New Course Proposal: Sustainability Literacy I (ESTU 197)
To be offered: Spring and Fall Quarters, 2010

Sponsoring College: Huxley College of the Environment*
Sponsoring Department: Department of Environmental Studies*

Course Title: Sustainability Literacy I (3 credits)
Course No.: Estu 197

Summary and Background:
Over the past four years a voluntary association of WWU faculty committed to the establishment of sustainability education at WWU has conducted an ongoing series of discussions. These discussions have led to the formation of the Sustainability Institute Initiative in Spring 2009. Over the past six months a group of faculty and staff have met regularly to outline a vision for sustainability studies at Western.

Although listed for the time being as a Huxley course, it is being offered by the WWU Sustainability Academy in cooperation with the WWU Sustainability Initiative as a pilot course in a planned sequence of courses in “sustainability literacy.” The sequence will target lower division students, and will eventually be offered as a new GUR track towards the attainment basic literacy in sustainability among WWU students, and will be available for co-listing with a number of other programs that wish to be affiliated.

The course will also serve as a requirement for future minors in sustainability studies to be designed in cooperation with those disciplines that wish to offer their students an opportunity to pursue a sustainability track within their chosen majors. Existing courses from other disciplines are actively being sought to establish a network of appropriate options for cooperative sustainability minors and majors throughout the Western curriculum.

Course Description and Justification:
Sustainability has been very broadly defined as meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The ability of society to use its global natural and human resources within sustainable limits will require a collective effort among all peoples in the global community and significant adjustments in the way we perceive ourselves and our shrinking world. Because sustainability is affected by everything we do, course learning objectives will be focused on creating student experiences that will lead to broad, systemic perspectives not available in any one discipline.

While definitions of sustainability call for critical discussion, most inherently entail the idea of quantifiable limits. Sustainability is also a call to action to discover common goals and values that are founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace, and to develop new economic, political, and social institutions which are consistent with these goals.

Course Format:
The course will be structured as an interdisciplinary inquiry into the complex web of interdependence between the natural world and human activity. Each quarter a group of WWU faculty will meet under the leadership of a faculty coordinator and organize the course offering around several broad sustainability topics selected by the teaching team, such as global climate change, poverty, food security, urbanization, energy, etc. Topics will be explored in depth in a series of 2-week segments in which several members of the faculty team will present individual perspectives on the topic from their respective disciplines. Student discussions will lead to group formulation of solutions, which will be presented as final projects or presentations.
Thematic Topics:
A variety of topics will be evaluated for inclusion in the course, reflecting the interests and expertise of the participating teaching faculty. Each quarter, four topics will be selected for curriculum focus. An illustrative example of thematic topics include: Climate Change, Water Resources, Fisheries Collapse, New Green Economies, Solar/Wind/Hydrogen Economy, Materials Economy, Redesign of Cities, Stabilizing Populations, Food Security, Leadership Communities, Global Peace, Poverty, Emotional and Spiritual Wellbeing, Institutional Transformations, and Learning Societies.

Course Coordinator and Teaching Faculty:
The course will be managed by a faculty coordinator who will coordinate each teaching module with individual faculty and lead the discussion seminars. Instructors for the individualized modules are faculty members of the WWU Sustainability Academy, who contribute their time and expertise as a recognized and valued form of professional service. The detailed course syllabus will be formulated upon selection of participating faculty and the course coordinator, and will be reviewed and approved by a faculty curriculum committee of the sponsoring college and the WWU Sustainability Academy.

Each lecture will explore one sustainability topic from the perspective of the instructor’s discipline, including conceptual framework, tools, and examples, using case studies and other methods. For each lecture, faculty will prepare a module syllabus, reading assignments, and exam questions which are assembled as a coordinated course syllabus and exam in ways that dovetail with the preceding and following presentations.

Future Course Sequence:
This course is intended as the first in a series of courses in Sustainability Literacy towards the goal of establishing, ultimately, a sustainability literacy requirement for all WWU students. Together the courses may represent a GUR concentration, and may be used as prerequisite courses in the future development of minors and majors within disciplinary departments.

General Education Competencies and Perspectives
The course is intended eventually to be a General Education course. Therefore during its pilot phase Spring and Fall Quarters 2010, attention will also be focused on developing a number of the eleven Gen Ed competencies through a series of reflective written assignments, small group collaborations, and discussions that individual instructors will design and implement for their segments under the guidance of the course facilitator. The course will address the following General Education learning objectives:

- Writing and speaking
- Critical Reading
- Collaboration and teamwork
- Values, assumptions, and beliefs
- Social and environmental interactions
- Citizenship and responsibility
- Personal and Professional ethics
- Problem solving
- Explore, imagine, and create