Sustainability Course Identification

Background

The OSU Sustainability Office is working to update and then maintain comprehensive lists of “sustainability related” and “sustainability focused” courses offered by OSU. Building from work done in 2009 by the Institute of Natural Resources, the Sustainability Office is now following national reporting standards to analyze and report the number and type of courses that touch on subjects of sustainability.

Defining Sustainability

Although sustainability is defined in many ways, the INR report offers this general description from the 2001 Oregon Sustainability Act:

‘Sustainability’ means using, developing and protecting resources in a manner that enables people to meet current needs and provides that future generations can also meet future needs, from the joint perspective of environmental, economic and community objectives.

One common framework separates sustainability into three aspects:

- **Environmental**: addresses Earth’s physical and biological processes and the interaction between them, including the relationship and interaction of humans and ecosystems
- **Economic**: addresses systems of production and consumption, finance, and economic viability
- **Social**: addresses societal processes and institutions, governance, values, and enhancement of human and community well-being.

Within the sustainability movement, it is often the human-influenced intersection between these sustainability aspects that is critical in teaching the concept of sustainability. An further refined definition might be:

Sustainability is the point where human endeavors reflect social equity, political stability, and economic development that is balanced with the capacity of ecosystems to absorb impacts without declining ecosystem structure and function.

Counting and Categorizing Courses

In an effort to develop and improve OSU’s sustainability indicators, the Sustainability Office is tasked with measuring the number of sustainability related and sustainability focused courses.

- **Sustainability related** courses incorporate sustainability as a distinct course component or module, or concentrate on a single sustainability principle or issue.
- **Sustainability focused** courses concentrate on the concept of sustainability, including connections between environmental, social, and economic dimensions, or examine an issue or topic using sustainability as a lens.

The tool/form shown on page two has been developed to assist in evaluating courses and categorizing them appropriately. The lists, once completed, will be made available online.
**Section A:** Sustainability related courses incorporate sustainability as a distinct course component or module, or concentrate on a single sustainability principle or issue.

Course must fulfill each of the following. Additionally, courses must meet at least two of the criteria in Section C. (+ = meets criterion; 0 = need more information; - = does not meet criterion)

- Enables students to effectively understand and/or communicate the concept of sustainability
- Recognizes the impacts of people on the sustainability of specific systems

**Section B:** Sustainability focused courses concentrate on the concept of sustainability, including connections between environmental, social, and economic dimensions, or examine an issue or topic using sustainability as a lens.

Course must fulfill each of the following. Additionally, courses must meet at least four of the criteria in Section C. (+ = meets criterion; 0 = need more information; - = does not meet criterion)

- Enables students to effectively understand and/or communicate the concept of sustainability
- Recognizes the impacts of people on the sustainability of specific systems
- Sustainability is emphasized throughout course
- Examines interactions between at least 2 dimensions of sustainability (social, environmental, economic)

---

### Section C: Additional Criteria for All Courses

In the table, for a horizontally-listed criterion to be counted, two vertically-listed sustainability dimensions (environmental, social, economic) must be included. Sustainability related courses must achieve at least two criteria; sustainability focused must achieve at least 4.

- Students are required to do an assignment or project that focuses on these sustainability dimensions
- These sustainability dimensions are referenced throughout course
- A module or unit within the course is dedicated to these dimensions of sustainability
- Presents technical skills or professional expertise necessary to recognize sustainability challenges and solutions within these connections.
- Presents technical skills or professional expertise necessary to approach real-world sustainability challenges within these connections.
- Presents one or more ethical approaches to these dimensions during the course.
- Presents how thinking and decision-making contribute to the process of creating sustainable solutions for these connections.
- Gives students the tools to understand the connections between their chosen course of study and sustainability.