Research on Climate Change Education at University of Richmond and Proposal for a Stewardship/Sustainability Themed First Year Experience

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Introduction

The mission of the University Strategic Plan 2017 is to educate students in an academically and intellectually challenging atmosphere that trains them for lives of purpose, prudent inquiry, and being accountable role models in the world. The 5th value (Stewardship in a changing world) described in the Strategic Plan is to "be a leader in innovative practices that sustain our environmental, human and financial resources in response to emerging environmental and financial challenges." Our proposal incorporates 3/5 of the values described in the Strategic Plan: Academic excellence, Thriving and inclusive University community, and Stewardship in a changing world.

The University of Richmond’s Quality Enhancement Plan 2017 (QEP) learning outcomes for the First Year experience are to:

- Introduce students to a culture of liberal arts
- Bond students with a sense of place and purpose
- Help students see the bigger picture of their education and make course and co-curricular choices in the context of opportunities available in and outside of the classroom.

We recognize that the University has an opportunity to engage and increase its environmental education, and raise environmental awareness. Therefore, we propose to incorporate stewardship and sustainability as a curriculum theme into the proposed First Year Experience, more specifically in the Living and Learning Program, as outlined in the current QEP in accordance with the Strategic Plan.

Literature Review and Methods

Transdisciplinary Approach & Problem Based Learning

Inside the classroom and in everyday life, climate change needs to be connected to politics, religion, culture, economics, ethics and social life in order for people to fully internalize the issue. As a University, we must invite first year students into activities where they can develop vital critical thinking skills and further discuss and argue global environmental issues through a transdisciplinary curriculum. (Freist 2016, Orr 2004)

In our project, we researched and analyzed:

- The Climate Education Surveys at the University of Richmond
- First Year sustainability programs of competing universities
- Potential stewardship/sustainability themed activities and projects for a First Year experience.

Climate Change Education Surveys

University of Richmond Professors

"Is it important for students to learn about Climate Change on campus?"

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

79 University of Richmond professors from 36 different departments were surveyed. A total of 91.5% believe climate change is accelerated by humans.

University of Richmond Students

"How do you view URP's efforts on promoting sustainability?"

- Very Successful
- Partial
- Fail
- Have Not Noticed Any

Climate Change is a threat that needs to be addressed immediately. It is a threat that needs to be addressed now and now must happen. This is a threat that is human and everywhere.

To what extent do you believe that climate change is accelerated by humans?

- Strongly Believe
- Believe
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

A total of 206 students were surveyed. 98.1% of respondents believe that human accelerated climate change is a (moderate or immediate) threat to humans and ecosystems.

Third Spaces on Campus

- "Third space" refers to the environment generated from the two usual social spaces – home ("first space") and the workplace ("second space") – that occurs on campus and are highly recommended for environmental education purposes.

List of Some Third Spaces on Campus

Transportation
Solar Panel
Transportation Center Lobby
Marina Wrenn Wilson Elmore Robinson Business School
Jepson Hall Quad
Library of Ford Field
Hill East Quad
Gardens Path

Stewardship/Sustainability First Year Experience Recommendations

Student Involvement

- Take part in a sustainability affiliated student organization event

Recycling Competition

- Have a Solar Tour on campus
- Read the University’s Climate Action Plan: Energy evaluation and cost-benefit analysis of campus buildings

Renewable Energy

- Petition for climate change
- Participate in UPR Recycle Mania

Green Dining and Food Waste

- Try a Traffic-Less Week
- No Plastic Bottle Competitions
- Community Garden Project
- Research on organic/local food on campus

University Programs Comparison

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<th>Sustainability-related Programs</th>
<th>Office for Sustainability</th>
<th>Academic Research</th>
<th>First-year Seminar or equivalent</th>
<th>First-year Living &amp; Learning or equivalent</th>
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Conclusion

With 72.8% of students strongly believing that climate change is accelerated by humans and 81.1% responding that climate change is a threat that needs to be addressed immediately, there is a heightened demand for education on sustainable living and stewardship. The students’ desire is equally matched by the professors, as 78.7% responded that it is very important for students to learn about climate change.

A stewardship/sustainability themed FYE will help the University immerse students into the intellectual community environmental values into consideration. Students will have an opportunity to develop an attention to stewardship to continue to carry throughout their lives.

Works Cited and Acknowledgements

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In 2014 Easley and Manning conducted a similar survey. In 2017, college students have a greater concern for climate change.