

Global Sustainability Students Demonstrate How to Bring the Message Home

December 15, 2011

Matt Kelly

December 15, 2011 — Students enrolled in a course at the University of Virginia's **School of Architecture** have suggested how the school can become even more sustainable.

The students in the interdisciplinary Global Sustainability course, led by Phoebe Crisman, an associate professor of architecture, were among those who presented their semesterlong, collaborative projects Monday.

The class projects described initiatives both on Grounds and in the Charlottesville community, including increasing the sustainability of Campbell Hall, home of the Architecture School; reducing food waste in the dining halls; expanding transportation options; and developing green neighborhoods.

The course consisted of eight workshop groups focused on different projects, applying what the students learned from weekly lectures given by faculty from the Architecture School, the **McIntire School of Commerce**, the **School of Engineering and Applied Science**, the **School of Medicine** and from various departments within the **College of Arts & Sciences**.

The lectures covered various topics, including energy and water challenges, sustainable food systems, community engagement and human health. The students formed groups based on topics and these groups sub-divided into teams, each looking at different aspects of the particular topic.

One group assessed the Architecture School's own practices using the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System developed by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. The teams analyzed the building's systems, the school's purchasing practices, transportation options and maintenance on the STARS scale, which assigns point values and is designed to create a framework against which colleges and Universities may be measured. The students assigned the Architecture School a rating of 58.78 on a 100-point scale.

The students made recommendations they said could add 23.2 points to the school's score, including placing all electronic devices on power-saving mode, so the machines would "go to sleep" after 10 minutes of inactivity. They also recommended installing low-flow water fixtures, increasing recycling of student waste and of materials used in the various school applications. Other solutions included centralized purchasing of bulk paper, reducing paper waste, increasing use of "green" cleaning products, swapping single-pane windows with double-paned replacements and composting food waste from the Fine Arts Café.

The students stressed that many of their recommendations would not require any change in behavior on the part of the faculty or the students.

"I thought they did an extremely thorough job," said Kim Tanzer, dean of the Architecture School and mentor of the STARS group. "They have provided an excellent guide to the School of Architecture to walk the walk ourselves."

Another group of students worked with **U.Va. Dining Services** on the topic of waste, education and gardening initiatives. Four of their sub-teams performed food waste audits at the Observatory Hill Dining Hall, the Newcomb Hall dining facility, Runk Dining Hall and the Fine Arts Café.

The students recommended that a standard protocol be devised for future audits and that they be conducted frequently. The students lauded steps Dining Services has already taken to reduce food waste, such as removing trays from the dining halls (so diners take less food initially) and working with Campus Kitchens, a student organization that repurposes kitchen leftovers to feed the homeless. They also noted that Dining Services diverts tons of food waste each month through its composting program.

The group recommended extending the composting program to Runk Dining Hall and the Fine Arts Café. They also noted that carefully auditing food waste will help Dining Services prepare less of some foods, and suggested using a text message service that allows students to share their food preferences with Dining Services.

Another group of presenters explored creating a U.Va. sustainability guide to communicate the University's goals and provide guidance to students on actions they can personally take. They reviewed the many student groups across Grounds that are focused on sustainability, compared ways of working with them, and examined different modes of communication, including social media, email and print advertising. They also examined how other schools and universities distribute their sustainability guides, such as the University of California at Berkley's "Little Green Book."

They decided the best approach was to combine a website with weekly emails and frequent social media updates. The content would include weekly sustainability tips, advice for students living on Grounds, examinations of what can and cannot be recycled, advice on saving water and electricity, transportation alternatives and a dining guide.

"The class is an essential component of the Global Sustainability minor." Tanzer said. "It provides a broad spectrum and an interdisciplinary view of the world."

— *By Matt Kelly*

Source URL: <https://news.virginia.edu/content/global-sustainability-students-demonstrate-how-bring-message-home>