

Title of QEP: Sustainability Curriculum

Institution: University of North Carolina at Charlotte

1. Why the proposed topic is important to UNC Charlotte?

Sustainability is clearly emerging as one of the central public policy issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, one that has ramifications for everything from economic development to quality of life. Sustainability is also emerging as a key arena for interdisciplinary academic enquiry. For example, a quick review of literature through the Web of Science, online scholarly journal search engine, revealed 23,622 articles with a topic of “sustainability.” Of those, 17,958 articles, 76 percent, have been published between 2001 and 2010. With such a growing literature on the topic of sustainability, it seems only fitting that an academic focus on sustainability, be integrated into the University of North Carolina at Charlotte campus. In particular it seems important for the university to ensure that it prepares students for a future in which both knowledge of and careers in sustainability are likely to be important.

In addition, it is worth noting that ‘environmental awareness’ was one of the critical 21<sup>st</sup> century skills identified by the UNC Tomorrow report. UNC Charlotte currently does not have any formal curriculum that addresses this skill. In this respect, UNC Charlotte lags behind most of the other research-focused universities in the UNC system. Examples of these efforts include research centers at UNC Chapel Hill, UNC Wilmington, and NC State, and degree programs at Appalachian State and UNC Asheville. Indeed, a focus on sustainability is emerging at campuses nationwide, and the Princeton review recently reported that the availability of sustainability related offerings is an increasingly important factor influencing a students’ decision about which college to attend.

2. How will the proposed project affect student learning?

This proposal will infuse sustainability into the curriculum at UNC Charlotte. There are a variety of possible places in the curriculum that would benefit from an infusion of sustainability. These include freshman seminars, the general education curriculum, and upper level elective and majors courses that could be the basis for a sustainability certificate, minor, and perhaps even a major. These options are not by any means mutually exclusive, and thus if this QEP topic goes forward for further consideration the key question is not so much which is the ‘right’ option as which option makes the most sense given faculty and student interest.

***Goals***

1. To ensure that as many students as possible are introduced to sustainability issues during the course of earning their diploma either because such courses are designed into degree requirements or because such courses are easily identified.

2. To allow students who have or develop an interest in sustainability to pursue that interest in their course work.
  3. To develop, if possible, degree or certificate program or programs that allow students to identify themselves as having interdisciplinary sustainability expertise.
  4. To build the curricular offerings that will support goals 1, 2, and 3, with a particular focus on increasing, if possible curricular offerings in the area of sustainability that allow students to experience the practical implications of sustainability thinking in their community (ies).
3. What existing problems or gaps in student learning the proposed topic will address.

The proposed QEP has the potential to address several gaps in student learning:

- Awareness of sustainability as a complex set of inter connected processes and decisions. All too often, students connect sustainability with important but somewhat superficial activities like recycling rather than the underlying policy and science questions.
- Connections between campus learning and real world concerns—specifically as related to sustainability within Charlotte and the surrounding region.
- The availability of academic programs to prepare students for careers in sustainability and/or provide them with interdisciplinary awareness of sustainability that they can apply to a traditional career field.

4. What portion of the student body will be affected by the proposed topic

If implemented as part of general education the impact could be very significant, reaching many if not all undergraduates.

5. Whether the proposed QEP is a new endeavor or a significant extension of ongoing efforts.

This is largely a new effort although it builds significantly on existing research efforts (for example the IDEAS Center) and graduate programs and also a University level focus on sustainability as an institution. The one undergraduate program in this area that is under development is an environmental science degree based in Geography and Earth Sciences.