A Proposal for a Minor in Sustainability
Quinn Egner
Environmental Studies Major
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Abstract
It is nearly undeniable that humans are altering the earth and rapidly depleting natural resources, compromising the future of generations to come. Thus, the importance of sustainability and sustainable practices is becoming increasingly important and relevant. While the world is working to innovate and prioritize sustainability, it is important that the University of Richmond must do the same. This proposal is for the addition of a minor in sustainability added to the university’s available education opportunities. The minor will be a total of six classes, three core sustainability classes and three additional classes to effectively cover the three pillars of sustainability (environmental, social, and economic). Furthermore, the university would be unique to the University of Richmond in that it requires minimal costs of only two additional faculty members and would provide unquestionable benefits. A minor in sustainability would improve the university’s AASHE STARS rating, allow the university to gain a competitive advantage among other institutions, and would allow the university to create more prospective students and produce more competitive graduates that are globally valuable citizens. Furthermore, the university would be symbolizing that it understands the importance of sustainability by introducing this minor. Around the globe, businesses, communities, colleges, and individuals are taking the necessary steps to work towards a sustainable future. The University of Richmond, with the introduction of a sustainability minor, has the opportunity to help lead the way instead of following back.

Giving the People What They Want
The issue of creating a sustainable society and future has been receiving more attention lately. Many people, specifically younger generations, are prioritizing sustainable living and addressing climate change (Harra et al, 2018).

• A survey of 26,000 young people aged 18-35 found that 85% of respondents listed climate change as the most serious issue globally, the largest response listed (Babington-Ashaye, 2016).
• Another survey of 5,000 people aged 18-25 found over 30% of respondents said that they would boycott a company that did not prioritize sustainable practices (Maeder, 2016).
• According to a UN Accenture CEO survey, 97% of CEOs believe that considering sustainability and sustainable practices is vital to the future success of their business (United Nations Global Compact, 2016).

It is increasingly evident that the younger generations are interested in sustainability. Furthermore, businesses are recognizing the importance of sustainability and are working to move towards more sustainable practices. If the University of Richmond wants to remain attractive to prospective students and want to continue to produce competitive graduates that succeed in their career, a minor in sustainability will only benefit.

Reaping the Benefits
Offering a minor in sustainability will:
• Improve the University of Richmond’s AASHE STARS rating, specifically in the sustainability curriculum category and the learning outcomes category.
• Help the University of Richmond maintain applicant pools as the younger generations increasingly prioritize sustainability.
• Maintain the university’s reputation for creating competitive graduates in the workplace.
• Act as a symbol to publicly display the university’s acknowledgement of the importance of sustainability and commitment to work towards a sustainable future.

The Sustainability Minor
The sustainability minor will focus on the three pillars of sustainability as described by the United Nations: economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Environmental sustainability describes maintaining natural resources and minimizing human impact on the earth, allowing biological systems to remain diverse and function indefinitely. Social sustainability refers to building social support systems, communities, and political structures that foster human wellbeing and maintain social order. Economic sustainability describes the ability of an economy to produce a defined level of production indefinitely into the future (Blackstock, 2007).

The sustainability minor will have a major impact beyond just the curriculum (Figure 2). The benefits reach beyond just the curriculum. The only costs to the university are the additional hiring of two faculty members to teach the minor. This is a minimal cost, especially when compared to other schools that offer sustainability minors. The University of Richmond has found the minor to be cost-effective, allowing the university to gain a competitive advantage among other institutions. The minor will be a total of six classes; three core sustainability classes and three additional courses, one from each of the three pillars of sustainability

Sustainability Minor Requirements

Joining the Club
A survey of higher institutions found that from 2008 to 2012, sustainability degree programs increased 57% (from 1,183 to 1,809). Furthermore, as of 2012, a total of 135 sustainability degree programs are offered by 156 institutions. Of those, around two-thirds are undergraduate degrees (Vincen, 2013).

• Emory University
Out of 1,180 total undergraduate students, 1,128 students graduated with a degree that includes sustainability (AASHE-Emory, 2017). Emory’s sustainability minor is truly interdisciplinary, with faculty on the steering committee ranging from business to agriculture to the German studies department (Emory University, 2018).
• The University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
70% of students chose to pursue a degree that includes sustainability at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth (AASHE-Arizona State University). Students are passionate and excited about what they are learning and confident that it will help them secure a job after graduation and help them lead a more sustainable life (Fut, 2015).
• Notre Dame
At Notre Dame, the vast majority of students who choose to pursue a minor in sustainability are students who do not come from other sustainability fields, such as environmental science. After only two years, the sustainability minor at Notre-Dame became the most popular minor for students (Hellman, 2018 pers. comm.)
• University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
The University of Massachusetts Dartmouth has seen exceptional success with its interdisciplinary sustainability minor. The minor was established in 2006 and quickly became the most popular and fastest growing minor offered by the university (University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, 2016). The university also includes an applied knowledge component through projects (Figure 3).

The University of Richmond could easily adapt a sustainability minor that emulates these schools. Arizona State, Emory University, Notre Dame, have gold STARS ratings. The schools have a diverse array of students pursuing the minor and have found their sustainability minors to be popular and successful.

Conclusions
The University of Richmond has been given a unique opportunity to become a leader in sustainability education. Currently, nine of the top ten liberal arts schools in the United States as ranked by US News offer minors in sustainability (The 10 Best Liberal Arts Colleges in America, 2016). If the University took advantage of this opportunity and offered a minor in sustainability, the university would act as a leader and gain competitiveness with these schools. While many schools offer sustainability minors, few of those schools are small liberal arts schools. For incoming students looking for a small liberal arts experience who also value sustainability and are interested in a sustainability minor, the University of Richmond will be able to out-compete all other liberal arts schools and gain more applicants. This is not new for the university; though small schools, the University of Richmond offers a nationally recognized business school, top-ranked science facilities, and was the first school in the United States to offer a leadership school. Being unique and innovative is what drives prospective student interest in the university. Adding a sustainability minor will only enhance that effect.

Sustainability is not a trend; it is a necessity. The rest of the world is moving and mobilizing to incorporate sustainability into everything humans do, as it is what humans need to do to survive. If the university does not want to be left behind, it must do the same.

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References
• Quinn Egner A Proposal for a Minor in Sustainability