



Sustainability in the Curriculum at UW Oshkosh

Stephanie Spehar

Department of Anthropology

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh





Sustainability in Higher Education

*"Sustainability implies that the critical activities of a higher education institution are (at a minimum) ecologically sound, socially just, and economically viable, and that they will continue to be so for future generations. **A truly sustainable college or university would emphasize these concepts in its curriculum and research, preparing students to contribute as working citizens to an environmentally sound and socially just society.** The institution would function as a sustainable community, embodying responsible consumption of food and energy, treating its diverse members with respect, and supporting these values in the surrounding community."*

--Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future
(www.ulsf.org)



Teaching Sustainability

- Moving beyond prescription
- Moving beyond specialization
- Sustainability as an *avenue of inquiry*: a way of looking at, evaluating, and solving problems
 - Will allow us to integrate sustainability *broadly* into the curriculum; reach more students
 - Will allow us to transform not just what students do, but also how they *think*

Table 1. Sustainability Conference Presentations Devoted to Teaching and Learning

Sustainability conferences	Total no. of presentation venues	Percent devoted to teaching and learning
AASHE, 2006	268	20
Greening the Campus, 2007	74	18
North American Conference on Sustainability in Higher Education, 2004	174	18
Greening the Campus, 2005	83	17
Greening the Campus, 2003	89	16

From Sherman (2008)



Teaching Sustainability

“Education for sustainability is a lifelong learning process that leads to an informed and involved citizenry having the creative problem solving skills, scientific and social literacy, and commitment to engage in responsible individual and cooperative actions. These actions will help ensure an environmentally sound and economically prosperous future.”

--The President's Council on Sustainable Development (www.ffof.org/pcsd)



Sustainability in the Curriculum at UW Oshkosh

- Essential Learning Outcome
- Courses (Winnebago Project)
- Field trips
- Programs
- Collaborative efforts (NEW ERA)



Sustainability in the Curriculum at UW Oshkosh

- Essential Learning Outcome
- Courses (Winnebago Project)
- Field trips
- Programs
- Collaborative efforts (NEW ERA)



Essential Learning Outcome

- “Knowledge of sustainability and its outcomes” was ratified as one of the Essential Learning Outcomes for UWO students in 2008
- Teaching is one of the “four functional areas” covered in the Campus Sustainability Plan
 - **Vision:** Link the university’s formal teaching mission and informal teaching opportunities to develop understanding, attitudes and habits that promote sustainability



Assessment

- How do we know that students have learned “about sustainability and its outcomes”?
- *Sustainability rubric working group*: multi-disciplinary group of faculty working to define learning outcome more clearly and create ways to assess it



Sustainability in the Curriculum at UW Oshkosh

- Essential Learning Outcome
- Courses (Winnebago Project)
- Field trips
- Programs
- Collaborative efforts (NEW ERA)

Courses

- Development of courses that focus on sustainability issues or at least have a substantial sustainability component
- How do you get faculty to do this?
- *Winnebago Project*

Winnebago Project

- 2- day faculty college
- Assists faculty with integrating sustainability into their courses
- Rework a current course or design a new one



Winnebago Project: Content

- Emphasis on the three dimensions of sustainability: environmental, social, economic
- Emphasis on sense of place
- Learn about local sustainability issues (Fox River cleanup, sustainable agriculture) and campus sustainability
- Presentations, exercises, discussions, activities (campus tours)





Winnebago Project: Model

- Based on model created by AASHE
 - Ponderosa Project at NAU and Piedmont Project at Emory
- Yearly AASHE training workshop/conference
- “Entice and trickle out”
 - Entice: incentive for faculty
 - Trickle out: impacts additional courses by participant, and creates interest in department



Winnebago Project: Nuts and Bolts

- Stipends for participants and leaders
- Usually in May, after classes end
- Participants expected to work an additional 2-3 weeks over summer, and teach revised/new class within the year
- Funding from Faculty Development (2008-2009) and Campus Sustainability Budget (2010)

Winnebago Project: Stats

- 24 participants (so far)
- 19 departments (Biology, Chemistry, History, Political Science, Anthropology, Sociology, Art, English...)
- 4 colleges (COLS, Nursing, Education, Business)
- Vertical integration: Intro-level pit classes through graduate-level classes

Winnebago Project: Examples

- History 101: World History (Sustainability in premodern world history)
- Chemistry 105: General Chemistry
- Anthropology 300: Human Dimensions of Wildlife Conservation
- English 481: Capstone Seminar (Thomas Hardy and the Natural World)
- Art 338: Design II
- Elementary Education 316: Teaching Science and Environmental Science in the Elementary and Middle Schools
- Business 771: Marketing Strategy



Other Course Options/Ideas

- Courses run in a sustainable way
 - Art and Green Chemistry: focus on using less harmful/recycled materials and less materials
- Integrate/utilize operations: great learning tool!
 - Field trips; UWO Campus Sustainability class
- GE sustainability requirement?



Sustainability in the Curriculum at UW Oshkosh

- Essential Learning Outcome
- Courses (Winnebago Project)
- Field trips
- Programs
- Collaborative efforts (NEW ERA)

Field Trips

- Developing a menu of field trips/tours for use in any class based on the idea of “campus as laboratory”
- Field trips likely to include: power plant, campus water issues; dining services, construction of New Academic Building
- Will provide information and how-to manual for use in a variety of disciplines



Sustainability in the Curriculum at UW Oshkosh

- Essential Learning Outcome
- Courses (Winnebago Project)
- Field trips
- Programs
- Collaborative efforts (New ERA)



Graduate Program in Sustainability

- There are already tracks or program options for students who are undergraduates interested in sustainability, but not graduate students
- New grad program: Environmental Science, with an emphasis on sustainability



Sustainability in the Curriculum at UW Oshkosh

- Essential Learning Outcome
- Courses (Winnebago Project)
- Field trips
- Programs
- Collaborative efforts (NEW ERA)



NEW ERA

- Consortium that fosters regional partnerships among the public colleges and universities in the New North
- Sustainability task force: look at all institutions and ask, “what are we doing for sustainability”?
- Focus on *collaboration* between schools
- Training students who are residents and will become future leaders in NE Wisconsin

Challenges/Issues

- What is our role as faculty? As a university?
- Action: Should we be trying to create students who KNOW about sustainability, or students who also DO something about it?
- Concerns about “indoctrination”?

Resources

- Sherman, D. (2008) Sustainability: What's the Big Idea? A Strategy for Transforming the Higher Education Curriculum. *Sustainability: The Journal of Record*. 1(3): 188-195.
- UWO Sustainability of Teaching and Learning:
<http://www.uwosh.edu/sustainability/teaching>
- AASHE Sustainability Across the Curriculum Workshop:
<http://www.aashe.org/profdev/curriculum.php>
- University Leaders for a Sustainable Future:
<http://www.ulsf.org/>