

Distinction in Research, Creative Work, and Design in Environmental Science

Please submit ALL materials to Dr. Amy Dunham (aed4@rice.edu) by March 15th, 2026.

Environmental Science students have the opportunity to apply for Distinction in Research and Creative Works through two venues: first, through their major concentration department (either Biosciences or Earth, Environmental and Planetary Sciences), or through the Environmental Science Program.

The Distinction in Research and Creative Works award for the Environmental Science major is focused on recognizing excellence in students' work in environmental design, action, and community engagement. This is an award for the creation and/or application of environmental solutions. This award recognizes outstanding work creating environmental solutions through collaboration with community or campus partners.

Students who have conducted research in a laboratory setting should apply for Distinction in Research and Creative Works through their major concentration department. For example, a student who conducted research that led to a publication in a scholarly journal should apply for Distinction through the department that hosted their research (typically either Biosciences or Earth, Environmental and Planetary Sciences). It is possible that a student may declare a major concentration in one department, but conduct research in a different department. In this case the application for Distinction in Research and Creative Works should go through the department that hosted the research, as that department will be best equipped to assess the scholarly products of their own field.

To apply for Distinction in Research and Creative Works in Environmental Science, students should submit the following:

- 1) A final product, comprising either:
 - a. one final product from a long-term project in collaboration with a community or campus partner (for example, a final report to a community partner recommending a specific action), or
 - b. a portfolio of products or in-depth descriptions from a suite of short-term projects with off or on campus partners;
- 2) A letter from a community or campus partner describing the impact of the student's work on the organization, discussing the student's responsiveness to organizational needs, and assessing the student's ability to work in an applied environmental context. If students are presenting a portfolio, letters from each partner should be included.
- 3) A short reflective essay (1-2 pages) written by the student describing how they applied disciplinary perspectives/methodologies from environmental science to their solution. In addition, the essay should synthesize what their engagement with the community or campus partner meant for their development as an environmental scientist, or how their time with the community or campus partner impacted their future plans.

ENVS distinction criteria rubric Fall 2024

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1. Package is complete:

- One final product (final report, other documents)
OR
- Dossier of short term products
- Letter from community or campus partner(s)
- Reflective essay

2. Final product demonstrates the creation and/or significant advancement of an environmental solution

Scoring:

3	Impactful solution is clearly designed and well-explained; solution is well-matched to partner's needs
2	Solution's impact may be well-matched but not well-explored, OR, solution is not well-explained
1	No clear connection between partner needs and solution.

3. Partner letter indicates that student's work is impactful, as measured by partner's criteria

Scoring:

3	Student brought significant change to organization, was a valued team member
2	Student brought some change and was positively received
1	Student's work was not clearly innovative (e.g. may have been clerical in nature.)

4. Student ownership of project:

Scoring:

3	Package displays intellectual independence: student "owns" the project
2	Student may have grown into some ownership of project
1	Student primarily followed others' directions.