

## SUSTAINABILITY COURSES AT HSU (rev. 3/29/2013)

In order to initiate this process the Sustainability Steering Committee thought it important to have a starting point to examine what curricular efforts already exist on campus before starting a discussion of changes or enhancements.

The first action taken was to create an inventory of existing courses that are broadly associated with the current concepts of sustainability: society, economy, and environment. Since this would be a listing of courses already offered, with no curricular changes proposed, it appeared to be the most efficient and policy agnostic way to proceed.

The SSC evaluated several alternatives for determining how to designate courses being identified with sustainability. The SSC determined the inaugural designations should be done simply, which provides clarity and room to improve and/or refine the process as related programs or processes are developed. As a result, a *description* of what connotes two categories of sustainability courses was adopted, rather than *definitions*.

These categories are drawn from the widely recognized work of AASHE (Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education). While “sustainability” has many definitions, our goal was to be inclusive, while recognizing that there are *social, economic, and environmental* dimensions to any adequate definition.

**Sustainability-focused courses** concentrate on the concept of sustainability, including its social, economic, *and* environmental dimensions, or examine a topic using sustainability as a lens.

**Sustainability-related courses** integrate social *or* economic issues with environmental dimensions of sustainability.

The lists began with a keyword search of course descriptions in the HSU catalog. Our committee used a total of 42 search terms, chosen to relate to the three dimensions of sustainability: environmental, economic, and social (search terms included: forest\*, ecosystem\*, energ\*, econom\*, financ\*, justic\*, socio\*, politic\*, communit\*, etc.). An initial list of courses whose titles or descriptions contained search terms from at least two dimensions was refined with a course-by-course examination of catalog descriptions. The committee then published a draft list to the department Chairs, asking for confirmation, additions, and/or subtractions from the lists. After reconciling the revisions, the final version was sent to the departments at the end of the 2012 Spring Semester.

- The anticipated main mechanisms for marketing this inventory are to have graphical designation icons associated with the courses in the printed catalog and text designations in the online course schedule. Permission must be obtained from the Integrated Curriculum Committee for making changes to the online course schedule, per existing campus processes.
  - The Vetted inventory was presented to the ICC early in the Fall 2012 semester and they determined it could not move forward until a definition of sustainability was constructed to give clearer context to the descriptions used in screening courses for the inventory.
  - The SSC is developing a working draft definition of sustainability for the campus and what constitutes a sustainability-related or focused course. The definitions will be presented to the ICC before the end of the Fall Semester.

- The SSC presented working definitions of sustainability and what constitutes a related or focused course to the ICC in mid-November 2012 at which time that body agreed to move forward with publishing the inventory as described above. The definitions are:
  - HSU Sustainability Defined:
    - Sustainability is the ability to meet the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.\* The relevant dimensions to examine include the environment, society, and economy and their interconnections.
  - Sustainability Courses Defined:
    - A course is related to sustainability if **any part** of it explores the relationship between the environmental and the social and/or economic needs among different generations (i.e., past or current in relation to future generations). This may include using sustainability examples to illustrate core course concepts.
    - A course is focused on sustainability if **a significant part** of it explores the interplay between all three dimensions.

\*Wording comes from the core definition created by the Brundtland Commission in 1987, convened by the United Nations to create a report on sustainable development into the future.

Subsequent to the ICC approval the Academic Programs office, Registrar's Office, and Sustainability Office met to work out the logistics of publishing the inventory in the catalog and online class schedule.

- The catalog will have icon logos next to the respective courses similar to this sample:



with the filled leaf indicating focused courses and the outlined leaf indicating related courses.

- The class schedule will have a new column (Sust\*) and the footnote: “\* Sustainability ("Sust") classes are either SF for Sustainability Focused or SR for Sustainability Related.”

After the course inventory is published, the next steps to greater integration of sustainability into the curriculum are anticipated to be:

1. Convene a loosely scripted gathering of interested faculty to pose the general question of how they would like to see opportunities for enhancing curricular offerings be conducted? Some of the suggestions will be, but not limited to:
  - a. Providing funding incentives to change individual courses.
  - b. Organize focused book circles for faculty to engage in dialog/discussion around sustainability concepts.
  - c. Organize a campus based training on incorporating sustainability concepts into courses.
  - d. Hire a trainer to present a specific, facilitated training on incorporating sustainability concepts into courses.
2. As the dialog progresses through enhancing course offerings a future or parallel question will be: does the faculty see utility in formalizing sustainability course offerings into a designated degree program (major or minor) and/or general education area?