

Chapter 81

Supporting Sustainability Education and Leadership: Strategies for Students, Faculty, and the Planet

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ABSTRACT

The authors describe a workshop, called the Sustainability Education Intensive (SEI), and related programs at a major research university in Canada that served to support educators to introduce or enhance aspects of sustainability into their courses, programs, and initiatives. They present their pilot work in the context of sustainability education and leadership, both in terms of degree programs and programs for educators worldwide. The authors present the key components, steps, and associated timelines of their planning and delivery. They give examples of participant feedback and how the workshop has “stayed alive,” thus representing the sustainability of this form of educational development. They provide templates that can be used or adapted at any post-secondary institution. The authors conclude with a checklist to help practitioners get started in supporting educators and leaders in the important area of sustainability education.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we describe a workshop, called the Sustainability Education Intensive (SEI), and related programs at a major research university in Canada that served to raise awareness and provide

skills and resources in developing sustainability-related courses, programs and initiatives at the post-secondary level across all disciplines. The target audience for the workshop and related programs included professors, instructors, graduate students, and other leaders interested in sustainability education. We present our workshop and related program in the context of sustainability

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education and leadership programs and initiatives at other Post-Secondary Institutions (PSIs).

As you read this chapter, you may wish to ask yourself:

- What makes my PSI stand out?
- Could a new or enhanced aspect of sustainability education make the difference?
- What support for faculty, administrators, and student leaders is needed?
- What are the steps to do this, and how do I start?
- With whom do I need to collaborate?

This chapter highlights an important strategy and policy of developing, promoting and facilitating sustainability-oriented educational programs and student services in higher education. We focus on ways to successfully meet the global challenge to involve learners in sustainability-connected curricula while at the same time being a change agent at your PSI.

We provide an overview of the major components of the SEI, as well as the steps we took in its planning, design, promotion and delivery of this workshop. We describe how we got started and what we feel makes our program unique. We present some examples by which the workshop has ‘stayed alive’, thus representing the sustainability of this form of educational development.

A key objective of this chapter is to provide practitioners with tools to implement sustainability education and leadership at any PSI, outlining the value in doing so. While recognizing that the particulars of sustainability education must be adapted for each place of implementation, we see value in accessing the details of how a specific program was developed and implemented. Thus, we provide templates that you can adapt for your own use, as well as checklists and timelines, to provide you with step-by-step plans for a sustainability education workshop and related programs to support teachers of any discipline or experience level at your PSI.

BACKGROUND

Defining Sustainability

The Brundtland Commission¹ of 1983 defined sustainability² as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This definition uses the triple bottom line of social, economic and ecological. Three decades later, UBC Sustainability³ (at the University of British Columbia, Canada) has evolved from a similar definition to one where sustainability is seen as “a matter of inter-generational justice” with respect to human use of the natural environment (<http://www.sustain.ubc.ca/research/articles/matter-inter-generational-justice>).

The Earth Charter⁴ is an international declaration of fundamental values and principles to guide and help build a just, sustainable and peaceful global society in the 21st Century. Launched in 2000, it views a sustainable global society as one “founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace” (Earth Charter, 2000).

There is often vivid discussion over “the definition of sustainability,” and though it can be helpful to explain what one means, we also acknowledge that there is no one definition that will appeal to everyone. In the SEI, we provided participants with a range of definitions and had them work with the assortment of sustainability interpretations in meaningful ways, thereby exploring and developing sustainability literacy (Cassidy et al., 2012).

The Importance of Supporting Sustainability Education and Leadership in Post-Secondary Education

Over the past thirty years, there has been an enormous increase in awareness, interest and knowledge about sustainability and its importance and value in education. As the UN Decade of Education

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