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Bringing sustainability programs to USFSP.

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Bringing Sustainability Programs to USFSP

WRITTEN BY
THE USFSP SUSTAINABILITY WORK GROUP

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Executive Summary

The Role of Sustainability at USFSP

The **USFSP Sustainability Work Group** (SWG) is a small ¹ cross-disciplinary group representing the passion and interests of the three colleges on the St. Petersburg campus. The group was convened by Dean Ebrahimpour of the College of Business in November 2012 and supported by Dean Heller from the College of Education and the Bishop Center through funding and assistance in a variety of ways. Our assignment was to investigate the feasibility of a Sustainability major/minor program of study at USF St. Petersburg.

In taking on this task we realized that the work of the university must be grounded in practicality such as course selection and development, student training and outcomes, and linked to faculty research – while simultaneously guided by an enduring vision. A vibrant university seeks to work at the intersection of present reality and untapped potential. This document is USFSP’s first step in mapping the present reality and providing a vision that taps into a growing area of opportunity.

The nascent role of sustainability in our world is still emerging. There are multiple contexts, meanings, and professions associated with the term, and though the term is highly contested, this report shows that there are areas of intersection and overlap that help clarify what sustainability can mean as a program offering at USFSP. We found that students, faculty, staff, and the Tampa Bay community all agree that:

1. Any sustainability program should provide cross-disciplinary content
2. ²Systems education should be foundational and integrated into any program
3. Close partnerships between the university and local business community should facilitate germane student experiences and educate the community on the relevancy of sustainability practices and attitudes.

Business surveys, discussed in Chapter 1 brought into focus that new sustainability professionals will need to be associated with *value creation* rather than yet another cost to be managed. Chapter 1 explores feedback from USFSP faculty, staff, students, and community businesses regarding the role and need for a sustainability program. Though our sample population is small, it provides insight into the overall positive attitudes and willingness to consider new programs at USFSP.

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¹ The term cross-disciplinary is defined as across distinct colleges and disciplines. This should not be confused with inter-disciplinary which may provide courses across disciplines within the same college but not across colleges.

² Systems Education is based on the premise of general systems theory developed by von Bertalanffy. He emphasized that real systems are open to, and interact with, their environments, and that they can acquire qualitatively new properties through emergence, resulting in continual evolution.
Chapter 2 provides evidence of authentic community interest and a willingness to engage in partnerships with the university to think deeply, brainstorm and develop new roles for the university and community as a whole. This chapter documents how the community is thinking about sustainability.

From the national and state data collected it is clear there is no one-size fits all solution for what a program in Sustainability should look like. Chapter 3 illustrates the wide range of programs and degrees offered that focus on sustainability. This data collection can help inform USFSP on how to begin crafting unique programs that suit the needs and requirements of our students and community, while maintaining standards that can be compared nationally.

The last chapter in this report provides a synthesis of all the information collected. The recommendations offered in this chapter are both general and specific. General recommendations are suggestions that provide support for initiatives but do not provide instructions on how to carry out these projects. Specific recommendations focus on how a sustainability program could be developed and managed.

When our group first convened, we developed a vision of what we hoped to accomplish; of what a program in “sustainability” might entail. We wondered how our vision would be reflective of the needs and interests of USFSP and the community. This report investigates this question and provides practical and useful information on what a sustainability program could represent.

In this report we hope to stimulate and inspire USFSP and the community to willingly traverse uncharted territory and make possible what is now only potential.