Introduction

Increasing sustainability course offerings is a tangible way to indicate a college’s commitment while ensuring the institution’s approach to sustainability education is comprehensive and includes diverse topics (AASHE, 2013). It can also be a good business move: 61 percent of students and 60 percent of their parents indicate that a college’s commitment to environmental issues factor into their decision to apply to or attend a school, making this a significant focus for admissions (The Princeton Review, 2014). Because of our unique place at the intersection of the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains and the type of students who normally apply to Colorado College, our Admissions Office has estimated that number to be closer to 80 percent at our college. Therefore, increasing visible sustainability offerings in the curriculum can be an integral piece of attracting excellent students.

In pursuit of the goals of The Colorado College Plan: Building on the Block, the Colorado College Office of Sustainability designed the Faculty Sustainability Scholars program to expand sustainability curriculum offerings at the college. The program commenced with Sustainability Across the Curriculum, a two-day workshop at the end of the 2014 academic year designed to help faculty develop an outline or course module with sustainability learning objectives. Participants engaged in exercises that foster a broad and deep understanding of sustainability, including reflection, field trips, and group discussion to support the development of a greater sense of place.

Concept

The Faculty Sustainability Scholars program builds upon the concepts pioneered by the Ponderosa Project at Northern Arizona State University and the Piedmont Project at Emory University to create a network of faculty members who have an understanding of and an interest in bringing sustainability learning objectives into existing courses and fusing that our college’s unique place. The program fosters an understanding of the connected nature of sustainability principles, including consideration of multiple business models, discipline-specific examples, pedagogical tools, sense of place building, and personal wellness, mindfulness, and reflection. Faculty members developed concept maps of sustainability integration and discussed opportunities for collaboration. The Scholars became ad-hoc liaisons for sustainability and are an important piece of permeating the campus and breaking down silos to achieve the trans-disciplinary nature of the topic.

Outcomes

Ten Faculty Sustainability Scholars participated in the workshop from diverse disciplines including geology, theater and dance, chemistry, mathematics, physics, political science, english, economics and business, and Film and New Media Studies. Dynamic discussions and participation built connections amongst the participants that bridged the expanse between their disciplines.

Participants were awarded a $500 stipend, with another $500 available upon completion and acceptance of the redesigned course within 12 months.

Future Plans

Plans are in the works for a presentation at the college’s annual Fall Conference to help spread the word and promote the program.

Faculty Sustainability Scholars will officially reconvene at least once per semester to share successes and challenges and further encourage collaboration.

Current Scholars will help refine subsequent annual workshops and mentor incoming cohorts of Scholars.

References
