

HOW CAN BEING MINDFUL MAKE YOU MORE SUSTAINABLE?

By Celene Lovato

Navigate. Explore. GPS. Summit Experience: all sound like phrases and terms one would use while hiking the Front Range, don't they? Well, they also apply to the new general education framework implemented at UCCS in the fall of 2014 called Compass Curriculum. The program includes requirements for education in the arts, humanities and culture, economics, health, global inclusivity, and sustainability with the goal of "preparing students for success in their majors, professional pursuits, and lives as creative, thoughtful, informed, and engaged members of our diverse global society." Compass Curriculum elevates UCCS as one of a handful of public institutions of higher education that requires every student to complete a course with a sustainability focus.

All graduating students must complete the Compass Curriculum requirements, regardless of their major. From nursing to engineering, anthropology to physics, business to education, students in all majors will learn about sustainability. In the spring of 2016, approximately 2000 undergraduate students at UCCS are enrolled in sustainability related or focused courses.

However, many may not see the application of sustainability in courses across this broad spectrum. But according to Sociology professor, Eileen Skahill, it's all about intersectionality: "As a sociologist, my job is to link society and culture to sustainability. I think it is important to understand that our Western culture uses the word "sustainability" so many different ways and to mean many different things...That said, I believe those of us in the field of sociology try to help students understand that sustainability means **equal rights and access** to all resources that *sustain* all forms of life; human life, the land and *all* creatures that inhabit the natural world."

Many fields already have a strong tie to sustainability. Dena Samuels, Assistant Professor in Women's and Ethnic Studies, cites her experience in teaching as an example of recognizing those intersections. She made the connections on her own, and teaching sustainability became her choice. She took it on as her responsibility to teach about sustainability, as students may not be getting it elsewhere. "Students need to understand how to make those connections. It's their planet, but the planet is going to be fine, it's humanity that's going to lose out." she states.

Sustainability isn't just an issue for geography studies majors; it affects our planet, which affects all of us. "Sustainability is about preserving and protecting the resources that allow for continuation of all life," states Skahill. So why is it so easy for us to not think about it at all? According to Samuels, our society is conditioned to consume, and we often miss the connections between people and environment. "For social change to happen, there's education that needs to happen," she states, "...My responsibility is to educate. Once you know, you can't not know." In

the realm of social justice and sustainability, she says that it takes mindfulness in order to achieve true results. We must be aware of what we're doing, how to fix it, and then consistently make sure we're responding in a way that will have positive effects. Professor Skahill agrees, "We have a responsibility to be a voice for the voiceless. Make no mistake, the Earth is speaking, but we have not been listening. I try to empower students to be a voice for the voiceless; land and human alike, for that is how sustainability is achieved."

Find the topics of environmental justice and social responsibility interesting? Take courses taught by Dena Samuels and Eileen Skahill.

"Social Justice, Sustainability and Living Mindfully" – Dena Samuels

"Sociology of the Environment" – Eileen Skahill

You can learn more about the Compass Curriculum program and find a list of classes with sustainability credit on the UCCS website: <http://www.uccs.edu/~compasscurriculum/>.