

# Saving University Environmental Health Programs

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Final Project for Environmental Health Leadership Institute, 2006

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# Introduction

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- Enrollment fluctuations and department changes threatened the continued existence of the East Carolina University Environmental Health Program.
- Both undergraduate and graduate programs were threatened.
- Both programs had a long history at East Carolina University, and have supplied local and state health departments with Environmental Health Specialists with a quality reputation.



# Question

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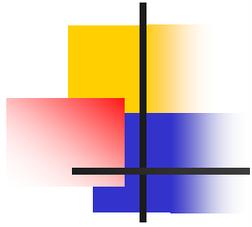
- How can the present Environmental Health faculty in its new department work as a team to develop sustainable enrollment in the Environmental Health degree programs, both undergraduate and graduate?

# Procedure I

## Investigating the situation

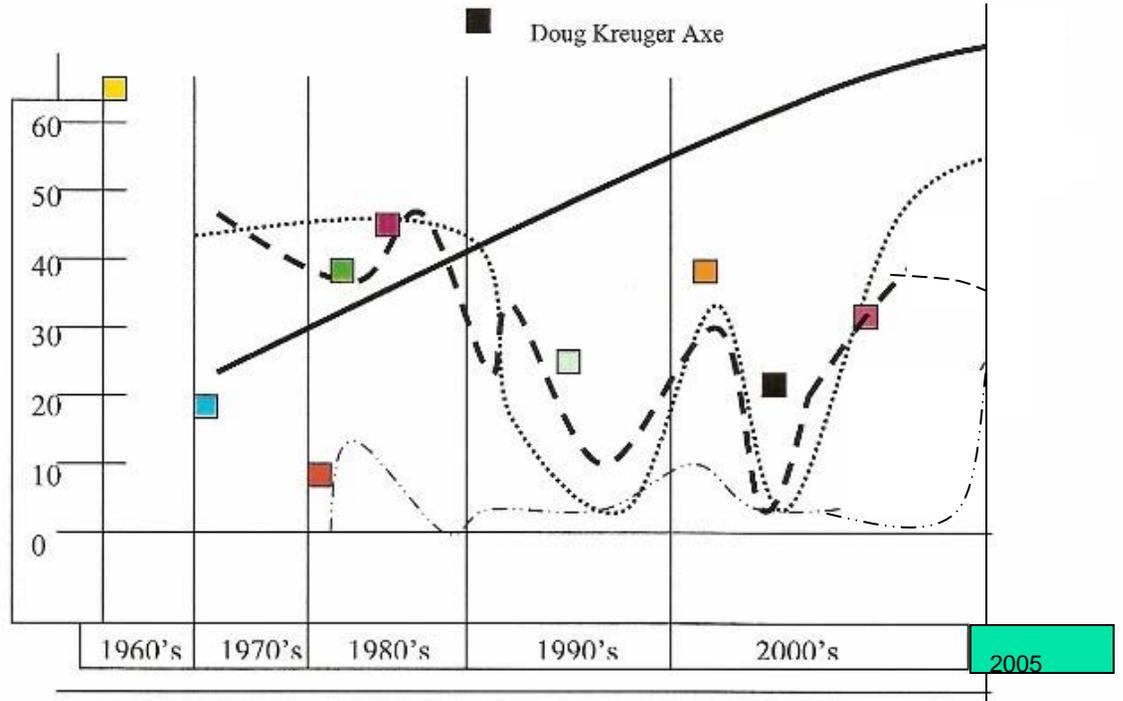
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- Past history and a relative timeline of enrollment, resources, events that punctuated the enrollment curves, and decades were graphed, after gathering historic events from current faculty, and recently retired faculty who were with the program from its inception. Figure 1 illustrates the historic situation and events.



Historical  
Critical  
Events

- Environmental move
- Program started
- Graduate prg started
- Reagan elected
- Centralized training
- Allied Health fight
- Industrial tech/safety added
- Doug Kreuger Axe
- Trenton returns Transferred to II E & P



Departmental  
Conditions

	Trenton Recruiting	YJ chair: mental Model: professors Don't recruit	*Football Success PA prog. Takes Funds	Industry And Tech. Axe	Health Ed and Promotion Promotes!
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- Graduate Student Enrollment
- Resources
- Undergraduate enrollment
- Jobs for graduates

Figure 1. Events and conditions affecting ECU Environmental health programs

# Procedure II

## Developing a systems causal loop

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- Vision discussions were held with current faculty
- Questionnaires were sent out to current undergraduate and graduate students in Environmental Health, and in the new Master of Public Health program.
- Discussions were held with Departmental and College administrators.
- Figure 1 represents the current reality, the focusing question, and the desired vision for the ECU



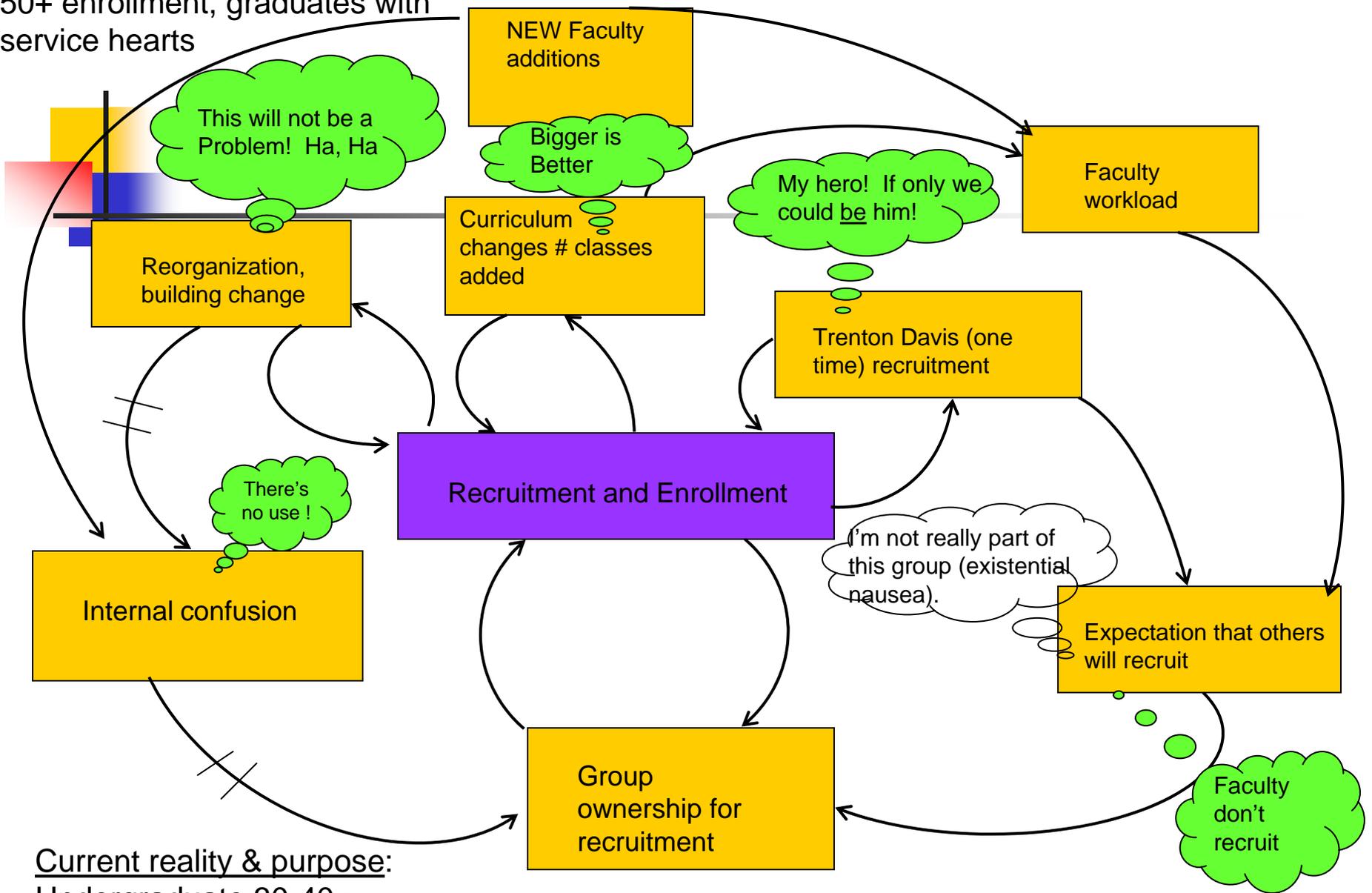
# Systems Causal Loop Analysis

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- Figure 2 represents the current reality, the focusing question, and the desired vision for the ECU Environmental Health program.
- Archetypes used in the causal loops were “Quick fixes that backfire” and “Shifting the burden”.

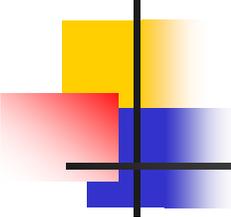
Desired purpose and vision:  
50+ enrollment, graduates with service hearts

Focusing question: How can we maintain sustainable enrollment?



Current reality & purpose:  
Undergraduate 30-40 :  
survival of the program by  
keeping it chaotic

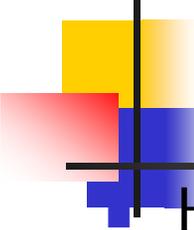
Figure 2. Shifting the Burden and Quick Fixes that Backfire



# Mental Models

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- Mental models in Figure 2 (in green clouds) illustrate the thought patterns that keep the loops circulating in reinforcing current reality.
- To break reinforcing loops, interventions are advised. Interventions can succeed with continued discussion and visioning work are necessary



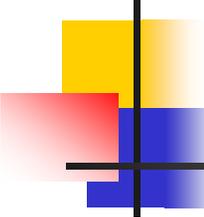
# Interventions

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How can side effects from quick fixes be reduced:

- 1) Be ourselves and not our hero: help all faculty realize their own skills as heroes.
- 2) Resist temptation to add new classes, and temper changes in curriculum by making small changes over time.
- 3) Make a plan to avoid total chaos in building move.
- 4) Let new faculty know well ahead that planning will be needed for transition time.
- 5) Let new students know that transition will require some extra flexibility and that they can help.
- 6) Keep the vision of service-hearted graduates in the sights of all faculty and keep it in discussions.

## Interventions cont.

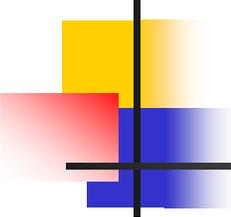


How can more attention and resources be directed to  
Fundamental issue to avoid shifting the burden?

- 1) Work with current E H faculty to discuss vision during weekly meetings.
- 2) Continue vision focus group sessions as new faculty and graduate students join the program.
- 3) Keep the vision of graduating service-hearted students in the sights of all faculty as work on the vision proceeds.
- 4) Participate in and help other new faculty develop and participate in a passion for service to humanity through environmental health.
- 5) Discuss how individual use of still growing resources contributes to program vision as well as to individual needs.

Interventions: Social Marketing Campaign Possible logo





# Conclusion

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- Analyzing the current reality, and the archetypical loop activities that have put the Environmental Health program at ECU in periodically “shark-infested” waters, has been a revealing process.
- Relying on chaotic events to justify “quick fixes that backfire”, and neglecting group-solidifying vision discussions has left the Environmental Health program somewhat vulnerable. Leadership with a cohesive vision that coordinates with the present department is needed to reach sustainable enrollment.