

It's About Community-Building: The Journey towards Sustainability at Central College
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Let me begin by volunteering that I consider myself “a recovering academic.” My academic degree and professional research is in African studies, with specialization in mass media and politics in southern African states. For nearly twenty years, I did what most of us do: teach and do research in my areas of disciplinary expertise, although being in a three-person department did force me to be very broad within four major subfields of political science. But hey: I was an Africanist, right?

Round about 2005, I began to realize that something fundamental in my worldview and professional priorities was rapidly shifting. By then, Central had initiated a common first year experience course, Intersections. Our common topic for the first three years was “The Human Place in the Global Environment.” My participating in faculty workshops and in teaching 20 freshmen over those first few challenging fall semesters “stretched me, pushed out of my comfort zone, I was walking the walk—the walk we were asking of our incoming students. It was fun; it was a growth experience; we had unwittingly begun the journey to infuse sustainability education across our entire curriculum.

Such involvement in sustainability education “saved” me from finishing out my career as an “academic”, opening my eyes to the power and possibilities inherent in building learning community connections across formal academic disciplines and institutions. It also caused me to re-think the definition and boundaries of what we were referring to as “curriculum” and “credit-bearing.” Not only has this enriched my teaching and research but I believe it has immeasurably benefitted our students. We spend our graduate school years narrowing our vision and focus and, if we are very fortunate—teaching at liberal arts institutions—spend our careers undoing the damage of this “training.”

In 2000, our incoming president set up a campus-wide taskforce on Environmental Stewardship (we had voted to insert a commitment to this in our Mission Statement in 1994). For the first time, I met and began to talk to people in facilities, grounds, food service. We drafted a report and recommendations, many of which were adopted and implemented over the next decade.

In November, 2008, the faculty voted unanimously to add 3.0 semester hours of Global Sustainability to our general education core requirements. This takes effect in August. The journey continues. **My new mantra: “community-connections-curriculum.”** Last week at this time I was starting up a faculty sustainability-across the curriculum workshop for twenty-one colleagues from ten different disciplines, as phase-one of our new training, education, and community outreach initiative, **The Prairie Project.**

Academic political science does not seem to have a lot of space for sustainability education, although I must admit that I have never really tried to systematically explore or test this perception. I hope to be able to do some of this through interaction with colleagues from other schools, as part of my participation in the FaCE project.

I also am hoping to become part of an extended learning community, to meet new people and to share and discuss ideas for infusing more of our courses with sustainability education content and pedagogy. Finally, I have an idea for a new interdisciplinary senior capstone seminar: “Heroes of Global Sustainability.”