

Academic Life Breakout Group—Sustainability Retreat 2007 Minutes

Breakout group:

Joe Bowersox (facilitator) – Director, Center for Sustainable Communities; EES Department

Bob Collin – Senior Researcher, Center for Sustainable Communities

Sara Fischer – Student, CLA

Forrest Lindsay-McGinn – Student, CLA

Carol Long – Dean of the College of Liberal Arts

Wendy Petersen-Boring – History Department

Elizabeth Siebert – TIUA Faculty

Valerie Watson – Administrative Assistant for Rhetoric and Anthropology

Morning Session: (General steps we can take to further institutionalize sustainability.)

1) Improve the pursuit of funding. Not just private donations, but also be smarter at going after corporate, government support. Pursue the sustainability dollars in the Governor's budget. This may mean we have to think about new collaborations.

2) Stay true to our primary mission: education. Sustainability must walk the fine line between education and advocacy. We must retain our focus on the critical investigation of sustainability—its advantages and disadvantages, etc. We can still promote responsible community membership and citizenship. In this, we should maximize and expand community service learning and other opportunities. Continue to stress the Four Es.

3) Expand problem oriented learning. Make our classes more like labs about the world. This makes it less about advocacy and more about real dilemmas we face. Makes sustainability education real and relevant. Classes should be about civic engagement as well.

4) Publicize what we are doing. We are too modest. Take credit for what we are doing.

5) Increase our focus on the fourth E, Equity. We need to do this across the board at the University, in our classes and in our practices. We must move forward on giving our employees a living wage and a future with possibilities. A living wage will be hard, but we can immediately begin work on improving the possibility of professional advancement. Wendy Gleason's new position may help with that. Improve cross sectoral communication, and transparency.

6) Improve the stature of sustainability education and research. Demonstrate relevance and examples in as many disciplines as possible. Improve interdisciplinary collaboration.

Afternoon Session:

Barriers to institutionalization of sustainability in Education

- 1) Biases (in the overseas experience, or ours. What voices aren't being heard)
 - against study for sustainability (too many in Costa Rica).
 - cultural reasons for travel. Language requirements. Culture shock
 - strong requirements
 - academic progress.
 - satisfactory progress. Trying to get people out in 4 years.
 - international education is a foreign language department constituency (and not focusing on sustainability).
- 2) Lack of a sustainability department. Why? Conflict with Environmental Science. How does it differ from EES? Would it be absorbed by EES (a track within EES). Overlap with EES. Would it be opposed by EES? Lack of PH.D programs and students. Lack of specialized curriculum. Lack of financial resources. The scientists would oppose it: "Lacks scholarly credentials."
- 3) Sustainability is fluff in terms of scholarship and teaching. It is wishy washy. Too ambiguous. It has no content. (perception of weak scholarship).
- 4) Lack of knowledge of sustainability by students. It is being shoved in their faces and everyone is doing it, so I want to do something else. BAD ADVISING or lack of advising of options. Perception that academic experience is too short (not enough time in 4 years to do this)
- 5) Lack of expertise in discipline's take on sustainability. Difficulty of retraining.
- 6) Difficulty of getting reward structure to help (publishing in sustainability???)
- 7) Lack of experiential opportunities for students interested in sustainability.
- 8) Lack of funding for faculty training/sus scholarship. Lack of development support for funding Sustainability.
- 9) The lack of teaching in a sustainable manner (we can teach sustainability but not model it—being high consumers of energy resources, paper resources).
- 10). Lack of relevance of classroom experience.
- 11) Obstacles to interdisciplinary teaching/team teaching (rewards, departmental structures, counting credits, buyouts).

New Ideas:

Sustainability Department

Classes like sustainable urban planning.

- 1). Facilitating travel Overseas Experience. Encourage "sustainability" destinations—places for study programs where students will be exposed to sustainable communities and research.
- 2) More abroad opportunities for Freshman and Sophomore. Important to sort these sort of perspectival issues out early on. Gets them grown up earlier. Matures them. SELL AS AN EQUITY COMPONENT. Gets them to have the experience earlier on and contribute to WU MORE Post-session programs.
- 3) Develop a Sustainability department (look in Australia). Liberal arts institutions could be better suited for this—or at least a sustainability certificate. Develop more courses.

- 4) Develop strategies and tools for improving scholarly perception of sustainability. Databases of examples of disciplinary research in sustainability.
- 5) Improve information balance available to incoming students about study options like sustainability (improve advising). TIE INTO GIS (use for ECOLOGY and EQUITY)
- 6) Create a wider range of course offerings in sustainability in different departments. Each dept takes on a course in sustainability.
- 7) Improve use of other faculty (MBA/LAW, local experts) in team teaching.
- 8) Provide opportunities for faculty to get additional training in sustainability in their discipline. More \$\$ to get faculty to visit these other schools and learn what they can do.
- 9) Get students into sustainability related jobs and internships. Make this a center function. Develop a list of partnerships for agencies and corps that will provide internships.
- 10) Develop list of sustainability related alums that can be contacted for internships and/or advice and/or jobs.
- 11) Develop a track record of sus research by faculty, students, new curriculum, etc.
- 12) More problem oriented learning.