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General Curriculum-Focused Sustainability Definition for STARS

Specific Sustainability Curriculum Definitions for STARS

Checklist for Sustainability Curriculum Designations for STARS

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Background:

In 2010, WSU Facilities Management enrolled the university in STARS (Sustainability Tracking and Rating System), a well-respected, widely used program (260 institutions in the U.S. and Canada, including Duke, CU-Boulder, IU-Bloomington, NYU, Michigan, SUNY, and many others) that helps universities measure progress toward the goal of sustainability across three main functional areas: education and research, operations, and planning, administration and engagement. Achieving certain benchmarks & milestones leads to the awarding of STARS points, which are in turn used to assign bronze, silver, gold or platinum status to participating universities. (See http://www.aashe.org/files/stars_annual_review_2010.pdf for more detail).

STARS is an essential tool for helping WSU measure its progress toward meeting the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment, and the subsequent WSU Climate Action Plan signed by President Millner and WSU Vice Presidents in October 2009, which includes sustainability-related goals. (Please see http://www.weber.edu/environment/green_initiatives.html for more detail).

One of the education and research benchmarks requires establishing a definition of sustainability for our institution's curricular offerings, and then identifying those course offerings that are sustainability-focused or sustainability related. This information will not appear in the WSU course catalog; they instead help the Environmental Issues Committee perform an inventory of our sustainability-themed courses for the university-wide STARS annual report.

For the purposes of STARS, then, this document provides a draft of 1) a general, overarching definition of sustainability in the curriculum, 2) specific sustainability-focused and sustainability-related curriculum definitions and 3) a detailed criteria checklist for sustainability curriculum designations.

I. General Curriculum-Focused Sustainability Definition for STARS

At Weber State University the goal of sustainability education is for students to gain knowledge and understanding of the intricate linkages between human and natural systems including a recognition that healthy human societies (physically, socially, culturally, politically, and economically) are fundamentally dependent on healthy ecosystems and the sustainable use of natural resources, such that they are available indefinitely for future generations to meet their needs. Included in this goal is for students to learn how to achieve sustainability across these areas.

II. Specific Sustainability Curriculum Definitions for STARS

Sustainability-Focused Courses

“Sustainability-focused” courses concentrate on sustainability, including its social, economic and environmental dimensions, or examine an issue or topic using sustainability as a lens. The courses provide valuable grounding in the concepts and principles of sustainability.

Sustainability-Related Courses

“Sustainability-related” courses include sustainability as a course component or module, or concentrate on a specific sustainability principle or issue. The courses help build knowledge about a component of sustainability or introduce students to sustainability concepts during part of the course.

III. Sustainability-Focused or Sustainability Related?

Sustainability-Focused

To be sustainability focused the majority (50% or more) of the course content (e.g., readings, papers, tests, discussion or other assignments) must focus on at least one of the 13 sustainability criteria listed below.

Sustainability Related

To be sustainability-related at least 25% of the course content (e.g., readings, papers, tests, discussion or other assignments) must focus on at least one of the 13 sustainability criteria listed below.

IV. Sustainability Criteria*

- 1) Sustainability as a concept: the history, politics, culture and science of ideas of sustainability and sustainable development.

- 2) Natural limits: the relationship between human population and lifestyle in relation to the finite capacity of natural ecosystems (including the global ecosystem) to provide for human needs.

- 3) Maintaining ecosystems: Natural resource conservation science and practices to maintain the integrity of ecosystems in the face of rising human demands.

- 4) Business and economics: Re-shaping market conditions to address “market failures” with respect to the environment and to provide incentives for businesses and economic systems to better maintain the integrity of ecosystems.

- 5) Social capacity: The social factors that support behavioral shifts (including but not limited to economic choices) necessary to enable and encourage societies to live in ways compatible with maintaining the long-term integrity of ecosystems.

- 6) Social equity: The mutual interactions between social inequality and environmental degradation, including theories of social reforms required to ensure an environmentally healthy and socially just society.

- 7) Sustainability discourse: The framing and discussion of environmental sustainability in the media, politics, and everyday life.

- 8) Culture, religion, and ethics: How culture, religion, and ethics—from consumerism to environmental stewardship—shape human behavior toward the natural world.

- 9) Governance: How legal frameworks and policies shape human behavior toward the natural world.

10) Science and Technology: The role of basic science and technology (broadly and individual technologies) specifically in influencing human impacts on the natural world.

11) Planning and design: Concepts and techniques from urban, regional, and rural planning and/or building design and/or product design that can influence human impacts on the environment and environmental impacts on humans.

12) Sustainability science: The new field of sustainability science that specifically attempts to build interdisciplinary perspectives from the themes (and related academic disciplines) listed above to promote human-environmental balance.

13) Other emerging fields and topics relevant to sustainability.

**This list was adapted from the University of Oregon's STARS Curriculum Definitions.*

V. Procedure for Assigning/Identifying Sustainability-Focused and Sustainability-Related Courses

-- Members of the Faculty Senate Environmental Issues Committee will identify relevant courses from the existing Environmental Studies Major and Minor that meet the definitions for sustainability-focused and sustainability-related courses.