor has the potential to appeal to students coming to EIU from Lake Land College which ranks second in Illinois and twelfth in the nation in the number of associate degrees in agriculture conferred (Community College Week 2014 Top 100). EIU’s education and teacher certification majors (and post-bacs pursuing certification) could add to their credentials relative to vocational agricultural education in Illinois high schools. In general, the rural studies minor could appeal to rural people in this rural place who like to learn but don’t want to leave! The minor can provide humanities and social and behavioral context for science-based majors, and exposure to geo-science perspectives for humanities and fine arts students.

This minor is strengthened by the involvement of faculty from multiple EIU colleges, not just several departments in one college. To that end, Drs. Chris Laingen (Geology/Geography) and Debra A. Reid (History) both teach courses in rural topics. Faculty in English, Economics, Political Science, Family and Consumer Sciences, Communication Studies, and The Lumpkin College of Business also emphasize rural topics, or engage in research that could support instruction in a special topics course focused on rural issues. The subject matter addresses rural both from a local, state, and regional perspective, but elective courses allow for inclusion of rural issues at broader scales as well. Services such as the SEED Center (Sustainable Entrepreneurship through Education and Development), which provides free management training for small business entrepreneurs, can offer additional support for students interested in rural economic development.

The interdisciplinarity of the minor also means that faculty in different colleges share responsibilities for recruitment, retention, and promotion. That said, the Department of Geology/Geography will serve as the home department as it has the most credits in the minor, thus, the College of Sciences will administer the minor in terms of certification for graduation.

Promotion will involve all faculty, but Dr. Laingen will work with a graduate assistant enrolled in the Historical Administration graduate program to design a website to promote the minor. Dr. Laingen will serve as the contact for inquiries. Upon approval, an interdisciplinary Rural Studies Curriculum Committee will be formed, and will consist of faculty teaching in the minor, with representation from most (if not all) participating departments.

If approved, the prefix RUR will be created for the Independent Study and Special Topics courses (RUR 3960 and 4400 respectively) and will be added to the curriculum. Moving forward, for additional courses to be considered for inclusion in the minor, they must have at least 50 percent of their content (based on syllabus review by the minor's curriculum committee) dedicated to rural and/or agricultural topics.

Catalog Copy:

Rural Studies (18 hours)

The minor in rural studies provides students with opportunities to learn about rural issues from multiple disciplinary perspectives, and apply interdisciplinary research theory and method to address real rural issues.

Core Courses (6 hours)

GEG 3330: Agricultural Geography. Credits 3

HIS 3801: Rural History. Credits 3

Elective Courses (12 hours; no more than 6 hours earned from one discipline)

CMN 3260: Communication of Class in US Culture. Credits 3

ECN 3810: Economics of Natural Resources. Credits 3

ECN 3870: Agricultural Economics. Credits 3

ENG 3706: American Regional Literature. Credits 3

FCS 4854: Parent-Child Study and Community Involvement. Credits 3

GEG 3310: Introduction to Biogeography. Credits 3

GEG 3320: Natural Resource Conservation. Credits 3

GEG 3780: Land Use Planning. Credits 3

HIS 3810: History of Illinois. Credits 3

PLS 3603: State and Local Government. Credits 3

PLS 3763: Environmental Politics and Policy. Credits 3

PLS 4793: Civic and Nonprofit Leadership. Credits 3

Approved by CMN: March 5, 2015

Approved by ECN: March 25, 2015

Approved by ENG: March 5, 2015

Approved by FCS: NOTE: on March 23, 2015, Dr. M. Sherwood, indicated, "We (FCS Department) are in support of the inclusion of the course. The formal Curriculum Committee statement of support will not be available until the April 2 meeting."

Approved by GEL/GEG: March 6, 2015

Approved by HIS: March 25, 2015

Approved by PLS: March 26, 2015

Date approved by the COS curriculum committee: April 3, 2015

Date approved by CAA: