

Call for Proposals

Course Development Grants -- Sustainability as Integrated and Applied Learning

The Center for Sustainable Communities and the Dean's Office invite proposals for the development of new or significantly revised courses that promise to infuse sustainability into the Luther curriculum. Award recipients will receive \$1,200 stipends (funded by the Margaret A. Cargill Foundation) and assistance with course development. We encourage potential applicants to consider the sort of integrated and applied learning in any field that would help equip students with the skills necessary to analyze the long-term stability of any complex system and then to react appropriately and creatively. These grants provide an opportunity for rethinking traditional disciplinary content and refreshing our commitment to the integration and application of learning toward contemporary local and global challenges.

Call for Proposals

To apply, applicants should email a brief project proposal to the Dean's office (wilkerje@luther.edu) by April 1. The proposal should include:

- A summary of the course which will be created or, if the proposal is for a course modification, the current course description and syllabus.
- A statement of the course goals and a description of how the new or modified course will focus on sustainability.
- A statement of why you hope to offer a course that focuses on sustainability.
- An estimate of when you expect to teach the new or modified course.

We encourage you to take a broad view of sustainability and have attached a handout of "frequently asked questions" about sustainability education that may help.

Award and Expectations

Award recipients will be expected to:

- Prepare a fully designed, ready-to-teach course focusing on sustainability by November 2016. This should include, at a minimum, a detailed syllabus, a complete reading list, and drafts of significant assignments.
- Engage in an ongoing discussion with the other successful applicants to share ideas, work through challenges, and begin plans for dissemination of their work. Recipients will be expected to participate in a summer workshop and attend monthly discussions through the fall semester.
- Share their experience through presentations, brown-bag lunches, faculty development workshops, etc.

Award recipients will receive a stipend of \$1,200 - \$600 to be paid after the summer workshop and \$600 to be paid at the end of the fall semester (contingent on the recipient meeting expectations). The award will also cover the cost of meals/refreshments, etc. associated with the cohort's ongoing discussion.

Timeline

April 1

April

Late May or June

July – November

November 2016

Proposals due

Awards announced

Workshop for cohort of award recipients

Ongoing work and monthly discussions with the cohort of award recipients

Course preparation complete

Frequently Asked Questions about Sustainability Education

What is sustainability education?

Sustainability education fosters in students the knowledge, skills, values, and habits of mind necessary to be responsible citizens of communities striving for a more sustainable world.

Do sustainability educators need to agree upon what is “sustainable?”

Sustainability education does not prescribe a list of practices that lead to the “right” outcome but instead demands an iterative series of questions and answers that require students to grapple with unsustainable situations and reason toward more sustainable solutions. Therefore, sustainability education offers both a process of discovery and a vision for the future, although the exact nature of this future may be impossible to define or agree upon.

Does sustainability education teach a body of knowledge, a set of skills, or a way of thinking?

Sustainability education is not merely a set **body of knowledge**, but one cannot take a systems approach to the social and natural worlds without a basic understanding of how those systems work. Therefore, sustainability education should strive to provide students a basic understanding of appropriate subjects from the physical and social sciences.

Sustainability education also emphasizes the **skills** necessary for a systems approach to problem solving. It helps students develop the ability to assess empirical claims, think critically about alternative viewpoints, communicate verbally and in writing, engage in political discourse, advocate change, and commit to action.

Most importantly, sustainability education serves as a lens through which we can analyze and understand problems and ultimately leads to a different **way of thinking**. Sustainability education promotes an understanding of social and ecological systems, an awareness of their interdependence, and an appreciation for the complexity of our world.

Sustainability education demands attention to the importance of place and community while simultaneously increasing students’ awareness of cross-cultural perspectives and global interconnectedness.

What is the role of social and economic justice in sustainability education?

Employing the habits of mind developed through sustainability education forces students to consider the connections between environmental and social systems and to see social issues such as poverty and racism in a larger context. Social and economic issues are a necessary, but not sufficient, part of sustainability education.

Does sustainability education require a certain value system? Is it activism?

Sustainability education should not push a political or moral agenda and must resist simple, dogmatic thinking. However, while sustainability education does not demand a particular value system, it does demand a critical evaluation of individual and collective values and the impact of those values on people, species and other systems. And while sustainability education should not advocate any particular change, there is an implicit assumption that some change is necessary and that students should develop the skills and knowledge necessary to work for change.

How does sustainability education relate to the liberal arts?

The systems thinking and interdisciplinarity that sustainability education can encourage – everything is connected and mutually influential, and it’s up to curious minds to discern how – is perhaps just another name for the kind of flexible, comprehensive, and curious thinking liberal arts education is designed to encourage. However, sustainability education is more than simply a repackaging of the liberal arts. The concrete and immediate challenges addressed by sustainability education give it a coherence and practicality that is often missing from the liberal arts.

How does sustainability education relate to my discipline? Doesn’t Environmental Studies take care of teaching about sustainability?

While Environmental Studies classes may be the most likely to address the concept of sustainability directly, many disciplines have a role to play in effective sustainability education. Some disciplines are more likely to focus on knowledge – for example, the basic workings of ecological and social systems – while others will help students hone the necessary skills such as problem-solving and effective communication. Much of what is currently taught in many disciplines contributes to sustainability literacy but significant change is also necessary. Faculty need to examine their role in preparing students to be responsible citizens of communities striving for a more sustainable world.