

The Treehouse

A Sustainable Living Community

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose:

The Treehouse Living Community will strive to minimize its impact on campus and global resources through green living behavior. We would like to create a student community where sustainable practices are the norm, where students can learn to apply sustainable ideas to their daily life and continue those habits throughout their lives. Connecting students interested in the environment with Huxley faculty will help students get involved with a major in Huxley College of the Environment or learn more about the environment. We will create a space for open communication and interaction with peers and faculty while upholding the Residence Education Model (REM) to encourage residents to learn about how they can contribute to the environment and future generations by maintaining an efficient lifestyle.

1.2 What is a “Living-Learning Community/Cluster”?

Living-Learning Communities are a designated space in residence halls for students with similar interests to live together and build connections with peers and faculty in their area of interest. According to the National Study of Living-Learning Programs, “LLPs emphasize personal development through engagement in broader community (Shapiro and Levine, 1999).”

As an educational community in the residence halls this program would offer similar benefits as the existing clusters on campus: “ These intentional communities offer a living/learning experience supported by educational programs and activities.”

The Treehouse is a sustainable living community that provides a climate where living efficiently is the norm. The intentional community will be facilitated by staff, and developed by students, who work within the community to:

- Connect freshman with faculty in their interest area
- Build environmentally conscious habits
- Learn about specific environmental issues
- Have more access to sustainability resources on campus
- Connect to the environmental movement on campus

1.3 Why is it important at WWU?

Western Washington University is at the forefront of sustainable campuses in United States. We have had campus wide recycling since 1971, developed the Outback farm on campus for 40 years, installed solar panel arrays on the Viking Union, implemented the res rap program, and we were the first school in the nation to buy all green energy. Yet we have no community where all students contribute to creating a culture of sustainability while other campuses have already implemented programs that offer education and immersion in environmentally efficient practices. This would be an essential step towards furthering

WWU's leadership in sustainability and connecting first-year students to faculty that they would otherwise not be able to be in contact with until they declare their major. With more contact they can learn more about what they want to do, what kind of research is going in the field, what an environmental major would entail, build bonds in the western community and help students get letters of recommendation.

1.4 Definition of Terms

ResRAP: Residents' Resource Awareness Program; goal to involve residents in sustainable living on campus.

Eco Rep: On-campus student residents who *advocate* sustainability in their residence halls through living by example and putting on events to educate and *promote* community involvement.

ResLife: Residence Life; an organization within University Residences that is specifically in charge of the experience of the residents on campus.

REM: Residence Education Model

Living-Learning Community (LLC): A residential community of students who share academic, social or cultural interests. They facilitate personal relationships between students, faculty and staff. Educational programs and activities support the community's interest.

Cluster: A building or area reserved for a specific student group. These intentional communities offer a living-learning experience supported by educational programs and activities.

Treehouse: The proposed name of the Sustainable Living Community at WWU.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Contacts

John Purdie-Associate Director of Residence Life

John.Purdie@wwu.edu

360-650-6590

- Supports the idea
- Stressed academic connection

Hui-Ling Chan-Assistant Director of Resident Life

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360-650-2960

- Interested in LEED gold certification in BT
- Supports the idea
- Cautioned about being exclusive
- Worried about people signing up for location rather than interest in topic

Derek Murakami – RD for Buchanan Towers

Derek.Murakami@wwu.edu

360-650-2001

- Supports the idea

Leah White-ResRAP Coordinator

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- Worried about the interface with ResRAP

Alison Gover-Curriculum Coordinator, University of North Carolina SLLC

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Max Zhang-Student at Wisconsin Madison University

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Megan Taft-Project Advisor at Wisconsin Madison University

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2.2 Program Development

The Treehouse will be a community where students can get the opportunity to become more involved with the environmental movement on campus. They will create guidelines for living sustainably and be enrolled in seminars that focus on an aspect of sustainability. These seminars can range from “Dinner and Discussions” on sustainable food to working in the Outback to learning about electricity usage. Students will be in direct contact with Huxley professors before they apply to the college, if they choose to do so, getting valuable time with WWU faculty.

Example Living Guidelines:

- Strive to take shorter showers by turning off the water when soaping up. Keep the shower short!
- Use a personal reusable water bottle and refill with tap water. Bring your own mug to coffee shops. This keeps one less bottle/cup out of the landfill every time.
- Use cold water and laundry detergents that are plant-based and free of phosphates when doing laundry; air dry if possible. There’s nothing better than crisp sheets that have been drying in the wind.
- Turn off or unplug appliances and electronics not in use. Invest in a "smart" power strip; it will increase the number of outlets, provide surge protection and eliminate electricity waste from phantom loads.
- Report maintenance problems so energy or water wasting problems can be reported and fixed.
- Use natural daylight instead of turning the lights on; open the blinds.
- Submit papers electronically when possible. If you have to print minimize margins and fonts and print double sided.

Example Curriculum:

- a. Year-long pass/fail course
 - i. Over the year that a student lives in the Treehouse they will participate in numerous projects and group meetings with the intention to further their work as an environmentalist
 1. **First Meeting:** All the students in the Treehouse will have an orientation day where they meet each other and are told in detail what will happen that year. The students will work together to create a mission statement for the year and brainstorm about what they want to accomplish. Students will complete a reflection on what he or she personally wants to accomplish that year and where they are now as environmentally disposed resident.
 2. **Small Essays:** Every other week the student will submit two small papers. One will be an article review from a newspaper or magazine that has to do with current environmental events. The other will be a journaling assignment on what they have done in the past two weeks that is relevant.
 3. **“One on one’s”:** the RA will discuss with the students in the Green House the regular ResLife topics; however they will also check in on the student’s environmental work. The RA will not reprimand, just serve to help the student reflect. They will pull up the first assignment from orientation and use it as a piece for discussion.

4. **End of the year project:**
 - a. **Group:** Students will form groups and create presentations on a topic they find interesting. No groups may have the same topic. It should be in accordance with their goals for the year.
 - b. **Individual:** Finish a reflection piece and an “Environmental resume.” If they plan on going to Huxley or pursuing a job in field they will compile the work they have done and assess the skills they have gained in one document.
 5. **Closing:** Students will get together and review what they wrote in the beginning of the year and decide their level of success. With the RAs, Interns, and faculty present they will write some kind of legacy document for the next year’s planners and next year’s students.
 6. At the years close the students will have the opportunity go on a camping trip.
- ii. Seminars:
1. Various 1 or 2 credit seminars will be offered to the students in the Treehouse. All students will be welcome to the seminars after the Treehouse residents choose.
 2. World culture and Local Food: and example of what a seminar may entail.
 - a. Two hour class every Tuesday from 5:00 to 7:00 in the Tropics room of the Fairhaven dining hall
 - b. Local restaurants that practice sustainable growing and buy habits would be invited to cook for the students. The University would pay a lessened rate for their services because of the mutual gain.
 - c. Students enrolled in the seminar, relevant faculty and those cooking the dinner would be invited.
 - i. First hour: All who are invited would sit down and have a family-style dinner. There would be no particular agenda for this part of the course other than to create a rare space for open dialogue between, old and young, faculty and student, community member and university resident.
 - ii. Second hour: Those who made the food would stand be recognized for their contribution. They would then talk about what went into making the food and how it was sustainable. Students would be able to ask specific questions at the end.
 - d. Students would write about the things they learned after dinner briefly in any medium they see fit.
 3. **Variation:** Seminars will vary quarter to quarter and it will be the responsibility of the staff working at the Treehouse to figure out exactly what they will entail.
- iii. Field trips:
1. The “Eco Reps” go on numerous trips throughout the year (e.g. the steam plant on campus). Rarely do all 40 Eco-Reps attend. Treehouse residents would get the opportunity to go with them.

2.3 Treehouse Demographics

The Treehouse Living Community will try to create a welcoming environment so that people of all racial, cultural and social backgrounds can live and learn together in a positive manner through environmental awareness.

- About 20 to 50 students can be involved in the Treehouse community.
- Students can live in the Treehouse regardless of class standing, although the community would be geared towards first and second years.
- Any student is allowed to apply. A short essay will be required to make sure students are interested in the community focus.

Buchanan Towers is the ideal location of the community due to the LEED certification and the focus of sustainability in the residence hall. A hall style residence hall would also be ideal because of the increased interaction among students using a community bathroom.

2.4 Admittance to Huxley

Students living in the Treehouse will get connected with Huxley professors before declaring their major. By establishing connections with faculty early on in their college career they will have an enhanced learning experience. Also, the early integration of environmental and sustainability seminars will help students figure out if they want a major with that concentration.

Living in the Treehouse will be a valuable addition to a student's application to Huxley, if they plan on applying to Huxley. Students have the opportunity to use a preliminary Huxley application as their end of the year project.

2.5 Residence Education Model (REM) Relevance

The REM already serves to help students learn more about themselves, others and their place in the communities they operate in. In the Treehouse, there would be an enhanced version of the REM to include the residents' awareness of the environment and the program of study they hope to pursue.

2.6 Interface with Eco-Reps

Eco-Reps in the ResRAP program are separate from the Treehouse program. Treehouse residents can still be Eco-Reps if they wish. There is no issue with program overlap because function of an Eco-Rep differs completely from that of a student living in the Treehouse. An Eco-Rep informs residents about the environment in order to promote awareness and action towards more sustainable living. Ideally, the students living in the Treehouse would already be cognizant of their environmental impact so the presence of an Eco-Rep would no longer serve to foster awareness but simply to be another resident who strives to lessen their impact on the environment.

The relationship is analogous to a Lifestyle Advisor and Gender-Inclusive Housing.

3.0 CASE STUDIES

3.1 Wisconsin Madison University

“The GreenHouse,” Sustainable Learning Community was established in 2006 and has been in effect for five years. About 45 students are admitted each year and pay \$200 (fees for trips, dinners, intern payment, etc.) to participate.

Purpose:

- Help create and sustain a green community on campus
- Connect people of diverse backgrounds
- Get students connected to social and environmental advocacy organizations on campus and in the community
- The GreenHouse (GH) was created to help set students on paths to finding sustainable solutions to social and environmental challenges. GreenHouse residents will join with faculty and staff to explore
 - food and agrifood systems
 - conservation and biodiversity
 - environmental justice
 - green business, building, and design

Stakeholders include the Madison Initiative for the Undergraduate and Residential Learning College (RLC); the GreenHouse RLC is sponsored by the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.

The program is desirable enough that students have to apply and many do not get in. It has yielded strong results in an increase in awareness for environmental issues among students. Although awareness is increased, there is no mandatory project or idea so it is difficult to quantify what residents gain.

They have had some difficulties getting male applicants, having multiple departments work together and ensuring that a faculty member is interested in leading the GH for an entire year. There is talk of possible expansion of the GH to another stack or residence hall.

3.2 University of North Carolina

The Sustainability Living-Learning Community (SLLC) was established in 2006. The current curriculum was established in 2009 when there was a change in learning outcomes for the community.

Purpose: “Our community is committed to exploring the concept of sustainability and engaging in sustainable service. We examine sustainability as a concept in many areas in addition to the environment, including: activism, creativity, development, economy, education, personal, politics, and the justice system.”

- explore sustainability through readings, documentaries, and speakers in weekly seminars. They are currently trying to get university credit for attending these seminars.
- Discuss sustainability over dinner prepared by community members in an optional Dinners and Discussions program.
- Host sustainable workshops open to the entire campus.
- Participate in volunteer projects inside and outside the community including trash cleanups and working in a community garden.

Member Expectations:

- Attend weekly seminars (1.5 hours). One unexcused absence is allowed per semester. Excused absences are allowed.
- Complete a minimum of 12 total service hours per semester. Four (4) hours must be serving the community (i.e. serving on a committee) and 8 must be direct service (HOPE Gardens).

There are 48 student members of the SLLC in a residence hall of 860 students. The community is run by four student coordinators, who are returners from the previous academic year, with the assistance of a Community Director. The Department of Housing and Residential Education runs the Living-Learning Communities (LLC). The SLLC is closely tied to 13 other LLCs on campus.

There were no initial costs in getting the program started but the community has a yearly budget to work with ranging from \$1250-\$1700.

3.3 Appalachian State

The Green Living Green Community at Appalachian State University is comprised of one floor of a co-ed dormitory with 45 students.

Purpose: to give students an opportunity to learn about the many factors and ways to live in a sustainable living community with the hope to later apply this learned knowledge to their everyday lives.

The students that live there choose the focus of the project for the year. (Last year they learned about sustainable food and planted a garden.)

Faculty leads and teaches the seminar each year. Other organizations involved include Residential Life, Office of Sustainability and Office of Recycling.

The biggest challenge is getting involved students focused on one issue of sustainability. It is not always easy to find a committed RA or student leader who has strong personal interest in sustainable behavior.

They advised us to find a faculty member that would be willing to teach a seminar style class for members of the living community. This ensures the help of an active faculty member who supports the program.

4.0 RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Behavior “Normalizing”

“An interesting study demonstrating the power of social pressure in bringing about green behavior was described in the book “Fostering Sustainable Behavior” by psychologist Doug McKenzie-Mohr. Psychologist researchers set up an experiment in a college gym shower in which a prominent sign was displayed encouraging student to conserve water by turning off the shower while they soaped up. Only 6% of the students did so initially. Then, researchers placed an accomplice in the shower who did not speak to other students or make eye contact with them, but simply turned off his shower while soaping up. This caused a shift in behavior, and 49% of the students in the study did the same. Compliance with the sign rose to an astounding 67% when two accomplices were placed in the shower and turned off the water while applying soap.”

Peer pressure often has negative connotation. It can push people out of their comfort zone and into a submissive conformist state. The drive to be accepted socially is extremely powerful. Being socially accepted and safe in a group is ranked right above food, water, and air (Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs). It is what drives teens to drink at an early age and what propels the dehumanization of the military.

The power of peer pressure is not inherently bad; it is simply a desire to share the same beliefs or actions as a group. Personal contact is emphasized because social science research indicates that we are most likely to change our behavior in response to direct appeals from others. In the context of a community wherein there are few previous ties, social acceptance will be near the top of the priority list.

Freshman first arriving at WWU will have this drive and a community where productive good habits are reinforced as opposed to deconstructive negative ones will not only increase grades. Although it is a common perception that students come to college without a career path, it is mostly erroneous (*study*). Many students know what they want to do and living in close proximity with people who have the same goals will make it so much easier to continue pursuing them. It is essential for this focus to be brought into the dorm life of the student. Instead of creating a barrier between their studies and their “home life,” the two will become mixed and they will always be learning.

Instead of switching off their chore of environmentalism after a hard day at school they will be eased into an understanding it a constant pursuit. In the learning community this understanding will be comfortable and grow through their early introduction to lecture, one on ones, understanding of Westerns on campus environmental movement, and simply being close to others who share similar sentiments. Environmental science is a study but environmentalism is a way of life. Although some will not go on to have a degree for Huxley, they will all take away the lifestyle of an environmentalist. Regardless of whether the community serves to help them with their studies or not, it will help to broaden and deepen their understanding of the environment. If the student does not choose to pursue a degree in Huxley it will set the stage for this part of their adult lives.

Through this ability to spread behavior through peer interaction we hope this pilot project of a community existing on a single floor or stack will spread throughout the rest of the residence hall and eventually the entire campus.

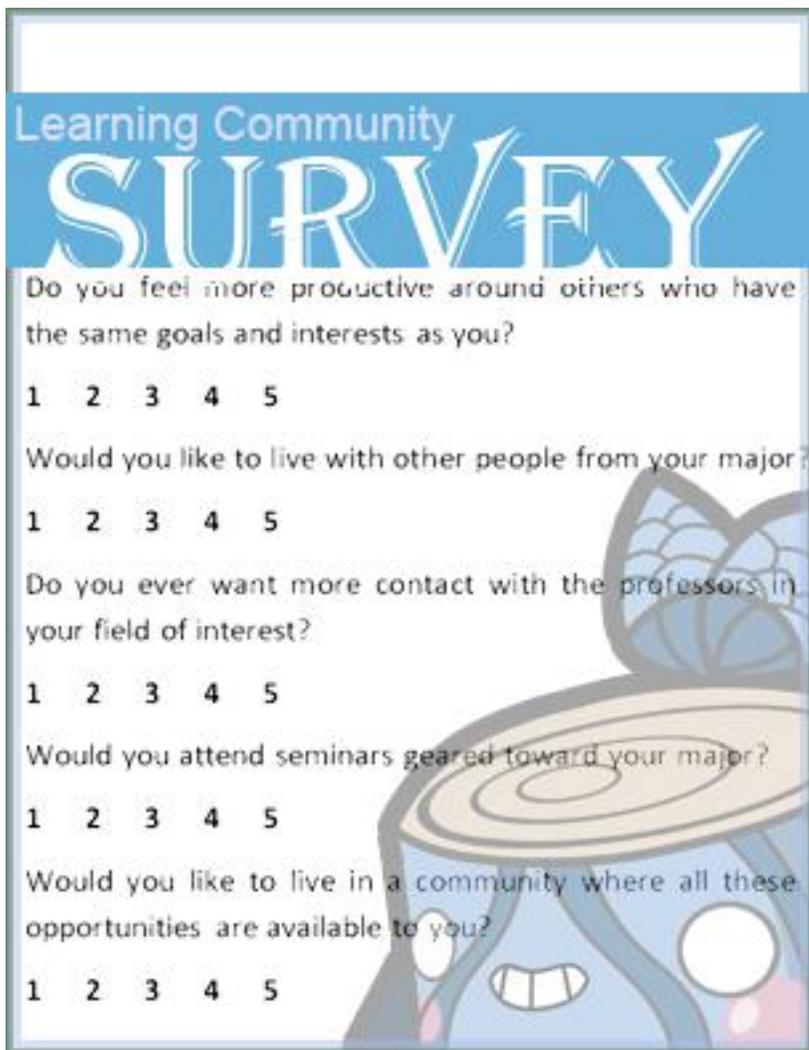
4.2 Community-Based Social Marketing

Community-Based Social Marketing has been proven to be an effective approach to behavioral change. We are most interested in developing a technique for behavior change so residents will be more likely to engage in environmentally sustainable activities throughout their lives. The method used by most community-based social marketers includes direct personal appeals, which will be customary and common in a community focused on sustainability.

Environmentally friendly products and sustainable measures designed into buildings are only effective when people are aware of the benefits and alter their habits to utilize efficient products to their full capacity. Since it is often expensive or time-consuming to establish efficient building mechanics or policies it is necessary to focus on more immediate behavioral change that can instantaneously reduce carbon emissions. The two most common ways to instigate behavior change rely on providing information. The “Attitude-Behavior Approach” focuses on increasing awareness of a particular environmental issue in hopes that people will alter their behavior to remedy their impact (i.e. ideally knowledge of water use would compel people to use less water). The “Economic Self-Interest Approach” works on the assumption that people will change their behavior or invest in retrofitting their homes if it was financially in their best interest. After numerous studies, both of these perspectives to behavior change did not result in an adequate amount of change in proportion to the amount of money and energy spent on distributing information. In order to proficiently alter people’s activities another approach, “Community-Based Social Marketing,” is most effective. This involves five steps: choosing a specific behavior to promote, identifying and removing barriers, developing a technique to change behavior (which often involves direct contact), implementing a pilot project, and continuing evaluation of effectiveness once the strategy has been applied to the community on a broader scale.

4.3 Survey

To figure out if there is an interest for a sustainable living community we will distribute the following:



Learning Community
SURVEY

Do you feel more productive around others who have the same goals and interests as you?

1 2 3 4 5

Would you like to live with other people from your major?

1 2 3 4 5

Do you ever want more contact with the professors in your field of interest?

1 2 3 4 5

Would you attend seminars geared toward your major?

1 2 3 4 5

Would you like to live in a community where all these opportunities are available to you?

1 2 3 4 5

The survey form features a blue header with the title 'Learning Community SURVEY'. Below the header are five questions, each followed by a five-point Likert scale (1-5). A cartoon tree character with a smiling face and large eyes is positioned on the right side of the form, partially overlapping the text.

This will be distributed as soon as possible, once finalized.

4.4 Current Clusters

Western Washington University already has several “clusters” in place. Viking Launch students, Fairhaven students and Honors students all commonly live together due to similar academic pursuits. Gender-Inclusive housing is new this fall and provides students with the opportunity for housing not based on gender and has specific learning outcomes associated with that community. The Treehouse would be similar to these current living options, but curriculum-based and with concrete goals and objectives for the

residents to accomplish. It provides an opportunity for residents to be connected to faculty and the broader Bellingham community in their first year at WWU.

4.5 Possible Problems

- Exclusion
 - Exclusion is inherent in any close community. Other communities cannot be open to any student (Honors, Varsity Sports, Major specified classes, etc.). Anyone can apply to live in the community and anyone can register for the seminars, we just cannot ensure everyone will be accepted. Other residents in the residence hall will not be excluded from their events, the Treehouse residents will simply have first priority. This is not about exclusion, it is about creating a social sphere for interested students.
- Low interest level/participation
 - If people are not interested, then there will be no need for the community on campus.
- Unorganized curriculum/hasty implementation
 - We will obtain many sources of critique and input. There will always be room to restructure or expand the program.
- Ineffective behavioral change
 - We will reassess and change the curriculum and make living guidelines more mandatory.
- Too much extra work for residents
 - We will require less work/involvement and have no credit for residents.
- Isolated
 - In order for the students to gain strong bonds it may seem like they are excluded from the greater Buchanan Towers but they will just be forming a voluntary group like a club. Since it is open to everyone, and voluntary, students will not feel any more excluded than they already are now as environmental activists.
- Students applying for location rather than community.
 - There will be an application to ensure that students want to live in the community for the benefits of the sustainable and environmental goals.

5.0 FUTURE WORKS

Timeline:

- Create a timeline (ex: to have implemented in Fall 2012, proposal must be finalized by Fall 2011)
- Distribute survey for student interest
- Attain resources (contacts for local food, club activities, outback information, sustainable transportation, etc.) for residents
- Get club, AS and RHA endorsement
- Finalize the curriculum
 - Find interested faculty
 - Establish an intern or work study job to coordinate
 - Figure out how to get university credit for seminars

6.0 CONCLUSION

Since the beginning of the project the goal has been to create a community where environmentalists can work together and feed off each other's interests. Through social norming and a collective student interest the Treehouse would be at the core of sustainability on WWU's campus. The students involved would be included in the yearlong curriculum designed as a pre-Huxley course or a course about the environment in general. The living guidelines they develop as a community would serve to increase their behavioral efficiency and alleviate their impact on the environment. These behaviors and gained knowledge through seminars would carry on into their lives after college.

WWU is a sustainably minded school and though we have numerous programs that reflect that, yet there is no residential cluster designed for sustainability. Western students are likely to be drawn to this program and it would create a ripple effect that could affect the entire school. These students would make a habit of being informed about what is going on with the environment on campus and in the broader community. This cluster of students is likely to become activists and extend their experience to the rest of the campus.

7.0 WORKS CITED

University Residences

<http://www.cbsm.com/pages/guide/fostering-sustainable-behavior/>

<http://news.change.org/stories/peer-pressure-more-effective-than-appeals-to-eco-idealism>

<http://livinggreenandsavingenergy.com/encouraging-greener-lifestyles-peer-pressure-works-best.html>