

Sustainability Action Committee

Information for the Strategic Planning Committee

Oct. 12, 2010

Question: "What are the most important sustainability trends for the SPAC to consider in identifying campus priorities over the next five years?"

Note: The Sustainability Action Committee had a meeting on Oct. 11 where we discussed this question. The answers are below.

1. There will be a shift in the business models that organizations and businesses use to run their operations, identify their priorities, and measure their successes. The shift is away from a dollar-based, short-term, economic-only model to a business model that utilizes a triple bottom line approach. The triple bottom line approach emphasizes evaluation of social and ecological measures, in addition to economic ones, for decision-making and for understanding the success of organizations and businesses. Moreover, the triple bottom line approach demands consideration of longer-term consequences and benefits of decisions than may be prevalently practiced. Finally, our current institutional practices must be highly visible in line with our shared vision of the world, for which we claim to be preparing our students.
2. Fossil fuels and the carbon they contain are becoming, and will continue to become, more expensive and more highly regulated. The relationship of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide to climate change and the troubling implications of climate change, means there is growing social pressure to reduce fossil fuel use and for organizations and businesses to be more accountable for what they use. Visible energy innovations on Truman's campus could engage students' creative thinking, and could nurture their sense of participating in a problem-solving enterprise, so that they can graduate with confident credibility as sustainability practitioners.
3. There is a trend toward the integration of sustainability in college curricula. Effective curricula integrate sustainability principles into a broader curriculum and throughout campus activities. One example of this approach is the Global Institute of Sustainability at Arizona State University. Dozens of other schools have B.A. or B.S. degrees in Sustainability (please visit the AASHE website for examples), a signal that college curricula have adapted to student demand and societal need.
4. There is a shift away from an ethic of greed toward an ethic of care in our society, in its institutions, businesses, and practices. This ethic of care requires us to change our approach to education. We need to 'foster the best' in people rather than 'expect the

worst' of people, and we need to think about how to integrate the ethics of care into our University curricula and practices.

5. There is a trend toward valuing social innovators. How do we educate social innovators to create new kinds of social institutions that can advocate effectively for behavioral change and that will promote sustainability? One possible answer is that such innovation can be accompanied and aided by the thinker's awareness of her/himself as a part of systems that demand sustainable management – social, ecological, and financial systems are contained in systems thinking. Use of service learning and other high-impact educational experiences can be a vital part of enabling students to think through their innovation processes.

6. There is a growing trend for higher educational institutions to be more responsible and responsive towards, and thus engaged with, their local communities. This builds the human capital of a region in a synergistic way as it applies to identifying and solving sustainability issues. The notion of place-based engagement literally grounds the educational enterprise where it lives, and thus assures its "real" accountability.

7. Students are valuing service learning and experiential learning opportunities more than they have in the past. This is a shift from valuing a more strictly content-oriented education to seeking hands-on, collaborative, problem-solving experiments. Their interest in these activities will facilitate sustainability efforts in their broader communities, and at the same time consolidate knowledge gained in more traditional classroom settings.