Subcommittee Members: Victor Nolet (Woodring College), Gary Bornzin (Fairhaven College), Dan Hagen (College of Business and Economics), Sara Singleton (Political Science), Linda Smeins (Art), Nicholas Zaferatos (Huxley College), Seth Vidana (Campus Sustainability Coordinator)

Re: Recommendations for establishing a university-wide program in sustainability literacy, experiential learning, research, and the creation of a WWU Faculty Sustainability Academy

1. Background and History:

The Curriculum and Programs Subcommittee met on several occasions in 2006 to discuss strategies for fostering sustainability education at WWU. The subcommittee forwarded its suggestions to the WWU Sustainability Committee in the winter of 2006, and held an open forum Roundtable Discussion on May 16, 2006 to review these suggestions with WWU students, faculty and staff. The suggestions were as follows:

1.1 Suggestions for WWU Sustainability Curriculum

“Evaluate, assess, and develop recommendations regarding general university requirements to strengthen student literacy in the areas of environmental science and policy, planning and design.”

“Investigate the desirability and feasibility of developing a university-wide Interdisciplinary Major in ‘Sustainability’ that brings together studies in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities.”

Accompanying the suggestions, the Subcommittee forwarded several action items to the WWU Sustainability Committee:

1.2 Preliminary Concepts and Action Activities

1. Inventory existing WWU classes that contribute towards environmental/sustainability literacy;

2. Solicit student, faculty and staff interest and input on ways to improve WWU sustainability education.

3. Evaluate the range of skills and competencies that all WWU students should acquire in their undergraduate education as well as for students majoring in a new “sustainability” degree program;

4. Develop an inventory of WWU faculty dedicated to sustainability principles through teaching, research, service, and other creative endeavors;

5. Evaluate curricula changes to strengthen sustainability literacy among all Western students;

6. Evaluate the desirability, feasibility and design for a new degree major in “sustainability”, including structures for administering the program and ways to incorporate “areas of emphasis” (such as a Major in Sustainability with emphasis in
7. Evaluate alternatives for incorporating into the curriculum a diversity of perspectives on sustainability.

Based upon these prior activities and subsequent discussions held at the fall 2006 Sustainability Committee meeting, the Subcommittee met on November 30, 2006 to formulate the following recommendations for implementing a WWU-wide sustainability curriculum:

2. Overview of Sustainability Curriculum Recommendations

The following recommendations seek to promote a developing curriculum and program in sustainability at WWU comprised of 1) classes in sustainability literacy, 2) classes in sustainability research skills, 3) a framework supporting independent student research and seminars in sustainability, 4) the creation of a university "overlay minor" in sustainability, and 5) the formation of a faculty oversight working group ("Sustainability Studies Academy") to participate in teaching, mentoring, and guiding the development of a sustainability curriculum at WWU.

The curriculum structure is intended to support sustainability studies serving freshman through graduate students. The curriculum could be developed in phases and comprised of a series of introductory classes (priority), a series of skills/development classes, seminar/independent research classes, and upper division/graduate research in sustainability.

2.1. Classes in Sustainability Literacy (a 100-level course structure)

GUR Freshman/Sophomore Education

Format: WWU could establish a GUR class in sustainability, initially serving as an optional GUR class; eventually it could become a separate GUR track requiring sustainability literacy for all WWU students. The initial class could be designed as a large format lecture class for 400 students, offered each quarter. The course would have a capacity to serve 1200 students each year, about 50% of the incoming freshman class.

Curriculum: Multi-disciplinary, comprised of up to 10 faculty members sharing teaching responsibilities from throughout the disciplines. Faculty, who are members of the WWU Sustainability Academy, could teach 1 or 2 weeks, introducing their particular discipline’s relationship to sustainability issues.

Thematic: The course could be designed to address WWU’s impact, locally, regionally, and globally, on sustainability issues (i.e. global warming; carbon neutrality) as well as to the impact of sustainability issues on WWU and its students. Students would examine the impact of their personal decisions and behaviors in the larger context of the communities to which they belong. They should come out of the class with several foundational understandings: sustainability issues are complex and interdisciplinary; each of us makes decisions that have impact beyond our immediate situation and into the future (therefore, we need to think “upstream and downstream” when we make those decisions); all disciplines have a stake in sustainability and there are ways that each discipline can contribute to creating a greener WWU and more sustainable planet.

2.2. Classes in Sustainability Research, Methods, Skills (a 200-level course structure).

Format: Mid-size classes offered by the Sustainability Studies Academy faculty introduce students to sustainability research methods, interdisciplinary studies, and working group problem solving skills. The class serves students advancing from the GUR
class interested in furthering knowledge in sustainability. The course provides skills for future independent research studies in sustainability.

**Thematic:** Applied research skills in a cross disciplinary environment. Experiential learning emphasizes topics relating to understanding sustainability through WWU's institutional as well as individual impacts.

2.3. Framework for Experiential Learning (300-400-500-level structures).

**Experiential Learning / Independent Research / Seminars / Service Learning**

**Format:** Faculty mentored small group seminars and independent research.

**Thematic:** Faculty developed seminars in applied sustainability studies. Faculty guided student independent research could address a wide range of sustainability topics of concern to WWU which are identified by the Sustainability Academy. Research products could be managed, published, and distributed through the WWU Campus Sustainability Office.

**Graduate Research:** Independent research studies can include graduate thesis research.

2.4. Overlay “Minor” in sustainability studies.

Students participating in the sustainability course sequence (the number of total credits and composition of courses to be determined) could obtain a “WWU minor in Sustainability Studies”, as an overlay minor to their chosen WWU majors. Courses taken in the sustainability curriculum could satisfy as “electives” in the student’s major.

2.5. Faculty Sustainability Academy

A Sustainability Studies Academy could be established comprised of all WWU faculty members who “self declare” a research, teaching, of creative endeavor interest in sustainability studies. The Academy could contribute in several ways to WWU sustainability studies:

1. Serve as faculty in the GUR (100) and Research/Methods (200) courses
2. Sponsor student independent research
3. Teach Seminars (300 – 500 level)
4. Mentor student-faculty research projects
5. Serve on committees for “self-design sustainability majors”
6. Identify suitable research topics
7. Monitor and refine the sustainability curriculum
8. Sponsor open colloquy and panel discussions to address emerging and controversial issues that pertain to sustainability and WWU’s impacts.
9. Engage in interdisciplinary research and scholarly writing focusing on issues related to sustainability.

**Organization:** A “call for faculty” could be announced, inviting faculty to self-declare their qualifications as a member of the Academy, identifying their particular area of emphasis.

**Research Products:** In collaboration with the Sustainability Office, topics of interest to WWU’s sustainability program could be identified and the research topics could form a framework for studies in the sustainability curriculum. Funding could support publication of research projects, and disseminate on the WWU sustainability website.