

POTENTIAL QEP THEME: SUSTAINABILITY LITERACY

Abstract:

Sustainability programs represent one of the fastest growing curricular areas across the country. During the past few years, RU has done much to bring sustainability issues to the forefront of thinking and action across the University, so there is a growing curricular and co-curricular foundation upon which a QEP in sustainability literacy might build. Implementation of sustainability literacy as our QEP theme has the potential to increase our visibility as a “green” institution and attract students with an interest in the welfare of our environment and our common future. Promoting the sustainability literacy of RU students will result in graduates who are better informed about environmental challenges our world will face in the years ahead.

Overview of Theme:

Sustainability literacy can be defined as the ability to understand how earth’s natural systems work and how human cultures and natural systems interact through time. To be sustainability literate is have a basic level of understanding of present and anticipated environmental challenges and present and potential individual and societal responses to those challenges. According to the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), sustainability programs represent one of the fastest-growing curricular areas across the nation. While the scope and definition of sustainability are contested, the central concern is with the maintenance of natural ecological processes as the basis and precondition for economic prosperity, human welfare, and a hopeful future.

Current Status of Theme at RU:

Radford University established a University-wide Sustainability Steering Committee in 2008. All stakeholder groups are represented on this committee, which provides oversight for all aspects of sustainability at the University and makes annual reports to President Kyle on progress made toward sustainability. President Kyle recently signed the American College & University Presidents’ Climate Commitment; she has also articulated a policy for all new buildings and major renovations to be done to a high environmental standard. Clearly, sustainability thinking has begun to permeate the University’s operations.

Ways the Adoption of this Theme Might Move RU Forward:

To become known as a “green” institution will help to advance Radford University, placing it among a group of institutions that includes most of the nation’s (and the Commonwealth’s) elite colleges and universities. It could be expected to help with recruitment, too -- there is evidence that many potential students seek institutions that use sustainable practices and offer courses and degree programs relevant to sustainability.

Who Might be Involved in Implementation of this Theme:

The Sustainability Steering Committee could serve as the primary entity for advancing sustainability literacy as the QEP focus. Numerous departments and courses across the Radford University curriculum that are already invested in sustainability issues could contribute to a focus on sustainability literacy. A working group has been established to coordinate and foster the inclusion of sustainability across the

curriculum. Already course content has been developed for University 100, and a certificate program in Sustainability and Environmental Studies has been proposed and is under consideration for approval. Simultaneously, existing student organizations with a “green” focus could enhance the co-curricular emphasis on sustainability.

Benefits for RU Students Resulting from the implementation of this Theme:

Knowledge of the environmental challenges ahead and of the creative responses to those challenges, collectively referred to as “sustainability,” will benefit all of our students and better prepare them to succeed in a world of rapid environmental change. Students who gain sustainability literacy are more likely to make sound and informed decisions at personal and societal levels, and critically to evaluate competing claims regarding both public policies and individual choices. Educating students about sustainability also prepares them for productive employment; according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment in environmental fields will continue to grow by approximately 25% in the next decade.