Sustainable Justice in Wisconsin: A Transdisciplinary Approach for Incubating the Movement

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Carleton College Rm 236, 2:00-2:50 pm
Outline

  - From Sustainability Studies to Sustainable Justice
  - Barriers to SUSJ implementation

- Program Achievements vs. Institutional Change

- Incubating the Movement

- Discussion & Questions
Origins: Sustainability @ UWRF

- Environmental Science professor, Kelly Cain & Sustainability Studies Minor @ UWRF (2008)
- AASHE years 2010-2018
- Sustainability-Across-The-Curriculum Trainings
- Sustainability-infused syllabi awarded stipends without review
- Growth of Sustainability Office, Director, Interns, Facilities Staff -- & Cuts (2012-13)
Julian Agyeman, Tufts AASHE Keynote 2010

“AASHE Digest 2009, 380 pages, over 1250 stories and initiatives from nearly 600 institutions, 24 chapters and the word ‘justice’ appears 13 times…”

Urban & Environmental Policy Planning, Tufts University
Introducing Just Sustainabilities (2013)
Sustainable Communities & the Challenge of Environmental Justice (2005)
Agyeman’s argument for Just Sustainability as the “middle way”*

**Sustainability**
- “Equity-deficit” environmentalism gave rise to environmental justice movement
- Sustainability movement largely white, educated, middle class
- “Green” agenda of environmental protection, biodiversity, ozone layer –updated as technoscience fixes for climate change
- Environmental sustainability
  - Good on *inter*-generational equity
  - Silent on *intra*-generational equity

**Environmental Justice**
- Environmental justice organization
- Rooted in grassroots Civil Rights
- Bottom-up organizing
- Redefines environment as places where we live, work, play, pray
- Largely low-income, people of color-driven
- “Brown” agenda of poverty alleviation, health and education, infrastructure development
- Just sustainability
  - Environmental quality & human equality are inseparable

Toward Sustainable Justice (2015-18)

- 2014-15 – Budget cuts to environmental programs across UW system begins
- 2015 - new ¼-time EH Sustainability Faculty Coordinator launches 5-year assessment:

Research -> Sustainable Justice Minor

- **5 criteria for inclusion**: Sustainability definition, sustainability-infused assignments, rubrics, resources,
- **Learning Outcomes**: sustainability ethics, praxis, global citizenship
- Foundations and Capstone courses + SJ-infused electives.
- **HOUSING the MINOR—WHERE??**
Assessing Campus Climate for Sustainability: Two Cultures

- Environmental Science (CAFES)
- Business & Economics (CBE)
- Predominantly white, male, with disciplinary graduate studies only
- View of education as knowledge transmission.
- Positivist – based in empiricism.
  - Auguste Comte: much as the physical world operates according to gravity and other absolute laws, so does society
  - Rejects introspective & intuitive knowledge, theology & metaphysics as these cannot be quantified.
  - Scientific method: circular process of theory & observation.
- With a transmissive methodology, ‘education for change’ is instructive—associated with the transfer of information—and ‘education in change’ is imposed.

- Environmental Humanities (CAS)
- Education, Social Work, Health (CEPS)
- Diversity education – PhD minors/studies, race/gender/sexuality integral to curriculum
- Critical Theory - view of education as fostering critical thinking skills.
  - Paolo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed
- Critical Pedagogy affirms
  - teaching as an inherently political act,
  - rejects the neutrality of knowledge, and
  - insists that issues of social justice and democracy itself are not distinct from acts of teaching & learning
- With a transformative methodology, ‘education for change’ is constructive— it engages the learner in constructing and owning meaning—and ‘education in change’ is participatory.
Student Groups:
ECOS, SALSA
Sustainable Justice Minor

Sierra Club Ranks UWRF 66 out of 268 cool schools in 2018
Program Achievements vs. Institutional Change

- **NEH Grant** – written for $100,000 to support team-teaching & interdisciplinary program gave faculty an opportunity to dream big

- **Strategic Initiative** – awarded for $10,380 to support SUSJ Capstone students for interdisciplinary research-based civic engagement

- **AASHE Gold Star Status Awarded in 2018**
- **Sierra Club ranks UWRF 66 out of 268 Cool Schools in 2018**

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- **Known Threats** – internal and external opponents
  - **Internal**: disciplinary silos, environmental science disciplinary dominance and corporate funding prioritized over transdisciplinary approaches in the liberal arts and environmental humanities
  - **Internal/External Campus climate**: anonymous call to AASHE criticizing UWRF’s STARS report data.
  - **State/National culture & political climate**: removal of environmental protections, increases in hate speech and discrediting non-dominant groups’ experiences of oppression (women, youth, indigenous people, people of color, immigrants)

Institutional Changes in 2019 --

- **ECOS Student Group folds**
- **UW-System budget cuts to Sustainability create faculty exodus (2017-present)**
- **New Chief Administrators**

- **Sustainability Faculty Fellows Program and Coordinator Cuts** effective December 2019
  - **New admin. plan:**
    - 2 rotating faculty fellows in Diversity or Sustainability,
    - housed in a newly-created Center for Teaching & learning
Incubating the Movement for the next wave

- **Sustainable Justice Minor** updated and institutionalized
- **SUSJ Foundations Course remains** as a Gen. Ed attracts enrollment
- **SUSJ Capstone course revised** into variable credit, with any SFF eligible to direct a student’s capstone research
- **Strategic Initiative Repurposed:**
  - J-term all-college faculty workshop, “Re-Igniting a Culture of Civic Engagement at UWRF”
Questions?

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