Celebration

A Colloquium on Undergraduate Research, Creative Activity, and Community Engagement

Celebration

Celebration 2016

Apr 29th, 4:30 PM - 6:15 PM

Crafting a Campus Sustainability Action Plan: A Grassroots Approach

Jolina A. Kenney
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/celebration

Part of the Environmental Education Commons, Environmental Health and Protection Commons, Environmental Studies Commons, Natural Resources Management and Policy Commons, and the Sustainability Commons

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/celebration/2016/Friday/37

This open access poster is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.
Description
In recent decades, colleges and universities have taken a leadership role in developing institution-based Sustainability Action Plans (SAPs). A SAP includes a summation of past achievements, current initiatives, and the prioritized goals and implementation strategies for future action in terms of promoting environmental sustainability. These plans can also serve as pedagogical devices that teach students, staff and faculty important lessons of intentional living, global citizenship, and environmental responsibility. While many plans are adopted as top-down initiatives, there is great value in finding ways to engage the entire campus community in such endeavors at the grassroots level. This project documents a ground-up approach to developing a SAP at Gettysburg College, a liberal arts institution in Pennsylvania. Consisting of three phases, the project began with an assessment of current sustainability accomplishments as detailed in ASHE’s Sustainability Tracking and Rating System (STARS) data base. The second stage included an investigation of recent SAPs adopted by peer institutions and work by the college's Sustainability Advisory Committee, President's Office and student groups to develop and implement as campus survey on potential sustainability priorities. Finally, a series of focus groups consisting of various campus constituencies provided input for crafting a final draft SAP, which was then offered to the campus community for a second round of review. This bottom-up approach helped to cultivate grassroots ownership of the resulting SAP, leading to a greater likelihood of successful implementation. This project may serve as a useful model for other liberal arts institutions.

Location
CUB Ballroom

Disciplines
Environmental Education | Environmental Health and Protection | Environmental Sciences | Environmental Studies | Natural Resources Management and Policy | Sustainability

Comments
Environmental Studies Senior Honors Thesis

This poster was presented at the 2016 American Association of Geographers' Annual Meeting in San Francisco, CA, March 29 - April 2, 2016.

This poster is available at The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College: https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/celebration/2016/Friday/37
Crafting a Sustainability Action Plan: A Grassroots Approach

Jolina Kenney and Randall Wilson

Gettysburg College, Department of Environmental Studies, Gettysburg PA 17325

Introduction

In recent decades, colleges and universities have taken a leadership role in developing sustainable actions. Sustainability initiatives have been implemented across the spectrum of campus life to promote environmental stewardship and enhance the educational experience. This paper presents a comprehensive approach to planning and implementing sustainability initiatives at Gettysburg College. The authors describe the process used to develop a campus sustainability action plan, including stakeholder engagement, analysis of current sustainability practices, and the development of specific action items. The plan provides a roadmap for the college to achieve its sustainability goals and align with national standards and practices.

Methods

Phase 1: The process consisted of four phases. In the first phase, we gathered information on the procedures involved in crafting a campus Sustainability Action Plan. A workshop sponsored by the Pennsylvania Environmental Research Institute (PERI) offered a starting point. This was followed by a comparative assessment of SAPs and Climate Action Plans developed by other similar institutions and a series of informal interviews conducted with sustainability experts. We used this information to develop a procedure and priority matrix for the creation of the action plan.

Phase 2: In the second phase, we examined the current status of Gettysburg College in terms of sustainability actions and policies. We identified areas for improvement, including curriculum, facilities, and operations. We also engaged in a series of focus groups and surveys to assess the perceptions and priorities of faculty, staff, students, and alumni.

Phase 3: The third phase consisted of engaging the campus community in constructive discussions of post sustainability action plans, current status, and future (ES-0502). The key components of the phase included a series of campus and student group meetings. Documents were distributed to the campus community and key representatives, and several key stakeholders attended the meetings. These included several demographic questions to discuss campus sustainability membership, student, faculty, or administration staff. It was utilized in presenting to a representative random sampling method as well as through a social media platform. In addition, five focus groups were held, each with four faculty members, and several students attended between five and fifteen participants and allowed for in-depth discussion of the goals and proposed policies.

Phase 4: The fourth and final phase consisted of distributing the survey and focus group results and translating them into a draft SAP document for Gettysburg College. The draft document is composed of an executive summary, strategic framework, action planning matrix, and strategic goals. Action planning matrix for Gettysburg College will be presented to the campus community and Sustainability Advisory Committee for their review and feedback. The final document will be presented to the campus community, the President, the Board of Trustees, and the faculty, and staff for review and approval. The draft document will be translated and distributed to the campus community to allow for a variety of sustainability practices and programs in accordance with the broader educational mission of Gettysburg College.

Results

The survey yielded 422 student responses from a total population of 2622, providing a 1.5% survey response. The survey showed that 91% of students believe that the college has provided them with opportunities to engage in sustainability efforts. Therefore, 11% were faculty.

The results show an overwhelming positive response to most of the sustainability actions and policies. To determine the priority of each goal, frequency responses were tabulated and presented below. The goals or policies with the highest positive ratings for all groups (including “very important” or “extremely important”) are shown in Figures 1-2. In a similar fashion, goals and policies with the highest percentage of negative responses for all groups are shown in Figures 1-2. When comparing the responses from all the groups, the most positive goal was to “increase awareness of sustainability.” The next positive responses were “implementing new policies” and “increasing student engagement.”

Focus group data clearly confirmed the survey findings. The most important priorities are a need for more education and awareness of the sustainability occurring on campus. This leads to the development of new educational programs and initiatives. In the process of craftering the action plan, the college will also own a sense of ownership in the action plan. The college will therefore, own the process of engaging the campus community. The college also has an ownership of the action plan, and this will lead to an ownership of the action plan and its implementation. Therefore, the action plan will be presented to the campus community, the President, the Board of Trustees, and the faculty, and staff for review and approval. The draft document will be translated and distributed to the campus community to allow for a variety of sustainability practices and programs in accordance with the broader educational mission of Gettysburg College.

Conclusions

The grassroots approach to developing a campus Sustainability Action Plan is a collaborative process that builds on the existing strengths and initiatives of the college. It provides a framework for integrating sustainability into the college’s strategic plan and for monitoring progress. The approach recognizes the importance of engaging the campus community in the development of the action plan and in implementing its strategies. It also emphasizes the need for ongoing evaluation and adjustment to ensure that the college remains on track to achieving its sustainability goals.

Literature cited


