A Sustainable Education

Environmental sustainability is increasingly understood as an essential part of college education, as students seek to live more sustainable lives and pursue myriad careers that are both directly and indirectly related to sustainability. Named as one of the nation’s most environmentally responsible colleges by The Princeton Review, SU is meeting the mark in terms of sustainability education.

The University Academic Sustainability Committee (U-ASC) brings together faculty from across the campus with the goal of supporting education and scholarship relating to sustainability. Encouraging interdisciplinary sustainability education, U-ASC complements and integrates related efforts among the four endowed schools and Blackwell Library.

Fulton School of Liberal Arts
The Fulton School is very active in addressing topics vital to a comprehensive understanding of sustainability. In the curriculum, the Fulton School identifies over 100 Fulton courses that directly address sustainability in a significant way, and the number is rapidly growing. Over half of these offerings are part of the new Environmental Studies Department (ENVR) founded in 2012, with the remainder offered in other Fulton departments ranging from Conflict Analysis and Dispute Resolution to Theatre and Dance. Convened in 2008 by Dean Maarten Pereboom, the Fulton Sustainability Committee has addressed a range of sustainability issues. For example, in 2013 and 2014, SU faculty and students were surveyed about their knowledge, awareness and interest in learning about climate change; survey results have and will continue to assist in developing SU curricula in this area. In a related effort, the campus recently finished a second semester of CrossTalk, a forum for students and faculty from across the disciplines to discuss ways of incorporating sustainability in the curriculum. So far the theme has been climate change. In spring 2015, the Fulton Sustainability Committee continues its work by offering a one-credit hour course, Changing Climate, Changing World. This course – and lecture series open to the public – presents a range of disciplinary perspectives on the issue, featuring faculty from the physical and social sciences and the humanities.

Henson School of Science & Technology
The Henson School has long supported coursework and research related to sustainability; ongoing projects include water quality assessment, solar powered bikes and powering station design, and predictive modeling and management plans related to coastal regions both here and abroad. Much of the work at the Eastern Shore GIS Cooperative (ESRGC) relates to critical areas and the impact of environmental change upon them. The Henson School has several programs related to sustainability issues such as student organizations (Smart Growth Club, Bioenvirons), tracks within degree programs (atmospheric science, land use planning, GIS) and dual degree programs (physical/engineering, biology/environmental science). Henson Dean Karen Olmstead is active in the National Science Foundation-funded initiative STEM Education for a Sustainable Future with faculty, administrators and environmental professionals from across the country.

Perdue School of Business
Students in the Perdue School have opportunities to learn how businesses engage in sustainable activities in the U.S., how the campus implements sustainable infrastructure and the role of tropical deforestation in climate change. Students in one international accounting class conduct research on how firms report voluntary sustainability practices through attempts to consider people, planet and profit. Other students have been mentored while doing a campus carbon study. Additional examples include International Energy Markets students examining the economic challenges faced by current renewable energy systems, and students taking Essentials of Real Estate completing applied learning projects, such as the cost effectiveness of adding sustainable infrastructure to campus buildings. Finally, in the cross-disciplinary course taught by Perdue and Henson faculty, Amazon Research Methods students engage in learning about the contribution that tropical deforestation has made in climate change and methods for addressing the problem.

Seidel School of Education & Professional Studies
Seidel School Dean Cheryl Parks and Provost Diane Allen represented Salisbury University as a recent recipient of the “Sustainable Partner” award by The Nature Generation for our dedication and support in inspiring youth to care for our planet. Sustainability is a topic engrained within many Seidel courses, such as secondary science methods where it is coupled with the Maryland Environmental Science Standards. Seidel’s Curriculum Resource Center houses the largest collection in the country of literature for youth that is focused on environmental stewardship. The collection directly impacts how SU students engage with sustainability in the classroom, impacting generations of children to come as all students read books from this collection. Service learning experiences and issues of social justice and sustainability also are embedded in all social studies courses in the Teacher Education Department. As well, the Social Work Department is developing an undergraduate elective that examines social work and sustainability, and will address social justice issues, which is a core social work value. The social work student Living Learning Community (LLC) also took students to Calliope Farm, a local organic farm, where students learned about the importance of diversity among plant species, year-round farming and production, and the health benefits associated with eating organic (non-GMO) plants.

The growth of academic and applied opportunities for students on campus has burgeoned due to the many dedicated students, faculty and staff who have enjoyed consistent administrative support, as illustrated, for example, by the University’s Climate Action Plan adopted in 2010. In addition, the SU Blackwell Library provides a range of support services for student and faculty course-related projects and research. Such initiatives are now further supported by the new University Green Fund available to any campus member to develop projects that promote social, economic and environmental sustainability on campus.