

Beyond Discipline: Integrating Academia, Operations, and Community for Campus-wide Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

Education for sustainable development requires institutions of higher learning to move beyond narrowly-defined, discipline-specific models of education that have typified the modern university over the last 150 years. Sustainable development itself encompasses an integrative view of how economies and societies bring about equitable growth and development that recognizes their interdependencies within biophysical systems of the earth. Hence, a model to guide education for sustainable development must draw on this integrative nature, and suggests an approach to restructuring the ways in which the educational arena is constituted.

During the past dozen years, this concept had been at the heart of the model being adopted at Ball State University. Beginning in 1991 with the inception of its first Green Committee, campus-wide efforts to expand environmental literacy and embrace environmental practices at the root of campus operations set in place a growing momentum to transform this institution into a leader in the movement toward education for sustainability (EFS). Despite barriers that persist, increasing attention has been given to adopting an integrative approach to EFS. In part, this is showcased in the five conferences on 'Greening of the Campus' that Ball State has hosted (the fifth will occur in September 2003), where dialogue among practitioners from dozens of other colleges and university have added to the movement toward EFS. A second major outcome was creation of an interdisciplinary series of academic minors in sustainability, known as the Clustered Minors, which use a common pool of core courses and a closing course to permit students from many fields to complement their academic study with an immersion in EFS. A third outcome was the annual offering of a faculty development seminar in environment and sustainability, known as the 'Green for Green' workshop, that increases faculty understanding of these issues so that they may be incorporated in curriculum across the campus. Over 200 faculty members have participated since its inception in 1992. Each of these advancements toward developing education for sustainability as a central tenet of the University were outcomes of the Green Committee; many of its other recommendations have been instituted, as well.

Perhaps the most important step forward was taken by becoming a signatory to the Talloires Declaration in 1999, then instituting a plan to implement its tenets. This

brought about the second Green Committee (Green 2) in 2000, a taskforce of more than 90 people- students, faculty, staff, and community members, representing a diverse range of stakeholders in the university and its surroundings. By cultivating a 'sustainability community' across the institution, Ball State University has continued the momentum necessary for the ongoing integrative needs of educating for sustainable development.

This paper addresses the background and status of this ongoing commitment to sustainability while also addressing the limitations and barriers that remain. No single model can work for all institutions, but the model that has emerged at Ball State may be seen as a useful barometer for what can- and perhaps what cannot- be accomplished through an integrative approach to sustainability education.