



CURRICULUM FOR THE BIOREGION INITIATIVE

BUILDING CONCEPTS OF SUSTAINABILITY INTO UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM

OUR PURPOSE

Curriculum for the Bioregion, an initiative of the Washington Center for Undergraduate Education at The Evergreen State College, aims to prepare undergraduates for citizenship in a world where the complex issues of sustainability—environmental quality, community health and wellbeing, and justice and social equity—are paramount. This faculty and curriculum development initiative is based on the idea that we live our lives in specific places but the choices we make have both local and global consequences. Learning sustainability concepts and practices experientially in our local places can help us perceive larger global forces and connections and in turn, understanding global connections can inform our local understanding and actions.

OUR STRATEGY

To reach large numbers of students, the Curriculum for the Bioregion initiative works with college faculty to build place-based learning and sustainability concepts into a wide array of undergraduate courses—often creating “faculty learning communities” who work collaboratively to share curriculum and teaching approaches.

APPROACHES TO CURRICULUM IMPROVEMENT OR REFORM WITH RESPECT TO CHANGING CONTENT AND ADDRESSING PRESSING ISSUES IN SOCIETY AND THE WORLD

- **"Add-a-course"** approach. A good step! But, important topical courses are often isolated in elective status or into one disciplinary lens, e.g., sustainability just as a dimension of, or a sidebar to environmental studies.
- **Re-orientation of majors, minors, or general education curricula.** The current driver for sustainability is the development of global understandings and competence or the involvement of students in civic engagement. Rich sites for learning are, of course, freshman seminars and senior capstone experiences.
- **Interdisciplinary curricula** – Either through new, added courses, or through curricular learning communities that link or cluster 2-3 classes during a given term and enroll a common cohort of students.
- The addition of **community-based learning** or **service-learning** to existing classes, that grounds theory in practice.

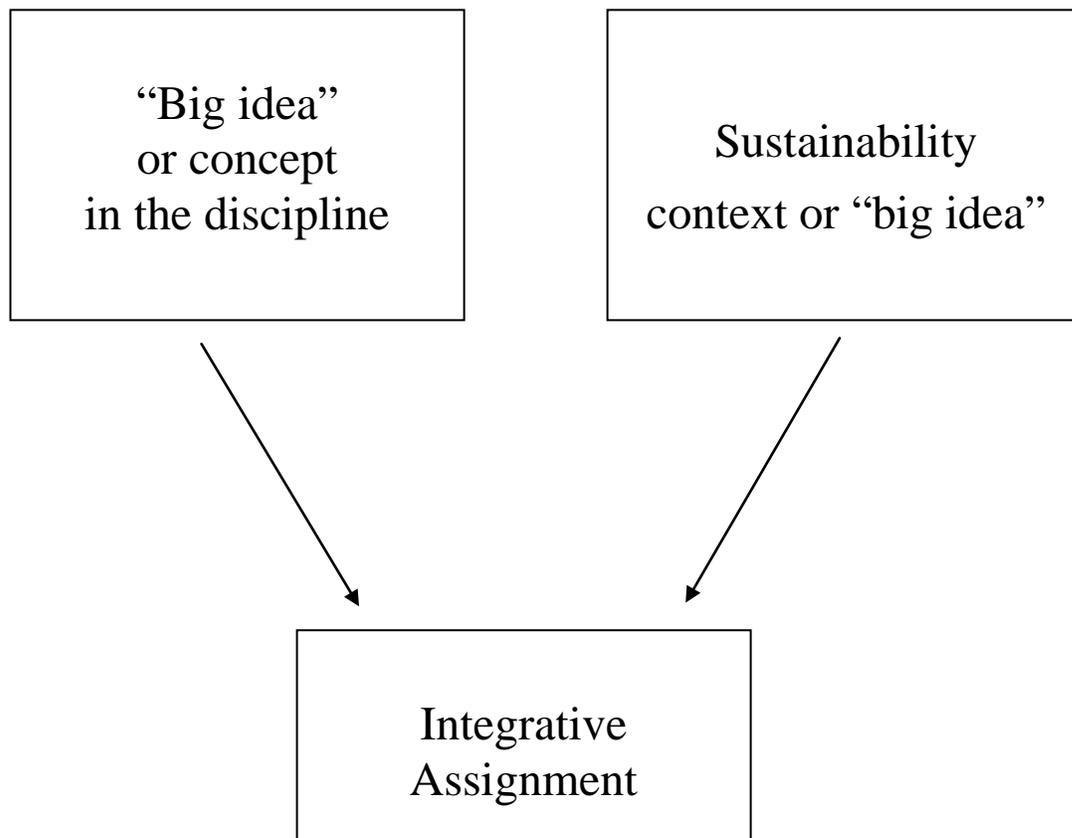
APPROACHES TO SUSTAINABILITY CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

- **Course redesign approaches:** The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) disseminates an approach that builds on the work of Geoff Chase and Peggy Barlett (and their Ponderosa and Piedmont Projects). On-campus faculty workshops stimulate and prepare faculty to build sustainability content in any course they teach—in any way they choose. On some campuses, faculty submit a revised syllabus and report on how they changed their class; often there is a financial incentive for doing this. In the case of the Piedmont Project at Emory University, a campus web-site displays the newly modified syllabi.
- **Ongoing “faculty learning communities:”** Faculty members meet over an academic term or for a year or more both to explore a new dimension in their work and to create or co-create products. Intellectual and social community is grounded in these teachers’ ongoing classroom work. These communities can be both intra-institutional and inter-institutional. This is the strategy of the Curriculum for the Bioregion initiative, using...
- **The Washington Center’s curriculum integration approach:** Our 26+ years of learning communities curriculum planning workshops have focused on keystone ideas and conceptual attainment related to significant learning. In our learning community work, we encourage faculty members to use this approach both for planning and for assessment of student learning as well.
- **Curriculum for the Bioregion’s faculty learning communities.** Since 2007, we have convened faculty learning communities in eight disciplines. Faculty participants (20-25 in each community) work both individually and collaboratively on curriculum integration projects using the approach described on the next page.

CURRICULUM FOR THE BIOREGION INITIATIVE'S APPROACH FOR DESIGNING INTEGRATIVE SUSTAINABILITY ASSIGNMENTS¹

In our faculty communities, we ask faculty members to begin by identifying **keystone concepts** or **“big ideas”** in a course that they teach. “Big ideas” are concepts that matter to faculty members and to the discipline. They are also concepts that are powerful enough that students can remember them, see them at work, and use them—years into the future. Then, we ask faculty to develop an integrative assignment that situates one of those “big ideas” in a sustainability context or issue, or links the disciplinary “big idea” with a “big idea” in sustainability.

Why focus on assignment development? Because it is through assignments that students use and integrate ideas and demonstrate their understanding of these ideas. Assignments are what students often take the most seriously in a course.



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