

SUSTAINABILITY AS AN INTERDISCIPLINARY THEME FOR UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

Respectfully Submitted by

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The subject of sustainability, encompassing equity, the environment and prosperity, touches on nearly every aspect of global society. In order to address climate change, rapid loss of biodiversity, increasing pollution and toxicity, inequality, conflict, and social and cultural instability as a species, we are facing an imperative that mandates all hands and minds on deck and fully engaged.

A majority of incoming students are aware of the precarious future that humanity faces and student surveys indicate a strong desire to be part of a sustainable future, to understand how to make a difference, and to receive real world skills to make a positive impact.

CU Boulder as a top research and educational institution has an important role to play in helping to address these multiple and entwined pressing challenges that humanity is facing, and in educating our students with the skills and knowledge to take up these challenges and innovate.

- How do we engage the entire campus community, but especially students in the question “What type of world do we want?”
- How do we and our students go about creating a sustainable future where they have hope of thriving and surviving?
- How do prepare our students to engage in creating a sustainable future - to redesign and rethink everything from our waste management, to our manufacturing processes to our buildings and architecture, to our food systems to human health to our transportation systems to our technology, and political, social and cultural arenas?

Proposal: This White Paper proposes to harness the broad appeal and diverse reach of sustainability as a theme to inform and organize undergraduate education, in order to help the campus meet the desires of parents and students for a relevant 21st century education, and to meet our educational Strategic Imperatives: **Be the top university for innovation, to shape tomorrow’s leaders and to positively impact humanity.**

Sustainability as an interdisciplinary theme is perfectly suited to inform and drive undergraduate education, and it could be argued that neglecting to educate each student in the basics of sustainability (at the very least) is to fail in our responsibility to prepare students for the future that humanity, industry, government and research are facing.

And yet, even for the very motivated and interested student, the opportunities to learn about sustainability, engage in sustainability-oriented research and real world projects, obtain important career and life skills related to sustainability or to major or minor in the subject are largely missing, from the educational offerings on campus, as organized and obvious learning opportunities.

There are a number of ways this could be addressed:

- Funding and support for a “Campus as a Living Lab” initiative that identifies projects on campus that faculty and students in collaboration with staff could undertake to address real-world problems and offer opportunities for innovation and impact.
- Applying sustainability as a Core Theme across disciplines in the undergraduate educational arena, particularly for first-year students, so that students have multiple opportunities to learn and engage and prepare for their future – from Writing courses, to math courses to Introductory sustainability courses and beyond.
- Founding a major and a minor in sustainability as educational offerings on campus.

Conclusion: The University of Colorado Boulder enjoys a national reputation for sustainability in both our campus operations and in our research. Adding excellence in sustainability education to this duo by applying sustainability as a theme to undergraduate education will enhance our mission, help us meet our Strategic Imperatives and engage and retain students facing an uncertain and rapidly changing future.