Studying sustainability at GVSU
Which program is right for me?

Grand Valley State University has earned a national reputation as a "green college." Students who want to learn about sustainability and related issues have several excellent options from which to choose. This short guide is to help decide which major will be the best fit.

Interdisciplinary **Environmental and Sustainability Studies (ENS)** draws upon knowledge from a variety of disciplines—arts and humanities, physical and life sciences, and economic and policy studies—so as to develop a holistic, place-based, and solutions-oriented understanding of environmental and sustainability challenges. While all aspects of humans' interaction with their environments are relevant to environmental and sustainability studies, areas of particular interest include sustainable food systems, energy and climate change, water quality, and the cultural and built environment.

Students will gain the broad educational background needed to create positive social change as leaders, thinkers, decision-makers, and citizens. The program emphasizes a practical approach to environmental issues through collaborative problem-solving, involvement in faculty-led research projects, internships, practicums, and community engagement projects.

Other programs at GVSU also deal closely with some or all of these areas of interest: **Natural Resource Management (NRM), Geography and Sustainable Planning (GPY), and Geology (GEO)**.

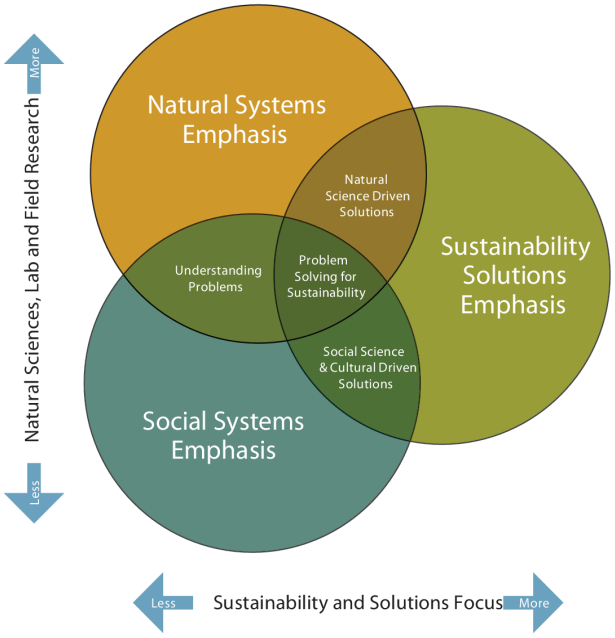

Figure: A framework for understanding undergraduate IES programs in the United States

The figure at left[1] shows how interdisciplinary environmental and sustainability programs may be mapped onto "three broad approaches to ideal IES curriculum design" (Vincent 2015), depending on their content emphasis. While programs draw from the whole range of available knowledge about humans' relations to their environments, we may say that, at GVSU:

- ENS maps toward culturally-driven problem analysis and solutions
- NRM maps toward science and public policy-driven problem analysis and solutions
- GPY maps toward natural and social sciences-driven problem analysis and solutions, and emphasizes the use of geospatial technologies
- GEO maps toward natural science driven solutions

All of these programs incorporate knowledge from all three of the figure's areas to some degree. The differences are in the depth of expertise involved in each, and how these different disciplinary sources are integrated within the major.

Perhaps the best way to find out which major is the best fit is to take one or more of these introductory classes:

ENS 201: Introduction to Environmental and Sustainability Studies
GEO 111: Exploring the Earth *or* GEO 112: Earth History
GPY 100: Physical and Environmental Geography
NRM 150: Introduction to Natural Resources

[1] Vincent, S. (October 2015). Trends in interdisciplinary environmental and sustainability programs. *EM: Air and Waste Management Association's Magazine for Environmental Managers*, 22-27.