



In April, members of the UI Environmental Coalition student organization prepared the soil for a garden near Hawkeye Court. The on-campus, sustainable garden includes a hoop building to extend the growing season and a rainwater collection system. It will produce vegetable crops for the Iowa Memorial Union and provide hands-on learning opportunities for students working toward the new Certificate of Sustainability. Students' interest in sustainable practice and thought is in evidence both out of the classroom and in: more than 200 University courses in disciplines across campus touch on issues of sustainability.

Mixed Greens

Courses campuswide connect students to sustainability

Most students who sign up for English Professor Doris Witt's Food Studies and Popular Culture class don't begin the semester with sustainability on their minds. Once they start analyzing books, essays, and videos that address topics like subsidies for corn farmers, 'slow food,' the restaurant industry, and Food Network programming, though, the topic is unavoidable.

"We start off talking about food, but move into sustainability issues in part because that's what the conversations are about out in society," Witt says.

"The goal is not to ensure that they come out with any particular attitude," she adds, "but to get it into their consciousness that sustainability is something they want to be thinking about, and help them think about how the debates play out in popular culture."

The 3-semester-hour class is just one of many at the University that weaves sustainability issues into topical discussions in areas like art, anthropology, engineering, and law.

While several disciplines at Iowa are well known for their work in sustainability, the University is working to make the

topic an integral part of the academic experience for everyone.

"We need to provide all students across the campus the opportunity to be involved in this issue, and learn about this issue, and do it in depth," says Jonathan Carlson, senior associate to the president of the University and chair of the UI Sustainability Steering Committee. "Sustainability is not just the issue of the day. We're going to be talking about it for the next 20 or 30 years."

At last count, the University offered more than 200 courses that touch on sustainability issues.

Many of those courses are in the sciences. The College of Engineering tackles sustainability issues in many of its civil and environmental engineering courses, and you'll hear plenty of sustainability discussions in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences' biology, environmental sciences, geography, and geoscience departments.

But there are plenty of options in other disciplines, too. A few examples: The art department offers a course in sustainable architecture; in anthropology, students can study the link between

religion and environmental ethics; and there's an economics class that analyzes production, distribution, and consumption of exhaustible and renewable natural resources.

In Fall 2009, the University will pull together these diverse offerings under a new certificate program. Undergraduates who complete 24 semester hours of course work drawing from four broad categories—changing environments and human health; energy, climate, and the built environments; the power of culture and society; and ethics, economics, and public policy—will earn the Certificate in Sustainability.

The interdisciplinary aspect of the certificate is one of its biggest strengths, says interim associate provost for academic administration Barbara Eckstein.

"There's no single course that can fully communicate the connectivity that we want to teach the students," she says. "We think it's important for students to understand what technology innovations can provide as means to solutions for sustainability problems, as well as understand non-technological fixes for change, such as our social structure, our

economic structure. It takes a certain scientific education to understand these matters, and a humanities education to articulate why it happens, and persuade people to your opinions about it."

Eckstein believes sustainability education at Iowa will continue to grow. Future options may include a stand-alone certificate, more courses for graduate students, distance-learning opportunities, seminars for first-year students, and a sustainability-themed living-learning community for undergraduates in the residence halls.

"Occasionally, we'll get the response from people that sustainability is just another education fad, but that's not true," Eckstein says. "The need for economists to talk to engineers to talk to writers to talk to and educate people... that's not going to go away, because these issues are not going to go away."

See a partial list of sustainability courses at The University of Iowa on the College of Engineering's web site at <http://www.sustainability.engineering.uiowa.edu/curriculum>.

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