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Ithaca College Ithaca, New York Spring 2005, Environmental Literacy

BACKGROUND

Campus Profile

Ithaca College (IC), with some 6,250 undergraduates and 250 graduate students, offers a diverse curriculum in more than 100 degree programs; as a comprehensive college, IC values both professional preparation and liberal arts education. The college has a long history of campus greening efforts, beginning in 1991 with the work of the Resource and Environmental Management Program (REMP) within the physical plant, which promotes awareness of environmental concerns and has developed solid programs in resource management, recycling, and conservation. The resource management scope of REMP has steadily increased from just recycling to include a nationally recognized food waste composting program for the dining hall, comprehensive energy conservation, and source reduction education efforts. REMP provides a networking function for faculty and students who are interested in studying institutional operations. Since 2002, the National Science Foundation (NSF) grant-funded program titled "Applying Science to Sustainability" has provided financial support, mentoring, and training for sustainability curriculum development across disciplines.

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GOALS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Goals

The goals are (1) to expand the faculty summer grants program for development of sustainability curriculum and (2) to increase that number (of annually awarded summer grants) to six to eight (with college-match funding).

IC's short-term goal is to support the effort of more faculty members to infuse sustainability education and practice into their curriculum development.

IC's long-term goal is to institutionalize the summer grant program so that 10-12 faculty members per summer may receive funding support to conduct research, to develop course modules, to develop new courses with significant focus on sustainability education and applied research, or all of the previous.

Accomplishments

The NSF "Applying Science to Sustainability" grant, jointly awarded to EcoVillage of Ithaca (EVI) and Ithaca College in the fall of 2002, is foremost a curriculum development grant. A second major contribution is the arrangement for qualified EcoVillage residents to serve as adjunct faculty at IC. As part of the initiative to teach sustainability across the curriculum, the coordinating committee of the grant annually invites proposals from faculty members who are interested in applying for summer funding to help defray some expenses for developing new courses or components within existing courses. In the summer of 2003, six IC faculty members were awarded curriculum development grants. In the summer of 2004, six EVI proposals were granted funding, and four IC faculty members received awards. In 2005, Ithaca College contributed additional funding to allow for more curriculum development awards to be made; those grants were awarded to four EVI projects and to eight IC faculty.

Challenges and Responses

The major challenge has been to develop additional sources of funding that will support the number of worthy proposals received as interest in the summer grant program grows and as the desire to support sustainability education increases.

ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Leaders and Supporters

Leadership is shared, and there is broad campus support for the program. Our provost and vice president for academic affairs, Peter Bardaglio, has assumed a strong visionary and leadership position for the sustainability initiatives on campus and has provided vocal support and encouragement for infusing considerations of sustainability within the academy. The academic funding team in institutional advancement has assisted with grant writing for additional funding to continue and to expand those curriculum development activities. The NSF grant team members have encouraged individual faculty members to explore curriculum development within various disciplines in each of our five schools. Other faculty leaders in various academic departments are interested in offering real world experiences to engage their students in problem-solving exercises, and the leadership in the academy is matched by operational managers willing to partner to explore and research aspects of campus sustainability.

Funding and Resources

The NSF "Applying Science to Sustainability" grant has provided funding for this project; however, identifying additional funding to support and augment this program has been challenging given budget constraints. Preparing strategic approaches to decision makers about shared interests in maximizing academic and operational resources has proved somewhat useful in reallocating some funding.

Community Outreach and Education

The NSF “Applying Science to Sustainability” grant mandates outreach and education, and the college’s sustainability initiative encourages free sharing and dissemination of information, so all campus sustainability workshops and presentations are open and widely advertised to the general public.

Climate Change

Implementation of some of the specific applied technology projects developed through the funded summer grant program may have a demonstrated effect on climate change, (e.g., feasibility studies of car-share programs at EVI and for the IC and Cornell campuses).

National Wildlife Federation’s Campus Ecology® Program

The NWF online case studies and the *Campus Ecology Yearbook* have all had a positive effect in terms of spurring campus action toward positive change and highlighting topics for future applied research.

CLOSING COMMENT

This grant program for summer curriculum development has been a low-cost means to spur additional faculty members’ effort to infuse considerations of sustainability in their coursework across disciplines. To date, more than 100 courses at IC have been identified that are wholly devoted to or have significant blocks of content focused on various aspects of sustainability. As some faculty grant recipients have commented, it isn’t the amount of money that matters. Many of them are excited about the possibilities of discovering new findings as they explore their subject matter within a lens of sustainability, and they find that the impetus of receiving even this small summer grant helps them focus their research effort and commit the time necessary to conduct this curriculum development work.