



Shared Futures Global Learning Forum

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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Sustainability and Interdependence

Questions:

- What are we sustaining/looking to sustain? (the environment, standard of living, etc.)
- Is the term “sustainability” losing credibility, and if so do we need a new one?
- Who owns/buys into the idea of sustainability? Does one department have ownership, or can we all pull out something that relates?
- How essential is sustainability? Where does it fit in among top priorities of an educational institution?
- Can we come up with (at least at the institutional level) a definition of sustainability? Would we want to, or does that limit the opportunity for all disciplines to participate?
- Do unsustainable practices in facilities and student life have a significant impact on students ideas about sustainability, particularly when in the face of trying to teach sustainability? How can it be countered (e.g. how can campus practices be reformed).
- Is it important to integrate sustainability across the curriculum? Or is it sufficient to encourage/require each student to take a course focused on sustainability? Or should sustainability not just exist within the curriculum, but be held across the entire culture of the campus?

Big Ideas:

- Sustainability can be taught as part of a whole course, or can be implemented campus-wide.
- Sustainability is much more than environmental – it also applies to economic, cultural, and community practices. In approaching sustainability, we must address the breadth of its definition. Thus, we need inclusion of basic scientists (possibly asking, is your science good enough for social policy?); humanities and social scientists (social justice component); economics and administrators (cutting costs through being more sustainable, turning the economic crisis into a reason to focus or refocus on sustainability).
- Every field should be able to have a serious conversation about sustainability (e.g. the Spanish literature course that approaches it through a poem by Pablo Neruda regarding the freshness of air).
- The idea of “good stewardship” may lead to a model for sustainability. In particular, as an educational institution it is essential to teach stewardship. In other words, it is necessary to teach process rather than just the endpoints.
- It is best to enter sustainability through one of three doors: environment, people, or economics.
- Place is important to the work that you do on campus and the ability to integrate experiential learning – going into the community to work on any form of sustainability first hand. For example, students can use service learning to evaluate the sustainability issues surrounding food security in the greater community, can work with the community to improve recycling practices, etc.

Faculty/Institutional Development:

- Mentoring structure needed whereby well-versed faculty can help others integrate sustainability into their classrooms. Participating faculty must have permission not to be an expert.
- Student buy-in (through student government or other student organizations) is necessary to give the program broad legitimacy and backing. Students need to be included through “sustainability leadership groups” – it can’t just happen from the top down.
- Community partnerships (sustainability beyond environmental).
- Must make administration see sustainability as “mission critical” – necessary to support the overall mission of the institution. Without this administrative will, the high initial cost is likely to steer the administration away from sustainability projects.