WWU Sustainability Academy
Western Washington University

Dear colleagues,

We cordially extend to you this invitation to join the WWU Sustainability Academy!

Following several years of discussion, a group of faculty has started the (tentatively named) "WWU Sustainability Academy." Our goal is to build upon Western's existing faculty resources to better meet the growing student and faculty interests in sustainability education at the general education level as well as at the program-specific level, and to provide a focal point for research and teaching collaborations among faculty, students, and community partners.

The "Academy" is open to any member of Western's faculty who contributes to knowledge in the broad field of sustainability (see below if you are not sure it's for you). We hope to stimulate an ambitious cross-college conversation and develop a plan of action this year.

Therefore we are asking you to:

1) Sign up as a voluntary, provisional faculty member in the WWU Sustainability Academy.

2) Help us identify curricular resources and interests.

3) Attend our next meeting at 4PM, Wednesday, December 3, CF 125, (please RSVP via the survey question).

4) Contact others in your department or College who could contribute to sustainability education at WWU, and ask them to complete the survey.

You can do all of this by taking our short survey at:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=G7xGZHn7_2f6JM6sBU_2fk7ZGSg_3d_3d

Please complete the survey before November 8, 2008

We appreciate your time and interest and look forward to receiving your survey reply.

Sincerely,

Gene Myers
Huxley College

Nicholas Zaferatos
Huxley College
What are the Current WWU Sustainability Efforts?

Western Washington University has adopted this definition of "sustainability":

A sustainable Western, through its academics, research and operations:
- Protects local and global ecology
- Upholds social equity
- Creates economic vitality
- Maintains the health of those in the Western community

We now have an Office of Sustainability, but we do not have a vehicle for instituting curriculum programs to carry out a sustainability mission at WWU.

In 2005 WWU established the Sustainability Committee, which advocates sustainability activities through a broad agenda. One of the committee’s charges is to expand sustainability education throughout the university curriculum. The WWU Sustainability Academy is a key step towards stimulating a cross-college conversation to begin new academic initiatives.

Will it be more work?

Only if we want it to work. Hopefully this will give back as much as it takes. There are strong signals of support from all departments and also from the WWU administration. This is only a starting point, and designed as a grass-root, faculty initiative. You can help define directions and outcomes.

What are some of the ideas for expanding Sustainability Education at WWU?

The curriculum sub-committee of the WWU Sustainability Committee has outlined a range of potential new directions. They include instituting sustainability literacy at the undergraduate level, teaching courses in sustainability research, methods, and skills development, experiential learning programs, establishing “minors” in sustainability as overlays to existing majors, and creating a new inter-college major in sustainability and graduate education.

Isn’t 'sustainability' a hopelessly diffuse / co-opted buzz word?

It is certainly a broadly defined and overused term. WWU's definition was intentionally stated broadly to ensure the widest possible involvement by all academic units at WWU. It may indeed have become a “buzz” word, but it is unlikely to go away, so we view the term itself as an opportunity that can lead to extended critical discussion and refinement by both faculty and students.

Sustainability is fine, but it's not what I do
You might be surprised by how some students creatively incorporate what you do with other fields of sustainability. Even if you see sustainability as only important to you in your personal life, your specialized field of expertise might well be critically important to a well-rounded WWU sustainability program. Look at the WWU mission statement above: is your teaching and scholarship pertinent to one of those four areas?

*Doesn't Huxley already have this covered?*

The intent is to complement and build upon disciplinary strengths across WWU, rather than to duplicate or compete with existing programs. Each college approaches sustainability education through their unique lens. It is through inter-disciplinary collaboration that opportunity avails itself for better understanding the interrelationships comprising a sustainability mentality.