



Yale College Environmental Studies

Junior Guide

Academic Year 2026–2027

Dear Environmental Studies Major,

The EVST Major offers a unique opportunity to study the complex interactions between society and the natural world, to acquire valuable topical knowledge, and to develop your research and writing skills.

Environmental Studies engages a wide range of academic disciplines and fields of study. To get the most out of the major, you must move with intention through the required courses, your field of concentration, and the planning, research, and writing of the senior essay. This guide seeks to help you do that by raising and answering a few basic questions about the EVST major.

This guide is just a start. We emphasize close faculty-student advising to help you find your best path to degree completion. Please get in touch and stay in touch as other questions arise. We look forward to working with you!

Sincerely,

[Mike Fotos](#)

BA DUS, Yale College Environmental Studies

[Kealoha Freidenburg](#)

BS DUS, Yale College Environmental Studies

Developing Your Environmental Studies Identity

You are joining a diverse community of peers united by a shared passion for exploring the complex interactions between society and the natural world. EVST majors study a wide range of topics, including ecological change, migration, natural resource conservation, human rights, public health, public policy, energy, farming and food, justice, history, literature and art, urban sustainability, and biodiversity. Each of these topics, when studied systematically within a concentration in the EVST major, offers a way of understanding how humans affect and are affected by the environment.

Designing your concentration helps you develop your academic identity with positive benefits for moving forward professionally as a valued contributor in your field. Having a plan and a clear way to present yourself, your passions, and your strengths prepares you to advocate for yourself when seeking summer internships or applying for research funding and later, when looking for jobs, applying to graduate school, or pursuing other paths.

Junior year is the time to think about your course selection and to act with intention to design the concentration that helps you realize your desired academic identity.

The BA and BS Degrees

The EVST major allows you to select a unique path of study while acquiring foundational knowledge and preparation for successfully engaging with peers in addressing the extensive range of environmental challenges. All EVST majors take core courses appropriate to their degree paths from a prescribed list of courses in the natural sciences and humanities and the social sciences. The choice of concentration and the selection of courses within the concentration allow you to craft a unique course of study. Course offerings and the required senior essay emphasize and strengthen your skills in research methods, writing, and communication.

The major is multidisciplinary and offers two paths to graduation, the BS or BA degree. The BS path is for students seeking advanced scientific training and wishing to complete a two-term senior essay requiring original scientific research and data analysis. The newly updated BA path is structured for students seeking careers or advanced degrees in law, policy, or management in the public, private, or non-profit sectors and requires a one-term senior essay.

Please refer to the Environmental Studies website and the Yale College Program of Study for specific details on pre-requisite, core, and major requirements for the BS and BA degrees.

Strategies for Developing Your Concentration

We suggest that you develop your concentration in stages. The first stage is cognitive and exploratory. You may know what motivates your environmental interests from everyday experience or from hearing and talking about it in everyday language. The academic discourse on that ‘thing you care about’ may be quite different. Finding the just-right selection of six courses in a concentration requires that you know what you’re looking for. Talk to fellow students including EVST Peer Mentors. Learn what your predecessors have done by browsing the EVST website pages on senior essay topics, summer environmental fellowships, and past prize-winning essays. Talk to the DUS and other EVST-affiliated faculty. Talk to faculty in other departments, too. EVST is multidisciplinary and the list of relevant courses is far-ranging. Explain your interests and ask for suggestions. You’re building a family

of courses not a random list, so be sure to ask yourself and others how the courses you're considering are related.

The second stage of developing your concentration is to search courses with purpose. Scroll through the list of concentrations on the EVST website. If a course looks interesting, track down the syllabus. Don't get hung up on the student reviews but pay attention to the comments about 'what I learned.' You're looking for information about what people learned not the popularity ratings of professors. Don't stop with the suggested concentration courses listed on the EVST website or under EVST in the online course catalog. Use the Yale Course Search web application and vary the keywords and apply the Advanced Search features including "Any Course Information Attribute" to expand and thoughtfully target your searches. Among the thousands of courses offered at Yale, you will always find surprises. Many courses now considered central to EVST were first located by students making their own searches.

Developing your concentration is an opportunity for professional growth and a chance to engage more deeply in the Yale experience. With your concentration in mind, attend public talks on environmental topics, sign up for an environmental newsletter, join a Yale environmental group, find a campus research job, or enroll in a field science course at Yale or through study abroad. Use your summers to gain relevant 'shoe-leather' experience by taking on a summer internship or research project, working for an environmental employer, or embarking on a life-changing hiking, biking, climbing, canoeing, kayaking, sailing, or camping trip.

Plan of Study

Fall semester of the junior year is the time to make your academic plan for junior and senior years. After consulting your BA or BS checklist, your EVST prerequisites, core courses, and the course list for your EVST concentration, try laying out a tentative plan of study for junior and senior years using the four-box grid below.

Fall–Junior Year

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Spring–Junior Year

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Fall–Senior Year

1. EVST 4960

2.

3.

4.

5.

Spring–Senior Year

1. EVST 4960 (if required)

2.

3.

4.

5.

Most likely, you have EVST prerequisites or core courses still outstanding and this exercise will almost certainly turn up a few blank spots or question marks. That's the purpose of planning now. It is far better to complete your EVST pre-reqs and major requirements before spring of senior year and writing the senior essay is far easier if you've completed the pre-reqs, core courses, and key courses in your concentration by the end of junior year.

As you fill out your list of concentration courses, do not overlook courses that help prepare you to write the senior essay. Those courses fall into three categories: subject matter relevance, research methods, and writing. The first one is obvious and usually takes care of itself. You will be attracted to courses that interest you and those interests will inform your choice of a senior essay topic.

The latter two categories require a bit more thought. The methods of research productively employed in the environmental field are as varied as the field itself. Depending on your discipline and research topic, advanced statistics, coding or AI, qualitative research methods, content or textual analysis, epidemiology, GIS, remote sensing, or an advanced seminar in theory, formal logic, or the philosophy of science may be relevant to your senior essay plan.

All EVST senior essay writers, BS and BA, no matter the research topic, benefit from courses that build writing skills. EVST supports two writing seminars that are directly relevant to writing about the environment. They are EVST 4469: Writing about Science, Medicine, and the Environment and EVST 3224: Writing about the Environment. A writing seminar in junior year is excellent preparation for the writing you will do in senior year.

Advanced courses in research methods, writing, technology, or theory that are likely to help with the senior essay are good candidates for the concentration list. If you have a question, you can always ask the DUS.

To sum up, junior year is when you prepare the ground for a successful and satisfying finish to your Yale College career. It is the time for wrapping up the pre-reqs and core courses, for nailing down your selection of concentration courses, and it is the most opportune time for finding the right senior essay advisor.

Finding a Senior Essay Advisor

You must find your own senior essay advisor. If possible, find your senior essay advisor during the junior year. Environmental Studies does not have its own faculty and instead relies on faculty volunteers from departments and programs across the university.

Enrolling in a seminar with a possible advisor is one way to establish a potentially productive advising relationship. Students interested in pursuing a science-based essay are encouraged to seek opportunities for supervised research within a faculty research laboratory. Having an advisor in place at an early stage will give you the opportunity to work with your advisor to finalize the courses in your concentration and to receive guidance or support on a summer research project. For many research projects conducted outside of a campus laboratory or the Yale library, the summer before the senior year is a critical time for gathering data.

Your advisor does not need to be formally affiliated with Yale College Environmental Studies. Your advisor must be a member of the Yale Faculty, however, and needs to agree to supervise your essay and to provide you with guidance and feedback along the way. If you are having difficulty finding a senior essay advisor, please speak with your DUS, preferably during the spring term of your junior year.

The Yale College Environmental Studies website maintains a [list of faculty](#) with environmental interests across the university. Review this list and identify several whose interests may overlap with yours. Visit their websites and consult their publications and course descriptions. If you think your interests may overlap, schedule a meeting to talk with the faculty member about your potential project ideas and to hear their suggestions for possible senior essay projects.

You do not need to have a fully formed senior essay topic when you meet with a prospective advisor. You also are encouraged to meet with more than one possible advisor to identify the best fit.

Planning for Your Senior Essay

In the Environmental Studies major, we consider the senior essay a capstone experience that pulls together research and writing skills you have learned and the topical issues you have studied in your EVST courses. Planning for the senior essay and for the summer before senior year should begin in the fall semester of your junior year.

The summer before senior year can be a critical time for preparing to write a successful essay. It may be the only time for BS candidates to do the work on faculty-supervised laboratory or field research required for a preferred essay topic. For some BA candidates, senior summer may be the last chance to find an internship or gather data and experience useful for their essays. Yale has grant funding to help make these things possible but it's up to you to search it out.

Here are three things that will help you prepare to write a successful senior essay.

1. **Concentration:** Develop an effective concentration by choosing a clearly defined theme and crafting a coherent six-course grouping that prepares you to write the senior essay and achieve your academic and professional goals in the major.
2. **Funding:** Track and meet the application deadlines for summer internships, research opportunities, and travel grants. Deadlines for funding may occur as early as mid-October and generally no later than March 1st. The Environmental Studies Program offers the [Summer Environmental Fellowship](#). Past SEF's have been diverse, including internships with environmental organizations or governmental agencies, or research projects in the field or laboratories at Yale or other institutions. You can find a list of past awards [here](#). The Summer Environmental Fellowship has supported many Environmental Studies majors working on senior thesis research.
3. **Focus:** Writing a successful senior essay requires that you have a focused topic and research question. Consult the [Senior Essay Handbook](#) posted on the EVST website and take the time to really study and think about your capstone project in Environmental Studies at Yale College.