Memorandum

Date: November 26, 2013

To: Environmental Studies Department

From: Matthew Freburg & Alex Catena

Re: Sustainability Course Project

Overview

We propose to implement a sustainability class that will be available only to first-year students here at Luther College. The course will be a 1st or 2nd 7 week course and will be available for both the fall and spring semesters (similar to how Fitness & Wellness courses are structured). Our goal is to teach students the importance of sustainability that will leave them with a better idea of how to be more sustainable in their daily lives. A sustainability course would also show that Luther College is devoted not only to implementing sustainable practices and institutions, but also in educating its students to allow them to be sustainable individuals in a world that is rapidly focusing on being more environmentally-friendly.

Background

Within the last five years and under the presidency of Richard Torgeson, Luther College heavily focused on being friendlier towards the environment. Although creating a sustainable campus is important, it is also necessary to teach the students how to interact with a sustainable environment and how to take walk away with a skill set that they can use in the future. With this course, students will be more likely to understand environmental problems and learn how to solve them in a successful and efficient manner.

Proposal

We believe that the student body would be able to understand Luther College’s policies on clean energy and sustainable procedures and goals if a sustainability course were to be implemented into the school curriculum and calendar, as well as being offered strictly to first-year students.

Description: The purpose of this project is, simply put, to educate first-year students about the importance of sustainability, why Luther College is supporting sustainable practices on campus, and why students taking the course should care about sustainability in their own lives.

Location: This course will most likely take place inside a classroom in Valders Hall of Science at Luther. However, it is possible during the school year (weather and transportation permitting),
that the students could participate in both field trips and individual student projects that focus on sustainable aspects within the Luther College and surrounding Decorah communities.

**Potential Uses:** The possible implementation of field trips within the course could allow students to spend time outside of the classroom and experience first-hand the different sustainability practices on and off campus. The individual student projects would allow students to choose a sustainability assignment of their choosing that pertains to the Luther College or Decorah communities. It could also help them to observe different locations around the college campus in order to find different sustainable topics to choose for the project.

**Labor:** This course will primarily be given to faculty members within the Environmental Studies Department at Luther College. This will include both work duties as a teacher inside of the classroom and as a guide during potential field trip ventures. It could be possible for students working as tutors or teachers’ assistants (TAs) to be involved in not only the classroom work, but also as potential drivers of vans and other motor vehicles owned by Luther College for field trips. Jon Jensen, the head of the Environmental Studies Department at Luther, has agreed upon the potential implementation of a sustainability course and can help to both support our project and act as an example to other professors of environmental studies courses.

**Resources/Costs:** Aside from necessary textbooks and other basic class-mandated materials that are of necessity to the course, there will be little need for additional resources. Cost wise it’s possible that extra teachers within the Environmental Studies Department will need to act as professors and instructors of courses, depending on the size(s) of incoming student classes and the number of sustainability classes being offered during the fall and spring semesters for both the 1st and 2nd 7 weeks. These two variables will determine how many instructors will be needed and how many will be paid for their work. Other costs could revolve around the operation and usage of the classrooms for the course, as well as the Luther College vans and motor vehicles for potential class field trips.

**Timeline:** As stated above, this will be a course that will be operated for the 1st and 2nd 7 weeks of both the fall and spring semesters (again, similar to Fitness & Wellness courses). It would be nice to see this course kept within the college curriculum for a long-term period of time in order to see its effects upon students that take it and what aspects of sustainability they learn from the course.

**Rationale**

*Education & Awareness*

With the implementation of a sustainability class at Luther College, it is our hope that first-year students taking the course will be able to grasp the concept of sustainability in both an
educational way and as well as a means of awareness recognition. Educationally, this course will teach students about the basics of sustainability, what Luther’s attempts and practices of sustainability are doing, and how students can act sustainably in their own lives. This course will also teach students why sustainability is important in our world and why we must be the individuals who have to care for and preserve the Earth and use its natural resources in wise and sensible ways through encouraging acts of conservation. In the words of Aldo Leopold in his chapter called “The Land Ethic” found within his 1949 book A Sand County Almanac, “conservation is a state of harmony between men and land.”

Luther College: An Eco-Friendly Model

Through its sustainability practices and several eco-friendly initiatives, Luther College has attracted local, statewide, and national attention. On October 29, 2012, the Governor of Iowa and the United States Secretary of Energy wrote letters to (former) college president Torgeson in praise of Luther’s new solar array and other sustainable practices and efforts. A blog post from DesMoinesRegister.com from November 29, 2010 wrote how Luther earned an “A” grade for its work in energy efficiency and other eco-friendly initiatives. Also mentioned in the post was how Luther was among the first colleges in the country to sign the Presidents Climate Commitment, encouraging the college to reduce the carbon footprint of its institutions, to allow the campus to operate more efficiently as a whole, and to make sustainability a part of every student’s education. With all of these recognitions and initiatives put in place from the past, it would make sense for Luther to take another step and require its student body to learn about sustainability, in the form of a new course, in order to continue setting a model for the region and nation, as well as keeping true to its promise that is written in the campus mission statement (“we practice joyful stewardship of the resources [and of the land] that surround us”).

Moving Forward:

In order to continue this project, we have talked to the environmental studies department about our idea to, hopefully, get their support. We are also planning to talk to Mr. Kraus, the dean of Luther College, in order to get a better idea as to the steps of implementing this course. We will also talk to the registrar in order to get a feel for the first year class schedule to see if it is feasible to add this course to their workload. Lastly, we will, eventually, run a test drive for this course to see how many students would take it, how they would respond, and to see if it is worth continuing.
**Conclusion**

Even though Luther College is striving forward to become a “model for sustainability [rather] than a mirror of our culture’s unsustainable practices” (Richard Torgeson), the practices being put into place are not enough. Luther should take the next step by implementing a sustainable course into its curriculum in order to give first-year students adequate knowledge about the campus and how to continue to live a sustainable lifestyle outside of Luther College. It is also important for students of Luther College to become change agents for the future.

**Contacts**

Jon Jensen — head of the Environmental Studies Department. Acted as our advisor for our project and supported our work. He strongly believes in sustainable lifestyles, choices, and habits. jensjo01@luther.edu

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