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WWU Social Sustainability Campaign

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Executive Summary

We propose to collaborate with community members and social groups on campus to provide multicultural integration and education on local sustainability issues, creating an inclusive platform that consolidates different perspectives on environmental justice.

Statement of Need

As students and advocates of the environment, we need to connect to people in personal and inclusive ways so that traditionally “green” problems, especially ones that have a great impact on those with less political power, can be addressed by working directly with the community. The health problems and threats to livelihoods caused by environmental hazards and global climate change are shared by a disproportionate number of disadvantaged groups, so to begin solving them we have to relate these environmental problems to the hidden human injustices that take place.

Consequently, to increase environmental consciousness and lessen the divide between classes while addressing this growing concerns, equal protection and social equity must be reinforced while building a sustainable society in Bellingham. Our goal is to start this conversation on campus, as it has become evident through discussions with social groups and community members that education and awareness will be a meaningful first step in future programs or events on environmental justice.

Research

Environmental Justice

“is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.”

“is the recognition that minority and low-income communities often bear a disproportionate share of environmental costs – and the perception that this is unjust”

WWU Clubs

After speaking with different groups on campus, we discovered that there are many social & environmental issues associated with the goals of different clubs. Although our priorities may differ while addressing social equity, it is important to collaborate in order to reach a common understanding of existing social and environmental issues.

Mixed Identity Student Organization

Mission Statement: We, the Mixed Identity Student Organization of Western Washington University, seek to form a community of students who desire ownership of their identities. We seek to function as a community resource which promotes self-exploration and understanding. To explicate, social and cultural politics are inescapable to our self-construction, and in deconstructing (or reconstructing) these, and in these confrontations/questions of haecceity and quiddity.

“We’re definitely concerned with issues of environmental justice, recognizing that many communities of color suffer from poverty and don’t necessarily have the resources to effectively fight climate change.”

Black Student Union

Mission Statement: An organization to promote cultural and political awareness and be active in political and social change. Furthermore, to encourage higher education, support all black students and all BSU club members on campus and provide resources for academic success.

Q: Do you feel you have access to sustainable options?

A: Only at farmer’s markets and organic food is pricy. Bellingham has more available options than most places and it’s still difficult to live sustainably for someone my age.

Q: Do you think you can make a difference in the environment?

A: Theoretically, yes, but it's hard to know how to do things other than what is handed to you (like recycling).

Q: Do you think sustainability is affordable?

A: It depends on who you are. Recycling? Yes. Organics? Not always. Gardens? They are hard to start.

Interviews such as this one give us insight to different perspectives on sustainable access. From WWU students we have learned that age, income and time are all factors that determine one's ability to maintain sustainably conscious choices. Our challenge is to identify factors that prevent people from investing in a sustainable lifestyle shift.

Julianna Fischer

President of Students for Renewable Energy

Mission Statement: Students for Renewable Energy takes action to move beyond fossil fuels in a just transition toward sustainable energy systems by engaging the community through education and advocacy for climate justice.

“Environmental problems are rooted in racism, sexism, colonialism, and capitalism. We need to stand in solidarity across movements.”

Bellingham Community Members

The Outback Outback Experiential Learning Project

A joint program of the Associated Students and Fairhaven College, the Outback is a five acre farm and wetland restoration site. The purpose of the Outback OELP is to coordinate a wide range of opportunities for students to learn about, develop and implement sustainable land use practices. These opportunities include personal and collaborative events and projects involving habitat restoration, organic gardening, green building, academic partnerships, independent study projects (ISPs), workshops, lectures and classes.

The OELP also provides job-related skill building and community networking opportunities for students. These include serving on the Outback Governing Council, volunteering, and participating in work-study and salaried employment.

The farm is an equal opportunity organization that offers education and job experience to those willing to dedicate the time required to learn the trade.

Seattle's Equity and Environment Initiative

"One of the key principles of environmental justice is that those most affected by environmental inequities are able to participate in the process and develop solutions."

Seattle's Office of Sustainability, in partnership with other city departments, has been working on racial and social justice programs that advance the interests and protect all communities regardless of class or race. The Community Partners Steering Committee is made up of passionate professionals from local and global backgrounds, ranging from students at the University of Washington to nutrition specialists. They are working on promoting climate action by guiding Seattle's Comprehensive Plan and transportation systems, hoping to build a more sustainable future for the city through incremental but meaningful action. There are also projects concerning access to local and organic food for low-income families, especially at Seattle's popular farmers markets with "Fresh Bucks." As cost has been cited as the main barrier of buying fresh fruit and vegetables, Fresh Bucks allows families receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits to earn money for farmers market produce. Innovative action like this aim to provide equal opportunity to sustainable resources, something that we can work on in Bellingham.

Sustainability Leaders Network

Mission Statement: Our vision is a diverse and closely aligned global network of social and environmental change leaders who work at their highest capacity to bring about the transition to a just and vibrant world. Our mission is to deepen the capacity of sustainability champions who are versed in an approach that integrates vision, systems thinking, reflective conversation, and creative expression.

Sustaining Thoughts: "Our problems and yours are common problems, and we have to find a common philosophy. I dream of committed people everywhere sharing a universal awakening, seeing that the wellbeing of humanity is interlinked. Wherever people suffer, let us share, and let us have not one leader, not ten or a hundred leaders, but thousands of leaders, everywhere."

— Ariyaratne

This group convenes for annual network workshops, focusing on educating the public and inspiring a new generation of leaders through their Young Leaders Initiative and Farmer's Apprenticeships.

Project Proposals

We are hoping to connect students and community members with opportunities to learn more about both local and widespread efforts on sustainable action. This could be accomplished through a series of simple yet impactful posters that would advertise these problems and eventually a speaker series if there is enough interest.

Poster Campaign Vision

"Help people live better lives"

"Let's start the conversation"

"Stand in Solidarity"

We are working with Austin Welch, the graphic designer for the WWU Office of Sustainability, to create a poster that emphasizes the human aspect of current environmental problems. Once this poster is spread around campus in the next few weeks, we will conduct surveys on campus to measure the effectiveness of the poster design and message. If there is a positive response, we hope to continue to with a series of posters with powerful images and accompanying ideas.

Budget: There would be minimal costs associated with medium sized posters that are printed on campus, final prices are being examined. A banner would cost \$45, and both this and the posters would be an appropriate use of the Sustainable Action Fund.

Speaker Series

Project leader on Seattle's initiative

Belina Seare- WWU AS president

Sheri Russell- WWU professor

Local business owner

With the right advertising and incentive, an event that brings together different perspectives on social sustainability would be a useful educational tool. We hope to offer opportunities to share individual experiences and new ideas on environmental issues surrounding equity and protection.

Conclusion

The goal of the poster campaign and any future campus effort is to establish an environment where social and economic divides no longer hinder participation within a sustainable society. Education and awareness on environmental justice is just the first step toward outreach with campus social groups and Bellingham community members, aiming to communicate on shared goals and bring together new perspectives on these issues.