Academic Sustainability Programs
Assessment Report, 2012

Expected Outcome: Students achieve their educational goals in sustainability

A goal of Academic Sustainability Programs is to provide a framework for students to pursue academic activities in sustainability. The anticipated outcome is that an increasing number of students from diverse majors will successfully complete the Minor in Sustainability Studies.

Assessment methods

Method: Analysis of data on students in the Minor in Sustainability Studies

Our office collects data on all students who declare the minor, and those who successfully complete the minor. These data have been collected since the minor was first offered in 2008. We also collect data on numbers of students who complete SUST 2000 Introduction to Sustainability, as this is the required introductory course for the minor. Many the students also take this course who are not pursuing the minor, so enrollment in this course also tracks general student interest in sustainability as a course topic. Year-to-year trends are examined.

Findings:

An ever-increasing number of students at Auburn University are completing a Minor in Sustainability Studies. The first group to complete the minor was 3 students in 2009, then 7 in 2010, 13 in 2011, and 20 in 2012 (N = 43 total). These students represented a wide diversity of 29 majors from 8 colleges on campus. The largest proportion of sustainability minor students have come from the College of Architecture, Design and Construction, followed by Liberal Arts, Human Sciences, and Business. During the academic year 2011-12, 37 students were currently pursuing the minor, representing a similar diversity of 28 majors in 8 colleges. Enrollment in SUST 2000 Introduction to Sustainability increased from 45 in 2011 to 60 in 2012, when we had to cap enrollment to facilitate course discussions, and some students still remained on the waiting list. About 1/3-1/2 of the students who take this course each year pursue the minor.

How did you use findings for improvement?

To increase enrollment in the minor, and to accommodate the expected increases, we initiated several activities. In 2011, we updated the minor website to make it easier for students to access and fill in the program of study form. The Program Director answered every email enquiry from students about the minor, and met individually with each student to declare the minor, discuss course options, and solve problems of course timing, graduation deadlines, etc. She offered SUST 5000 Capstone in Sustainability individually to some students during the summer so that they could graduate in August with the minor. In 2012, the Sustainability Minor Committee approved new minor elective courses, so that students have a wider
variety of appropriate options for elective courses. We also removed some elective courses from the website that were no longer offered on campus. We made plans to begin offering SUST 2000 during both semesters in 2013-14, to accommodate growing demand. We coordinated with college-level advisors to make sure that students know where to enquire about the minor and file their plan of study forms. We manned tables with minor information at new faculty and staff orientation sessions, Earthfest celebration at the Arboretum, and periodically on the main campus concourse. We established an email list of all declared minor students, and used it to inform them of campus-wide lectures and events relevant to the minor, new minor courses, internships, etc. These activities appear to have enhanced a sense of community and access to information among the students, and increased enrollment in the minor.

The program director also met with faculty, advisors, and students in colleges with low enrollment in the minor (such as the College of Engineering [8% of minor students] and Sciences and Mathematics [13%]), to encourage student awareness of and enrollment in the minor.

Additional comments:

Data on the number of students who declared but did not complete the minor were not available as of 2012. In 2013, we began to track students who declared but did not complete the minor, so that we can assess retention rates for the minor. Preliminary assessment indicates that most students who declare eventually complete the minor. However, some fail to complete because they leave Auburn University before graduating, are unable to schedule all of the required minor courses in time for graduation, etc. We will use these collected data to design new program activities to enhance retention in the minor.

Expected Outcome: Faculty are trained in how to incorporate sustainability in their courses.
A goal of our program is to train faculty so that they are able to incorporate ideas, examples, and issues in sustainability into courses that they currently teach, and to design new courses that either focus on or include sections on sustainability.

Assessment methods
Method: Analysis of enrollment in and participant evaluation of faculty training workshops
Academic Sustainability Programs tracks the numbers and diversity of faculty who voluntarily enroll in an annual 2-day faculty training workshop in sustainability. Also for the first time in 2012, we collected written anonymous comments from participants on workshop evaluation forms, and used these to inform changes in the workshop for the next year.
Findings:

Faculty enrollment in training workshops remained fairly low but constant during the first several years that workshops were offered: 11 faculty participated in 2006, 10 in 2007, 13 in 2008, and again 13 in 2009. From these 4 years of workshops which trained a total of 47 faculty, only 12 course syllabi were revised to incorporate sustainability content and posted online. No workshops were offered in 2010 and 2011 due to turnover in the director’s position for the program. Then in 2012, the new director again offered the workshop, and 20 faculty from 13 departments in 7 colleges enrolled, leading to the revision in 2012 of 17 courses to incorporate sustainability content; syllabi for all of these were posted online. Comments on the written evaluation forms indicated high faculty satisfaction with the 2012 workshop, with 18 out of 19 respondents rating the workshop at 4 or 5 on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the top rating possible. Faculty also offered suggestions for improvement, such as more time to be scheduled for interaction among faculty members and for individual work on course syllabi, and changes in some of the workshop speakers.

How did you use findings for improvement?

In response to the fairly low and flat enrollment trends of faculty in the training workshops during 2006-2009, we initiated an award payment to each workshop participant in 2012, of $500 for each revised syllabus submitted after the workshop that successfully incorporated sustainability into course content. This appeared to provide an incentive for faculty to spend their time participating in the workshop and revising their syllabi, and also enhanced their accountability for submitting revised syllabi to the program director. This process likely contributed in part to the spike in workshop enrollment and in the number of revised course syllabi in 2012. We also updated the workshop application form, advertised it widely via AU Daily, AU-profs email, etc., and set a clear deadline for submission of applications. Information on workshop participants, revised syllabi, etc. were posted on an expanded website to facilitate information exchange among participants and other interested faculty:

http://www.auburn.edu/academic/provost/undergrad_studies/academic_sustainability/workshops.html

Faculty comments on the 2012 workshop are being used to further revise and improve the one to be offered in 2013.

Additional comments:

The faculty workshop appears to be growing in popularity, and is creating an ever-expanding base of faculty on campus who are trained in teaching courses in a sustainability framework. This process also led to the addition in 2012 of new approved elective courses to the Minor in Sustainability Studies.