

GreenHouse Residential Learning Community
University of Vermont
90 University Heights South, Room 9
Burlington, Vermont 05405

March 4, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter of affirmation to provide justification for why the Ecological Design Collaboratory (EDC) qualifies as an innovation credit for STARS. As the Director of the GreenHouse Residential Learning Community and a founding EDC steering committee member I have a breadth of experience in place-based and sustainability studies. My years of experience as an ecologist studying and practicing landscape natural history and ecosystem geography, made formal through a PhD in Natural Resources, lead me to be confident in my assessment that the EDC is a truly novel and creative program fostering sustainability at UVM and in the community.

First, the EDC is a collaborative effort of individuals and organizations fostering strong campus and community engagement. Ecological design has seen strong interest on the UVM campus and around Vermont, though it lacked a programmatic home at UVM. By creating a home student-initiated projects can be linked to the sustainability needs of the community. The EDC is a design-build center on campus where classes have access to space, resources, and mentorship; a place where students can develop the hands-on skills they need to bring their projects to fruition. Students are provided with the intellectual and physical space to explore ecological design, while also having direct connections with community partners.

Second, the GreenHouse Residential Learning Community, which promotes ecological literacy and fosters a holistic appreciation for human and natural environments, is a logical host for the EDC. The EDC is grounded in a strategy of relocalization and a belief that creating resilient communities will require self-reliance, creativity, and knowledge of place. Rooted in this philosophy the EDC has evolved with a clear mission of "place-based ecological design." In order to realize this objective, the activities of the EDC are centered on four main themes: 1) Design and Build with Local Materials, 2) Biomimicry, 3) Biophilic Design, and 4) Transformational Leadership. These fundamental themes provide a strong innovative platform for which to improve student knowledge and skills centered on living design approaches that promote sustainability and vitality.

Third, the Living Place Design Competition is a great example of the type of ingenuity and creativity that place-based ecological design framing can foster. The year-long competition was used to build awareness of the collaboratory. Competitors were tasked with creating a holistic design submission that integrated storm-water management, sustainable food production, and community engagement. In the end, 52 teams from around the world representing over 200 people participated in the extremely successful competition. It's possible that a follow-up course will be taught where students will build out the winning design, or a hybrid of several of the top designs.

For these reasons and more the Ecological Design Collaboratory is a striking example of sustainability innovation and leadership at UVM.

Sincerely,



Walter Poleman

Director, GreenHouse Residential Learning Community