Building a Sustainable Community at a Commuter College

Creating an Ethic of Care: Challenges, Attitudes & Actions

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Demographics of Wenatchee Valley College

- 27% over age 25
- 21% have children
- 7.8% full-time employment
- 37.4% part-time employment
- 3.4% homemaker
- 23% seeking employment
A Diverse Campus Community

• **Open-Access Institution:** Non-competitive admissions
  
  First generation college students  
  Lower-income  
  Educationally disadvantaged backgrounds  
  Veterans  
  48% non-white ethnicity  
  4% speak English as a second language

• **Commuter Campus**
  
  Students who live on campus: < 2%  
  Students who commute from a 30 mile radius: 80.1%
Faculty: working across disciplines to teach and practice sustainability

- Sustainable Agriculture
- Geography
- English
- Society and Natural Resources
- Biology
- History
- Outdoor Recreation
- Geology
- Nursing
- Industrial Design and Electricity
New Ecological Paradigm & Cultural Worldview Student Survey

- At the start and the end of coursework
- Questions
- Scores range from 60 (1 student) to 120 (2 students)
- Median scores are 80 to 90
- Responses about how to get students engaged in sustainability:
  - Give extra credit
  - Provide incentives like leadership experience
  - Student clubs
  - More campus-wide events
  - Greater encouragement from professors
  - Need more time to spend on campus
Administrative Actions

- Student Programs and Clubs
- Instructional Goal--Create a learning environment that embeds sustainable practices and philosophies... *reduce consumables, etc.*
- Inertia of Institutional Bureaucracy
- Facilities Projects:
  - Solar panels on science building
  - Xeriscaping
  - Electric carts and cars
  - Occupancy sensors for HVAC and lights
  - Trash compactor (less hauls to landfill)
Cultivating an Ethic of Care

• “Sustainability...is grounded on the ethical commitment to the well-being not only of contemporary populations but also the well-being and enhanced opportunities of future generations.”

  (The Ethics of Sustainability by Charles J. Kibert Leslie Thiele Anna Peterson Martha Monroe)

• Sustainability of communities whether they are comprised of people or any other living organisms and their environment.
  1. Building Community
  2. Create Ethic of Care for our Campus
  3. Encourage and Support Action by Students and Staff
Building Community

• Sustainable Agriculture: Food & Farming
  ▫ Story 1: Sharing workspace-- the greenhouses
  ▫ Story 2: Learning, Working & Growing together-- sharing food
  ▫ Story 3: Connecting with the greater community-- real projects
    • Gleaning
    • Working with local farmers, farmer’s markets, school gardens
Attitudes and Actions

- Geography: human-land interactions
  - Story 1: Expand understanding to social justice and equity
  - Story 2: Service learning projects
  - Story 3: EcoChallenge

“I hope to learn different ways we can help the community and learn more about social issues going on right now.”

“I think I'll learn that doing this as a volunteer feels good and that I may want to continue doing this even after the class is over.”

“I hope I can learn how to connect with those in my community who are helping others, and connect with those who are in need, and learn how I can be more proactive towards things that need to be addressed and ultimately changed or altered.”
Challenges...

- Can Wenatchee Valley College become a ‘common home’ for both faculty and students?
- How do we encourage students to ‘care’ about this place and our community?
- Will sustainability initiatives be sustained when student leaders move on after two years?
- Is a Sustainability Coordinator essential?