Proposal to Establish a Sustainability Shared Goal
Educational Policies Committee Sustainability Shared Goal Task Force
(Requesting Bloomington Faculty Council endorsement)

Introduction

There is a pressing need to bolster Indiana University Bloomington’s General Education requirements for undergraduates to include sustainability literacy. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report warns that we are on track to reach 2.7 degrees Celsius of global warming (4.86 F) by 2050. This is a catastrophic prediction from the world’s scientists. UN Secretary General António Guterres called the Report “a red alert for the planet.” IU President Pamela Whitten recently stated that “Indiana University [is] actively finding solutions, leading conversations, and engaging the community locally and internationally” on the issue of climate change. A Shared Goal on Sustainability continues this important commitment and progress.

Institutions of higher education, like IUB, are uniquely positioned to develop an educated citizenry to address the existential crisis of global environmental change. Many of IUB’s peer institutions have implemented general education requirements focused on sustainability literacy - Michigan State, the University of Minnesota, and the University of Nebraska among them. Indiana University should not be left behind. Thus, a multi-disciplinary task force that included students was convened by the Education Policy Committee of the Bloomington Faculty Council to develop a proposal on a Sustainability Shared Goal.

The following suggested Shared Goal policy is based on learning outcomes suggested by the Association for the Advancement of the Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). It neither requires the addition of a new course, nor additional credit hours, but can be, the Task Force believes, implemented through current curricular offerings, potentially with more explicit reference to core concepts in most units. If approved, the Task Force recommends that an implementation group, with representatives of the schools, be convened to continue that discussion.

Definitions

*Sustainability*, as defined by the United Nations is the reconciliation of environmental, social, and economic demands – the “three pillars” of sustainability – for the immediate and future wellbeing of individuals and communities.

*Sustainability literacy* is an integrated, interdisciplinary understanding of the interactions between people and the environment to improve well-being, ensure equity for present and future generations, and safeguard the planet’s life-supporting ecosystems. Students will be able to define sustainability and major sustainability challenges; understand carrying capacity of ecosystems; apply concepts of sustainable development to address global sustainability challenges; and evaluate actions through a systems perspective that acknowledges the interconnections between the economy, social institutions and the environment.

Another Header?
Example learning outcomes

Academic units will evaluate, monitor, and regularly report on the achievement of sustainability literacy among their students.

The sustainability learning outcomes suggested by AASHE are derived by experts in the field and include the following (see Appendix III for a full accounting of program learning outcomes and competencies). It is recommended that schools, programs, and courses work from these learning outcomes as they develop and customize outcomes for their own students:

1. Students will be able to define sustainability and identify major sustainability challenges;
2. Students will understand the carrying capacity of ecosystems;
3. Students will be able to apply concepts of sustainable development to address sustainability challenges in a global context; and,
4. Students will identify, act on, and evaluate their professional and personal actions with the knowledge and appreciation of interconnections among economic, environmental, and social perspectives. Or “students will be able to evaluate actions through a systems perspective that acknowledges the interconnections between the economy, social institutions and the environment.”

Oversight of Implementation (and beyond)

For the first 2-3 years, the task force recommends that the BFC establish a subcommittee of the General Education Committee (GEC) to oversee the implementation of the sustainability shared goal, henceforth referred to as GEC-SSG. The GEC-SSG, which may benefit from including the continued service of the SSG Task Force and its leadership, would:

a) provide guidance to schools as they evaluate and report on sustainability in their curricula,
b) gather reports from schools,
c) offer feedback to schools regarding ways to improve sustainability literacy,
d) summarize evaluation reports from across campus in order to provide a broader view of sustainability literacy and the approaches taken by each school,
e) advise BFC and other relevant units on ways to improve sustainability literacy, and
f) collaborate with the Office of Sustainability and other units to assess improvements in literacy over time and stay abreast of sustainability literacy standards and practices.

After a 2-3 year implementation, oversight might be turned over to the GEC or perhaps a subcommittee of GEC that could evaluate all shared goals.

Implementation & Timeline

The task force has identified 3 most likely avenues for students to learn about sustainability:

1. General Education Courses: The task force worked with Bloomington Assessment & Research (BAR) to create a data dashboard that shows what students by school and major have taken sustainability-
related GenEd courses (see Appendix V). As noted above, around 25% of IUB undergraduates learn about sustainability through GenEd courses. These courses were evaluated and determined as sustainability courses by the Office of Sustainability in accordance with the standards by the Sustainability Tracking and Assessment Rating System (STARS, the primary sustainability metric for higher ed).

2. Program-specific Courses: Many undergraduate programs teach about sustainability in their own courses and in the context of their discipline, which is the ideal way for students to learn these concepts.

3. Co-curricular Activities: Some schools may already offer co-curricular activities that teach sustainability.

After policy adoption, the task force recommends that during AY2022-2023, schools evaluate to what degree sustainability literacy is being taught to their students and identify opportunities to improve. The results of this evaluation should then be reported to the GEC-SSG which will offer feedback to units. By AY2023-2024, schools should have a long-term plan for evaluating, monitoring, and reporting changes in sustainability literacy learning opportunities among their students.

Evaluation, Monitoring, and Reporting

Each school will be responsible for developing a plan to evaluate and monitor sustainability literacy in their unit, based partly on guidance from the GEC-SSG. This plan should focus primarily on the teaching and learning of the 4 Sustainability Learning Goals.

Aside from the 4 Sustainability Learning Goals, the task force recommends that programs and instructors use the course-level learning outcomes developed by the task force as guidance at the course and program level (Appendix III).

After the initial evaluation report has been submitted, schools should continue to evaluate, monitor, and report on a regular basis to be determined by the schools along with the GEC-SSG.