Dear Environmental Studies Major,

Congratulations on your admission to the Yale College Environmental Studies Major! The EVST Major offers a uniquely tailor-able 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,

John Wargo  
Chair, Yale College Environmental Studies

Mike Fotos  
DUS, Yale College Environmental Studies

Linda Evenson  
Program Manager, 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 EVST 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 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.

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. 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 by now familiar list of concentrations and associated courses on the EVST website. If a concentration looks promising, browse the list of suggested courses, looking up their descriptions on Yale Course Search or the Yale College Program of Study. 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 particular professors. Don’t stop with the courses listed on the EVST website or under EVST in the online course catalog. EVST students and staff look for potentially relevant courses every semester but no one knows your unique interests like you do. Use the Yale Course Search web application and vary the search terms. Among the thousands of courses offered at Yale, you will always find surprises.

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 get out in the field perhaps by enrolling in EVST 234L Field Science: Environment and Sustainability or EVST 244 Coastal Environments in a Changing World.

Your EVST concentration is your individualized degree plan, so explore, learn, and enjoy!

**Make a 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. Check the Yale College Program of Study and the Yale Course Search web application for what courses are being offered and when.
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 major requirements before spring of senior year and writing the senior essay is far easier if you’ve completed all the pre-reqs, core courses, and key courses in your concentration by the end of junior year.

Junior year is when you prepare the ground for a successful and satisfying finish to your Yale College career. It is the time for nailing down your EVST major requirements 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. 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.

The [Academics/Advising page](http://www.evst.yale.edu/academics/advising) of the EVST website contains useful information and tips on finding and working with a senior essay advisor. If you are having difficulty finding a senior essay advisor, meet with the EVST DUS, preferably no later than the spring term of your junior year.

**Planning for Your Senior Essay**

In the environmental studies major, we consider the senior essay a capstone experience that pulls together research 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 1. The Environmental Studies Program offers summer fellowships, too. Pay attention to the EVST newsletter and browse the EVST Student Resources page for links to the Yale grants and fellowships website and other funding opportunities.
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.