CAL POLY HUMBOLDT
University Senate
Resolution to Recommend Approval of the Critical Agriculture Studies & Agroecology New Degree Proposal
11-25/26-ICC – November 18, 2025 – Curriculum Reading

RESOLVED: That the Critical Agriculture Studies & Agroecology New Degree Proposal, detailed in proposal 24-2837, be approved.

RATIONALE:
The Critical Agriculture Studies & Agroecology (CASA), B.A. is a transdisciplinary, applied, and justice-centered program that integrates the arts, humanities, and sciences to prepare students to transform agriculture for a climate-just and sustainable future.

CASA redefines agricultural education for the twenty-first century by combining scientific study, critical analysis, and hands-on practice. Students develop the technical, cultural, and ethical tools necessary to reimagine relationships among people, land, water, plants, and animals. The program trains Cal Poly Humboldt's "critical farmers"—leaders who bring together regenerative agricultural practices with an understanding of social justice, decolonization, and Indigenous and traditional ecological knowledges.

Located in California's North Coast region, the program leverages Humboldt's distinctive food system—one built on small farms, regenerative practices, and farm-to-table economies—to create an experiential model for agroecological education. Through community-based coursework, applied farm labs, and partnerships with regional farms and Tribal organizations, students contribute to developing inclusive and climate-resilient food systems that align with California's equity and climate goals.

This program embodies Cal Poly Humboldt's polytechnic mission, integrating applied science, the arts, and humanistic inquiry to address global challenges in sustainability, climate adaptation, and agricultural transformation.

Program Description: The Critical Agriculture Studies & Agroecology (CASA) program offers a cutting-edge, hands-on major that crosses traditional disciplinary boundaries between science, the humanities, and the arts. Students learn within a supportive program community centered on the program farm, an emerging demonstration site for agroecological experimentation and applied research.

The program emphasizes both breadth and depth. The core curriculum grounds students in agroecological methods, agricultural history and politics, and leadership for social and environmental change. Students then develop depth through one of four emphasis areas:

1. Arts, Environmental Justice & Politics
2. Food, Wellbeing & Culture
3. Ecologies & Practice

4. Leadership & Sustainable Economies

CASA students graduate prepared to lead agricultural innovation, communicate across communities, and contribute to rebuilding resilient regional food systems.

Program Overview:

- **Total Units:** 120 (including GE and university requirements)
- **Major Requirements:** 40–49 units
    - All courses in the major must be completed with a grade of C– or better.
- **Core (25 units):**
    - SOIL 104 – Introduction to Sustainable Agriculture and Lab (3)
    - CASA 210 – Principles of Agroecology (3)
    - CASA 210L – Methods in Agroecology (1)
    - CASA 325S – Community Farming, Leadership & Social Change (4)
    - NAS 309 – Traditional Ecological Knowledge & Indigenous Natural Resource Management (3)
    - CASA 410 – Critical Agroecologies & Food Sovereignty (4)
    - CASA 490 – Capstone Project and Seminar (4)
- **Additional Applied Farm Experience (3 units total):**
    - CASA 313 – Upper Division Farm Lab (1)
    - NAS 333 – Food Sovereignty Lab (1; must be taken at least once)
- **Emphasis Areas (18–24 units):** Students complete six (6) courses total: at least four (4) courses in one emphasis area and one course in two others.
    - **Arts, Environmental Justice & Politics:** Courses include ANTH 314, ART 372B, CASA 480 (Histories of Agrarian Crisis; Art and Gardens), CRGS 331, ENGL 311, ENST 471, NAS 332, PHIL 302, PSCI 373, and WS 340.
    - **Food, Wellbeing & Culture:** Courses include ANTH 308, CASA 480 (Culinary Literacy; Food-as-Medicine; Black Agroecologies and Foodways), COMM 429, HED 231, HED 343, and PSCI 305W.
    - **Ecologies & Practice:** Courses include ANTH 359, BIO 330, BOT 330, BOT 350, BOT 360, CASA 480 (Urban Farming; Compost & Mulch Seminar), ENGL 471, ENGR 305, NAS 308, RRS 306, SOIL 260, SOIL 360, SOIL 462, and SOIL 468.
    - **Leadership & Sustainable Economies:** Courses include BA 340, BA 430, COMM 438, ECON 309, ENST 470, NAS 312W, NAS 362, PSCI 317, and ESM 435.

Student Learning Outcomes: Upon completing the Critical Agriculture Studies & Agroecology (CASA) major, students will be able to:

1. Practice: Utilize best practices, methodologies, and skills for regenerative and agroecological farming.
2. Analysis: Apply intersectional, decolonial, and transnational analysis to examine agriculture and human–environment relationships.
3. Leadership: Demonstrate effective leadership and business skills.
4. Agroecology: Analyze the multiple valences and meanings of the term “agroecology.”

Distinctions From Existing Programs: The CASA program is distinct within the CSU. It centers on critical agroecologies, equity, and decolonial frameworks, weaving traditional science courses into an interdisciplinary architecture. While complementing existing agricultural and environmental programs, CASA uniquely combines scientific literacy, social justice, and transformational leadership.

Humboldt's regional food system—defined by small farms, regenerative practices, and local agritourism—differs significantly from large-scale agricultural regions like the Central Valley. CASA leverages this distinctive local context to offer students experiential learning grounded in place-based and community-driven agriculture.

Workforce Demand: Workforce data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and California Labor Market Information confirm strong demand for graduates with knowledge in agroecology, sustainability, and agricultural leadership. While overall employment for agricultural managers is projected to decline slightly over the next decade, tens of thousands of annual job openings are expected due to retirements and turnover.

The average age of U.S. farmers is nearing 60, highlighting the need for a new generation of agricultural professionals capable of advancing sustainable and just practices. CASA graduates will enter the field prepared to fill these roles, combining scientific expertise with community leadership and ecological ethics.

Alignment With Polytechnic Build-Out: The CASA program embodies Cal Poly Humboldt's polytechnic mission by merging scientific knowledge, humanistic inquiry, and community-based practice to address sustainability and climate change. Consistent with the Polytechnic Prospectus, CASA contributes directly to the science, technology, engineering, and applied science pillars of a polytechnic education while extending them to include social and ethical engagement.

This program:

- Integrates applied agricultural sciences with humanities and arts-based inquiry to solve complex environmental and social challenges.
- Centers climate justice and sustainability, aligning with state and CSU system goals.
- Models transdisciplinary collaboration, combining soil science, Indigenous ecological knowledge, decolonial theory, and creative communication.
- Strengthens Humboldt's position as a regional hub for sustainable food systems and applied environmental learning.
- Expands polytechnic diversity by ensuring accessible pathways for first-generation and underrepresented students into agricultural leadership.

CASA demonstrates that polytechnic education encompasses both scientific innovation and humanistic insight, producing graduates who can lead California's transition toward equitable and sustainable agriculture.

Resource Implications: The Critical Agriculture Studies & Agroecology (CASA), B.A. has been designed to launch efficiently by leveraging existing faculty expertise, courses, and infrastructure within related departments. The program's early implementation phase will therefore require minimal new investment, with incremental growth supported through planned faculty and staff additions as enrollment expands.

Faculty and Staffing:

- Existing faculty from Environmental Science & Management, Native American Studies, and related disciplines possess sufficient expertise to deliver the program at launch.
- An additional tenure-line faculty position in engaged learning and agroecology is recommended to meet anticipated student demand and to sustain program growth.
- The program will require a dedicated farm manager, ideally drawn from the lecturer pool, to oversee operations at the program farm, support teaching, and maintain research continuity. Pairing instructional and farm management responsibilities ensures efficiency and stability.
- As the program grows, additional tenure-track positions (approximately one per 40 majors) will be needed to maintain high-quality, hands-on instruction and advising.

Facilities and Operations:

- The University Foundation has purchased a 26-acre parcel of agricultural land, with 2 acres designated as the CASA program farm. Development of this site has begun, including a water storage system, equipment container, and initial infrastructure for teaching and crop cultivation.
- Grant funding has been secured for the installation of a vegetable washing station, rainwater catchment system, and greenhouse.
- The university has provided start-up funds and base operational support, establishing a strong foundation for applied instruction.
- Future needs include ongoing base funding for operations and equipment (O&E) and continued development of teaching and research infrastructure on the farm.

Financial Outlook:

- The CASA program has been structured for fiscal sustainability. Most required courses already exist in other departments, minimizing the need for new instructional development.
- While the university's initial investment in land and start-up costs has provided a strong foundation, establishing recurring operational support for the program farm is an essential long-term goal.
- The program anticipates supplementing base funding through grants, partnerships, and collaborative research projects with regional and state agencies.

Commitment to Growth: Cal Poly Humboldt is committed to growing and maintaining the CASA program once approved. The program's applied, community-engaged model aligns closely with the university's strategic priorities and will attract students, grants, and community partnerships that reinforce its sustainability.

Related Proposals:

- CASA - 210 - 24-2981 - New Course - Preliminary Seminar in Critical Agriculture Studies & Agroecology
- CASA - 210L - 24-2982 - New Course - Preliminary Seminar Lab
- CASA - 303 - 24-3008 - New Course - Upper Division Farm Lab
- CASA - 325S - 24-3006 - New Course - Community Farming, Leadership & Social Change
- CASA - 410 - 24-3007 - New Course - Critical Agroecologies and Food Sovereignty
- CASA - 490 - 24-3021 - New Course - Critical Agriculture Studies & Agroecology Capstone

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Note on Document Preparation: Portions of this resolution were developed with the support of artificial intelligence tools to enhance consistency, formatting, and clarity. All content originates from the official proposal documents and aligns with Chancellor's Office documentation standards. Each resolution is reviewed and finalized collaboratively by the Integrated Curriculum Committee Chair, committee members, and the proposal authors, with opportunities for revision prior to submission for Senate consideration.