A Learning Community for Global Sustainable Development in Rural Communities

Amount Awarded: $800

Categories
● Global Opportunities Clusters/Learning Communities

Student Learning Outcome Intended
❖ Goal 1: Develop globally competent knowledge
➢ Explain historical, political, scientific, cultural, or socioeconomic interconnections between the US and the rest of the world.
➢ Describe some of the contested assumptions and intellectual debates across the globe that are relevant to their major.
➢ Analyze the dynamics of global transactions as applied to a problem important to their field.
❖ Goal 2: Cultivate intercultural competencies
➢ Analyze a single issue from multiple perspectives.
❖ Goal 3: Foster globally competent citizenship
➢ Describe a social problem requiring collective remedies that transcend national borders.

Other Support
Have you received any other grant support for this project?: no
Have you received funding from the QEP before?: no

Summary of the Project
Many current global sustainability challenges in our society stem from inefficiencies driven by traditional ways of using natural resources, population dynamics, wasteful consumerism, and inequitable public policies (local, state, federal). More specifically, unsustainable rural activities are shaped, in large part, by the misalignment of public policies linked to the environmental and social impacts of resource use and waste, the inequitable distribution of resources, and insufficient economic development necessary to support community needs. The interdisciplinary collaboration among faculty and students will model the integration of specific disciplines to create opportunities for the development and implementation of sustainability solutions, both within Western North Carolina and abroad. A unique characteristic of this learning community is that we intend to include global participants from other universities for the purpose of sharing knowledge gained by these colleagues related to rural sustainable development. Sustainability challenges are of global scale, but local solutions may be best derived by collaborative education focused on common problems.

This interdisciplinary learning community will focus on increasing awareness of the need to resolve rural sustainability challenges in order to achieve optimal environmental stewardship and social development outcomes, along with the economic development needed to support these outcomes. The goal of the learning community is to integrate existing curriculum and develop new curricular projects, with pedagogy focused on an appreciation for transdisciplinary discourse and community-based research and learning. This learning community will draw on knowledge and expertise from disciplines including, but not limited to, social work, business, urban planning, and public policy. It will also demonstrate how coordinated study-away or on-campus curriculum can drive productive cross-linkages between local and global sustainability, and between rural and urban sustainable development. The goals of this learning community are well aligned with the three QEP Student Learning Outcomes:

Goal 1: Develop globally competent knowledge
Goal 2: Cultivate intercultural competencies
Goal 3: Foster globally competent citizenship

The learning community will seek to emphasize the context-specific, interdisciplinary nature of sustainability in rural areas through a problem-oriented decision-making framework that includes:
1) Identifying and defining a problem (social, environmental, economic dimension of sustainability)
2) Identifying strategies for establishing a baseline of the problem, and benchmarks for measuring efficacy of developed solutions for the problem.
3) Identifying a common sustainability objective for developing solutions for the problem.
4) Generating a list of possible strategies and options for achieving the common sustainability objective.
5) Facilitating a participatory, stakeholder-driven process of decision-making to select the most appropriate (economically and politically feasible, and publicly acceptable) strategy for achieving problem resolution, and related course(s) of action.
6) Providing guidance and assistance with the implementation of recommended course(s) of action.
7) Comparing progress indicators to baseline conditions and benchmarks.

By establishing the Learning Community, we hope to overcome the traditional academic barriers that often plague solution-driven curricular projects, such as single-semester time frames, academic silos, and lack of interdisciplinary, integrative collaboration. Because of the continuity of the Learning Community, the curricular activities can be driven by project objectives (e.g., reducing inequity, strengthening local economies, building environmental safeguards), rather than primarily focused only on student learning outcomes. That is, any given project can be completed from the planning to implementation (and measurement) stages, over more than one semester, through the participation of many students and faculty members.

Any challenges you can foresee:
The development of a mutually acceptable definition of the issues facing rural sustainability across disciplines, traditionally viewed as unrelated in the academic context, is a primary concern. In addition, overcoming academic silos that are traditionally focused on more independent approaches to problem-solving, will be both a challenge and an opportunity. As such, this learning community provides an excellent opportunity for people involved in disparate professions to work together to develop a clear focus of the challenges to rural sustainability, as well as viable and effective solutions to overcome these challenges. In addition, identification of interdisciplinary educational goals must be considered as each discipline is committed to meeting a variety of curricular and professional requirements. Again, this learning community provides an opportunity for educators in these professions to develop inter-professional training that meets precise discipline-specific requirements, while at the same time developing professional skills in working on teams comprising individuals from differing disciplines but with a shared goal.

Sustainability science is a problem-driven rather than theory-driven field. Indeed, some papers from NAS proceedings discuss it as a corollary to other practice-focused and problem-solving fields, like agriculture, urban planning, and social work. Because of the need for economic development to support sustainability initiatives and solutions, practical application requires guidance from the economic and business fields as well. This applied focus we find to be very motivating for students.

Sustainability problems are also context-specific. They present opportunities for community-based, participatory decision-making that integrates different perspectives, values, skills, and assets. This suggests that time and the extent and depth of interactions will shape many of the outcomes of this proposal.

Aspects of collaboration and/or interdisciplinarity:
An inter-professional cluster has the potential to generate integrated solutions for rural sustainable development including, but are not limited to, agriculture, food waste reduction, food recovery and redistribution, effective land use management, affordable renewable energy sources, shared economy opportunities, social entrepreneurship, local economic development, and equitable environmental governance. This learning community will explore these ideas—and others brought to the table from disciplines including social work, business, geography and planning, economics, and public policy.

Additionally, we plan to examine sustainability with a comparative perspective that recognizes the importance of scale (local to global), culture, and existing policies. We expect to bring in speakers and field experts (either physically, or virtually via Skype) who can share their experiences and involvement in addressing sustainability issues in rural areas, both in and outside the United States. One approach is comparative study of systems (e.g. land use, waste management, human services, food production, or transportation) in nations with different political and economic histories, legal systems and cultures. Our professional ties in other US states, Bulgaria, Poland, the Netherlands, Colombia, Mexico, and other nations provide a network of scholarly resources that may support student and faculty exchanges and...
virtual shared curriculum. For future activities of the learning community, we propose to invite speakers from some of these countries to share both academic and practical aspects of engaging with rural sustainability issues, and to send students and faculty to those locations and to international sustainability educational exchanges and conferences.

**Opportunities for external support (optional):**
Opportunities are being identified to provide funding from external sources in the form of grants to community organizations for the purpose of implementing courses of action that promote rural sustainable development. As part of the Learning Community activities, students will gain experience in preparing and submitting grant proposals on behalf of community organizations to solicit funding to support the implementation of certain sustainability initiatives. These external funding partners include local municipalities, community organizations, foundations, and research institutions.

**Expected Results of the Project**
- Course development/improvement
- Expanded study, internship, or service learning opportunities for students (domestic or abroad)
- Development and implementation of solutions to rural sustainable development challenges, in the U.S. and abroad.

**Assessment Plan**
A measure of the success of the learning community is the development of curriculum based on the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in developing solutions for global sustainability challenges, with a particular emphasis on the role of rural sustainable development. A further measure of success is the development of a global learning opportunity that facilitates an effective exploration of the cross-linkages between local and global sustainability, and rural versus urban sustainable development. Within specific courses, student learning outcomes focused on gaining specific content knowledge on rural sustainability, as well as the development of professional skills related to sustainability problem-solving should be established.

An important goal of the learning community is to develop opportunities to reduce community/agency research fatigue as a result of student projects that often cover the same ground or rehash old solutions. The learning community will identify current problems as the focal point of some applied courses to provide both real-world grounding, with students interacting with practitioners and seeing how practice constraints as well as creatively challenges academics. The learning community will serve as platform to bring together faculty, students and community members from different fields to generate deliverables such as courses that run in parallel and perhaps intersect and interact a few times during a semester, or courses that link up from one semester to another, or even single practice-based courses with enrollment from across campus.

Finally, success of the Learning Community will also be assessed in terms of the achievement of the implementation of sustainability initiatives in participating rural communities. These initiatives will be measured in terms of their environmental and social impacts associated with sustainable development.

**Time Line**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NOVEMBER 2016</strong></td>
<td>- Award notification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DECEMBER 2016/JANUARY 2017</strong></td>
<td>- Initial meetings with selected faculty and students to identify rural community leaders who may be available to participate. Contact rural community partners provide information on project and secure interest in project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NOVEMBER 7, 2016</strong></td>
<td>- iASE Lottery (students sign-up to participant in international ASE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Speak at iASE Lottery about language immersion weekend, begin to get buy-in for student participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FEBRUARY 2017</strong></td>
<td>- Start-up meeting. Orient all members to goals of LC and clarify deliverables</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### March 2017
- Workshop with faculty participants both locally and globally, which would might include an International Speaker (Online) who will discuss rural sustainability projects abroad (for examples, Bulgaria).

### April 2017
- Choose projects to develop more fully as courses or collaborative assignments

### May 2017
- Final revisions to collaborative projects and identification of next steps for launch of selected projects

### May 31, 2017
- Final Report to QEP Office

#### Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Budget</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BUDGET</strong></td>
<td><strong>- Estimated round trip airfare $1,500 (to be purchased in April 2017)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel costs associated with identifying global partners/collaborators for building a virtual learning community focused on rural sustainability issues - T. Ruseva will travel to the Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study of the Commons (IASC) to be held in July 2017 at the University of Utrecht, the Netherlands. The goal is to identify partners (practitioners and academics at universities in Europe, Latin America, and Asia) who are working on issues related to rural sustainability and try to get buy-in for building a virtual learning community.</td>
<td>- $800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training materials/resources needed to facilitate a one-day workshop for local participants (and virtually with global participants and speakers) that will showcase diverse course formats for interdisciplinary service-learning and global sustainable development in rural areas:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Budget Narrative

The focus of sustainability is to use available resources, and through innovative thought, to repurpose or reinvent them so as to reduce the need for new resources. In this case, our resources are faculty, students, and community partners who will be collaborating through existing curriculum and research resources on rural sustainable development. With this in mind, the request for funding is for resources that will assist with the establishment or extension of international collaborations. To encourage interdisciplinary and global perspectives to rural sustainable development, we plan to create platforms for connecting ASU faculty and students to faculty/students abroad. To that end, the travel costs in the budget are associated with attendance at one international academic and practitioner attended conference to establish contacts and identify partners for building a virtual learning community focused on applied learning and rural sustainability education.