INTRODUCTION
What's Unique About Community Colleges & Sustainability?

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Social, economic, and environmental challenges are quickly growing in size, complexity, and rate of speed. Educational institutions play a vital role in providing the knowledge, training, and community partnerships needed to implement solutions to global problems on a local scale. Community colleges in particular are uniquely positioned to enhance the quality of life on our planet while serving as engines of economic and social mobility for students[1].

Since the early 1900s community colleges have served a dual function as liberal arts transfer institutions and also as technical and vocational training schools. Today, 50 percent of all undergraduates start at a community college. Therefore a responsibility exists to expose these students to a wide variety of concepts, career pathways, and success skills early on.

Sustainability is a broad interdisciplinary topic that can be related to any discipline and intersects every department across any organization. It is also a tool to keep curriculum content current and engaging for students who are ever more aware and concerned about societal problems - which many students may personally be facing themselves such as hunger, poverty, debt, polluted communities, and health challenges. New research has found that more than 60 percent of all university students want to learn more about sustainability, with 87 percent of all students agreeing that their universities should take sustainability seriously. Almost three quarters of higher education respondents agree that all courses should actively incorporate and promote sustainable development[2]. The majority (93 percent) of CEOs identify sustainability as a critical challenge facing their business today[3]. Universities are responding to this upstream (students) and downstream (business/industry) call by adopting sustainability offices and staff, creating new sustainability degrees and courses, and instituting sustainable operational practices and processes. Higher education has an opportunity and obligation to disseminate sustainability challenges, industry specific practices and solutions throughout a student's college experience. At best, students will then have an opportunity to carry this systems thinking skillset with them upon transfer to a university or directly into the workforce. From there it will evolve into a competitive advantage that will benefit their employers because sustainability drives innovation and cost savings while boosting employee morale, productivity, and retention. At the least, students will become aware global citizens who are more likely to be engaged in their community and governance.

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[1] http://time.com/4800811/the-case-for-community-college/

[2] http://sustainability.nus.org.uk/articles/two-thirds-of-students-want-to-learn-more-about-sustainability

[3] https://www.scheller.gatech.edu/centers-initiatives/ray-c-anderson-center-for-sustainable-business/index.html

Community colleges are poised to deliver effective and agile short-term training programs while at the same time developing undergraduates for transfer to four-year institutions. This dual function will be more important than ever in navigating the complex multi-industry and interdisciplinary paradigm shift over the next ten years. There is also an opportunity to directly address the need to transition displaced workers from failing industries such as coal, into growing clean industries such as solar and wind through retraining/reskilling. Similarly, veterans, women, and minorities can strongly benefit from community college resources and framework. Other characteristics that make colleges ideal to shape a sustainable and just economy include:

- Connections to industry, government and community that can be leveraged to drive sustainable practices, technology, and knowledge. Ripe for deploying a campus (and community) as a living lab model.
- Increasing partnerships with technical schools and four-year institutions that are resulting in effective innovation and research models as well as efficient sharing of resources and knowledge.
- Students are local, so they have a stake in their community's livability and therefore ideal candidates to be shaped into engaged citizens.
- Curriculum and programs are nimble and responsive based on employer needs and timelines. This quality aligns with the urgency to get sustainability in the curriculum early, often, and across all disciplines.
- Open access results in a diversity of ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds which are ideal for complex problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity (the top three of ten job skills needed in the 2020 workplace according to World Economic Forum[4]).

Community Colleges also face their own set of unique challenges including:

- Initiative fatigue.
- A high turnover rate and commuter campuses by design make it difficult to keep student led or inspired sustainability initiatives started and moving forward in the long term even when successfully implemented.
- With a high percentage of adjunct faculty, it is difficult to engage faculty since they're working multiple jobs to support themselves.
- Two-year institutions are less likely to have a paid sustainability coordinator/director.
- Faculty feel that their curriculum is static due to the need to articulate to four-year transfer institutions. It is challenging to convince faculty that sustainability is a practice of infusion rather than adding more information and work into their syllabus.

To submit a campus "CCASE Study," please visit the NCSE website: https://www.ncseglobal.org/ncse-community-college-handbook-sustainability-education-and-operations

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[4] http://montrealgazette.com/storyline/the-top-10-job-skills-for-the-future-2020-to-be-exact