

SIU Sustainability Council Project

Project title: Assessing Climate Change Education on the SIU Campus

Project I.D. #: 41211

Award date: May 5th, 2012

Completion date: May 2013

Funds used (if different from award amount): \$2051.44

Brief write up of project/project experience:

The project incorporated a mixed-method approach (using a survey and focus group) to better understand (1) SIU Carbondale student's attitudes regarding climate change and (2) how climate change is being taught on the SIU Carbondale campus with a focus on the accuracy of information conveyed to students.

For the quantitative portion of the study, the research team (two PI's and two undergraduate students) utilized a survey-based method to quantify the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of SIU Carbondale students regarding their understanding of climate change and sustainability. The survey instrument was constructed using cited literature for the foundation. The survey contained the following types of questions: knowledge (8), attitude (7), behavior (16), and demographic (10). We obtained 258 surveys completed by students representing 23 departments. While students have an understanding of basic principles of climate science, they are not making the connection between climate change and human health. Approximately, 83.7% of students had their opinions on climate change before attending SIU. Only 40.6% of students feel their experiences with learning about climate change on campus are adequate.

The qualitative portion of the study was completed in the Spring 2013, in which we conducted focus groups for more in depth discussions on climate change education they experienced. Focus Groups were semi-structured, and included three different sections including introductory questions, discussion questions, and additional ideas. Discussion questions included their descriptions of climate change, the impacts of climate change, prior wisdom regarding climate change, and finally, questions regarding the quality and type of information received from the University about climate change.

Best things learned/produced from project:

Data Collection Techniques

- Allow plenty of time for qualitative projects. We attempted to complete two focus groups, but were only able to complete one. Student participants did not show up for the second focus group. We learned many strategies for ensuring student retention including email follow ups, quick rewards, etc.
- Larger incentives.

How do you define sustainability?

Sustainability is a multi-faceted approach incorporating economic, environmental, and social aspects of management to maintain life on Earth.

Has this changed over the course of your project? If so, how?

Our project results shed light on SIU Carbondale students' perception of the importance of climate change and sustainability. Students in the study were relatively sustainable, but had varying opinions of climate change. Some had only been exposed to sustainability concepts through their peers.

What do you see as the next step for the project?

The next step for the project is to publish the results in a peer-reviewed journal (Journal of Environmental Education).

In regards to future research, we suggest the following:

- ✓ Studies with younger students (elementary, middle, and high school) to discern climate change attitudes and sustainable behaviors.
- ✓ Studies that focus on media literacy – and dissemination of climate change knowledge and attitudes.

For future practice on campus we suggest:

- ✓ Easy identification of all courses that discuss climate change and/or sustainability.
- ✓ More awareness of the Sustainability Council and the Green Fund. Many students were not aware they had opportunities to apply to the Green Fund and that we had a governing Sustainability Council.

Optional: Do you have any suggestions for the SIU Sustainability Council to improve the Green Fund award process?

Based on student feedback, even though they pay fees for the Green Fund, they were unaware of what it was, and did not know SIU has a Sustainability Council. I think more efforts need to be encouraged from council members to spread the word. Many departments including Plant Biology, Geography, and Agriculture seem to have students with an understanding of the Green Fund, but other departments outside the sciences seem to have more students that are unaware.

Here are a few suggestions:

- Advertise to new teachers about opportunities for service-learning in their courses with a Green Fund Project.
- Involve RSO's (not just environmentally-themed RSO's) about potential involvement.

Attach a minimum of five images – these will be used to promote interest in Sustainability Council projects. These can be photographs of the progress of the project, the completed project, or promotional materials.

Please find attached our Poster Presentation that was presented at the student forum hosted by the Department of Geography and Environmental Resources in May 2013.