

**Facilitating Sustainable Agriculture:
A Participatory National Conference on Post- Secondary Education**

January 24-25, 2006

Asilomar Conference Grounds, Pacific Grove, California

Student Responses to Pre-conference Needs and Interest Assessment

The following is a summary of responses to a pre-conference *Needs and Interest Assessment (n=20). In section I, responses to the ten general categories presented in the assessment are ranked according to the aggregate scores (highest to lowest). Additional responses to qualitative, open-ended questions are reported in Section II.

* **Please note:** Though some subject areas received an overall lower ranking, in some cases a number of respondents identified these topics to be of high interest. The conference structure was facilitated to make it possible for all participants to pursue the subject matter and topics most relevant to their goals in attending the conference.

Sustainable Agriculture Student Educational Needs and Interests:

Section I: Scored pre-defined needs and interests

Ranked from Highest Aggregate Score to Lowest

Items were scored using a scale of 1 through 5, with 1 being disinterested and 5 being most interested.

- Experiential learning, hands-on practical learning, student farms, internships & the integration of classroom and applied field-work. (total score = 90)
- Developing inter-personal and inter-institutional collaborations between sustainable agriculture programs/projects. (83)
- (Review) Existing sustainable agriculture programs' instructional resources, teaching methods, strategies, and facilities. (82)
- Interdisciplinarity, integration of natural & social sciences in courses and curriculum. (79)
- Developing and maintaining institutional and faculty support and participation in student sustainable agriculture programs/projects. (73)
- Systems and holistic approaches to agroecology and food systems. (72)
- Critical educational theories of learning, pedagogy, and curriculum. Participatory Action Research, Critical Pedagogy and Popular Education as social learning and action methodologies. (68)
- Assessment of specific student initiated programs'/projects' (e.g. student farm/co-ops), development needs. (68)
- Strategizing to meet student programs'/projects' development needs (e.g. student farms). (63)
- Outreach and student recruitment. (63)

Sustainable Agriculture Student Educational Needs and Interests:
Section II: Qualitative Responses to Open Ended Questions
Student responses listed on a per student basis

Degree: Ph.D., Program: Environmental Studies, Year of Study: 2nd year
Emphasis: Agroecology

1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?

Applicability of my work to small holder farmers

Use of a participatory approach to my research to empower farmers and assist them through generation of useful data

Assessments of methods for improved low-input and organic agriculture in the tropics

a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals?

The strength of the program is the interdisciplinary approach that includes both ecological and social questions. In my case, this is important because I want to make sure my ecological work is applicable and useful to farmers, and does not just contribute to academic knowledge.

b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals?

The weaknesses are the flipside of the strength—we are trained to be generalists, and we may not get the depth in either disciplinary area.

2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture?

That's a big question... I will answer this from as if I am thinking about US agriculture alone rather than tropical agriculture, which is my focus.

Concentration of industry and the decline in small farms and farming culture

Labor, and winning rights for farm workers

Lack of research on organic production methods, this despite the dramatic growth of the organic sector.

3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why?

Agricultural economics—it is always money that drives things.

Ecology- Use of an ecological approach gets us away from the short sighted trappings of a purely agronomic approach and allows a focus on reducing negative environmental externalities associated with ag.

4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student?

Hands on experience and lots of time on field trips/ in the field

Pedagogy that relies more on participation (be it in discussions or in hands-on activities) than the traditional lecture approach

Creative problem solving as required by many well written take-home exams and papers

Small class sizes, group projects

5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a student?

The traditional lecture, test, lecture, test format.

Degree: B.A., Program: Biology, Year of Study: 4th year
Emphasis: Botany

1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?

Learn to grow a variety of crops in order to provide local, fresh, healthy, chemical free food for my family, community and myself

Learn a variety of diversified techniques to grow this food in an efficient, sustainable and eco-friendly manner

Learn how to market the organic produce in order to maintain economic viability while using agricultural techniques that do not threaten the ecological well being of the land.

Teach my children and others (peers, students, parents?) what I have learned

a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals?

Our farm is tapped into the local farmers market, city fresh (a rural-urban food program), college coops, college dining service and local businesses, providing good marketing experience. Opportunities for educating others, especially children, about the value and necessity of local, organically grown produce are also abundant in Oberlin.

b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals?

Currently there is no experienced farmer directing programs and teaching interns the techniques mentioned above. Most of my learning was trial and error. Hopefully next summer an experienced grower will be working on the farm. Also the relationship between the college and the farm needs to be developed further.

2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture?

Accessibility—making organic, fresh produce accessible to everyone, everywhere

Solidarity—amongst organic farmers throughout the nation in order to change the food system on a national level

Education—we must teach the youngest children to realize the importance of local, organic food as well as the problems with industrial agriculture.

3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why?

Ethnobotany/anthropology—it is the original peoples of this continent who have the most in depth, time-tested knowledge of the land, plants and animals. As a nation, we must ask forgiveness for our treatment of Native Americans and then look to them for help in creating a sustainable agroecology system

Botany and Geology/Hydrology/Soil Science—we must have a deep understanding of the plants and the earth and water they grow upon in order to produce a sustainable agriculture system.

Economics—marketing, marketing, marketing!!

Education—we must continue to teach and teach more, for the children make the difference.

4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student?

Trial and error, hands on experience, receiving tutorial from or working with an experienced farmer, reading

5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a student?

Reading and theoretical ideas about sustainable agriculture I find less effective, however I like these approaches.

Master's, Human Ecology, near completion
China, environment, food systems

1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?

Emphasizing social justice in agriculture

Creating a just system of global food production, distribution and consumption

Collaborative, interdisciplinary educational use of the college's farm

a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals?

An interdisciplinary approach to approaching problems and solutions

b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals?

It is a small school in Maine with plenty of farmers committed to sustainable agriculture in the area and it is difficult to understand the broader picture of corporate agriculture in an area where small-scale organic farming is practiced. We also have an amazing college-owned farm that acts as educational resources, but I hope that it could be used more widely in classes not focused primarily on agriculture.

2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture?

Understanding why people feel disconnected to the process of food production and how that disconnect has enabled corporations to take over food production. Also, having the ability to draw connections between local production and the global political economy is vital.

3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why?

An interdisciplinary program focused on ecology, agriculture, economics and the social sciences, particularly sociology and political science. Sustainability has often been measured in terms of production, ecological impact and economics, so studying the fields of agriculture, ecology and economics will enable students to grasp these aspects. Sociology and political science help to emphasize the social structures and power in decision-making and planning that is going on.

4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student?

A combination of hands-on farm work in the college farm or garden and then reading about it; basically a way to go between classroom and farm.

5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a student?

M.Sc., Plant, Soil & Entomological Sciences, 1st Year
Sustainable On-Campus Direct Market Production Planning and Education for New Organic Farmers

1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?

- 1) *To be able to effect a degree of change at my university*
- 2) *To be able to continue to work in sustainable agriculture & education beyond college*
- 3) *To be an important voice and resource for my community in sustainable agriculture*

a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals?

My undergraduate degree in Agriculture Education keeps me connected to the world of secondary Ag Ed and Extension. I have a network of mentors and professors across two universities [Name & Name] and statewide in a local non-profit organization [Name]. I have access to a fledgling organic farm project with which to experiment and help to grow to potential. I have the support of the farm manager and greenhouse manager on campus in putting our ideas into practice. I also have a wonderful community with a thriving farmers market and coop for inspiration, resources and information.

b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals?

There is not as much support from the administration either in my university, college or department. There is talk of supporting sustainable ag education, but in practice the budgets do not support our work sufficiently.

2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture?

*Access (to land, to capital, to equipment, to labor, to markets)
Available and Affordable Health Insurance (for owners, operators, managers and labor)
Development and Support of Locally Controlled Markets for Agricultural Products*

3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why?

Soils, Plant (or Animal) Physiology, Integrated Pest Management, Business & Financial Planning & Marketing. These are all equally and vitally important. Sustainable Agriculture is a systems approach. The whole cannot function without the parts.

4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student?

I am a visual learner, a reader. I also learn by doing. Experiential approaches that involve active critical thinking and problem solving components work well for me when combined with independent study and continued practice.

5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a student?

PowerPoint lectures, or any lecture in outline form. I need a narrative. Observation alone is lost on me...I need to actively participate.

B.A., Double Major, Community Studies and Social Ecology, 4th year
Resistance and Social Movements

1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?

To learn, to teach, and to change

a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals?

Specifically, Community Studies gave me the tools to organize for social change. With an emphasis on theory and practice, the program afforded me many opportunities to teach, organize and empower communities, and to learn and be empowered myself.

b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals?

Good question.

2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture?

The World Trade Organization, GATT, and globalization

Regional food production and consumption, in the US and globally

Intellectual Property Right monopolies on seed, biodiversity and indigenous knowledge

3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why?

Nothing wholly technologically and scientifically based, because that will not make agriculture more sustainable. I believe most important disciplines ought to be interdisciplinary and along the lines of reclaiming food as a basic human right along with access to water and land, sustainable living, teaching and learning horticulture at all levels, media, combating the global economy, and claiming institutions of higher education as model places where positive change for sustainability occurs more frequently.

4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student?

Self-guided study with the support of a mentor over a longer period of time than the 3 month quarter. A balance of theory and practice. Outdoor classrooms. Field Studies. Apprenticeships.

5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a student?

Classroom based instruction. Large lectures (unless they are riveting).

Summary: Student Needs and Interests Assessment

MS, Horticulture, Vegetable Production, 1st year

1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?

Graduate with degree to get job in sustainable agriculture field; design vegetable production/ farm course for undergrads; learn economic analysis/business skills needed for running farm business.

a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals?

Supportive faculty; land- 80-acre horticulture farm.

b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals?

No connection between Horticulture and Ag. Economics department, little with other ag disciplines like entomology, weed ecology etc.

One course in vegetable production runs Jan.-early May (not really the vegetable growing season in [Region/State])

2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture?

Defining sustainable agriculture in the context of profitability; access to land;

3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why?

Economic analysis of farm business because if a farm isn't viewed and run as a business, it will not be profitable, hence not sustainable. Ecology- a basis in the science of ecology seems essential to understanding agriculture. Marketing- you can grow a beautiful, successful crop, but without a good marketing system it can go to waste. Production systems: efficient systems make all the difference to wasting time and money in agriculture.

4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student? Hands-on, visual, interactive situations are best for my learning style.

5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a student?

Powerpoint presentations, book reading.

Summary: Student Needs and Interests Assessment

M.S. student, Regenerative Studies, 2nd year
Traditional agricultural knowledge of immigrants

1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?

- 1) Learning about the expression of traditional reciprocal relationships (land, community, farmer)
- 2) Facilitating community development
- 3) Learning fruitful educational processes rooted in action

a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals?

Flexibility and freedom. Depth of interdisciplinary perspectives.

b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals?

Lack of key faculty doing things (in my general focus area).

2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture?

- 1) Local urban and suburban agriculture.
- 2) Depth of community interaction and support.
- 3) Tradition, ritual, culture.

3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why?

Ecology. An understanding of ecological concepts lays a foundation for understanding relationships, interconnectedness, and interdependencies; with broad applications from community, to culture, management, and design.

4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student?

I actually like lectures (coupled with visuals preferably), but can't forget discussions, learn-by-doing projects (whether community-based or field based). Overall, I see the opportunity to share what one have learned, to teach, as the ultimate learning process.

5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a student?

Boring dry lectures by someone who doesn't care or have much depth of experience. Overall, being forced to learn something one doesn't really want to learn (dull, non-interesting subjects, with no perceivable application) is the least effective for me.

Summary: Student Needs and Interests Assessment

M.Sc., Environmental Studies, 2nd year

1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?

1. Analyze the collective strategies among Organic growers in [State, region]
2. Analyze the cost/benefit of using soil enrichment practices (Cover crops, rotations etc)
3. Analyze what soil enrichment strategies are used by Organic growers and whether or not they are affective at restoring health to the ecosystem.

a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals?

Two of the faculty working on our agroecology grant have degrees from Land Grant Agricultural Universities. We have been granted lab space for agroecology projects. We have been able to draw interest in agroecology from departments outside the Environmental Studies department. All our faculty are dedicated and we have expertise in the spectrum of issues/challenges facing agroecology; ecological, economic, and social.

b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals?

Lack of contact with farmers and lack of open space for experimental plots as we are not a Land Grant University.

2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture?

1. Lack of government support/subsidies/incentives for farmer conversion to sustainable agriculture;
2. Lack of market, uncertainty of prices, and Organic label integrity.
3. The potential negative environmental effects of soil enrichment strategies.

3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why?

1. Ecology- the understanding of energy cycles, interconnection, and importance of scale important because it tells us what we are able to do. This uses both idealist (ideas, values, preferences) and materialist theory
2. Economics- farmers must make a living. Economics can also be used to analyze what we want to do, ie. How big should our sustainable farms get, what is the farmer's willingness to pay for environmental protection, what are the costs to free trade among nations, and what happens when niche markets become the norm.
3. Anthropology- this discipline can be used to probe the question, what we should do in regards to sustainable farming. This approach may explore policies and institutions that drive R&D in agroecology, also what collective action farmers may take not only to build trust among their groups, but to establish a political **voice for reform**.

4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student?

Hands on approaches and contact with real farmers can be the best learning approach because right away you face innumerable challenges to your expectations. Teaching approaches that work best for me are ones that aim at a synthesis between disciplines.

5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a student?

This depends on the subject. Sometimes too much participation or student led dialogue can be a bad thing as it can get unfocussed and deteriorate pretty quickly.

Summary: Student Needs and Interests Assessment

B.S., Horticulture, Senior
Organic vegetable farm systems

1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?

Learn existing information and growing techniques, learn why they exist, and learn what new innovations are being developed to improve or replace the existing techniques.

a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals?

[University] is woefully lacking in official alternative agriculture resources, but there are many individual people and places who are brilliant resources, one just has to find them. This makes for a very open ended program that I design myself.

b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals?

No support from the institution. No classes, etc.

2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture?

Products, systems, and philosophical paradigm. I think a lot more people would consider alternative agriculture if they were more confident that the new system would adequately replace the old.

3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why?

Soil science is fundamentally important, as is a holistic understanding of how plant and animals grow. Their life cycles, strengths and weaknesses.

4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student?

Visual, tactile field study. Or lectures closely tied to specimens and examples from the field.

5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a student?

Abstract philosophies are interesting to me, but I get bogged down in them after a while. I do best with subjects that are directly applicable to my life.

Summary: Student Needs and Interests Assessment

B.A., Geography, Senior

Local Food Sheds, (Farm to College Programs), Labor, Corporate studies

1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?

I would like to be able to use my studies in a practical and activist manner after graduation, use my knowledge of local food sheds to improve the food systems in my area, and learn more from farmers on how best to keep them sustainable.

a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals?

As a liberal arts college, there isn't a program designed specifically for Ag. I've constructed my knowledge thus far from travel, independent projects, and side classes.

b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals?

Not applicable.

2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture?

Labor, valorization of sustainable goods in the market and how much of the food dollar still is reaching the farmer, and the corporatization of sustainability.

3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why?

I personally value economics, politics, and labor above all else because those three issues inevitably control the market.

4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student?

5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a student?

Summary: Student Needs and Interests Assessment

Msc. AGRICULTURE, FOOD SECURITY AND NATURAL RES. MGT., SUSTAINABLE
AGRICULTURE, 2nd year

1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?

- To be able to find a good job in the sustainable agriculture sector
- To be able to contribute to research in the area of sustainable agriculture
- To be able to contribute in the future in the area of education and policy pertaining to sustainable agriculture and natural resource management.

a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals?

- It combines natural resource management with agriculture in enhancing sustainable agriculture
- Takes a holistic look at food security and agriculture in an interdisciplinary manner
- Combines social science with natural sciences.

b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals?

- Too broad and offer little room to tailor studies to career

2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture?

- Integrated agricultural Production systems
- Ecology and agro- ecosystems
- integration of aquaculture into agricultural farming systems

3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why?

- Interdisciplinary approach

4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student?

- Group roundtable discussions, group presentations, seminar, workshops, excursions and tours, Study groups.

5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a student?

- Lecture alone

Summary: Student Needs and Interests Assessment

M.S., Environmental Studies, 2nd year
Sustainable Agriculture

1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?

1. Refine farming knowledge and techniques and understanding of global food system
2. Contribute to my local community (via sharing knowledge or empowering citizens)
3. Learn to teach people about the magic of agriculture and farming

a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals?

1. Activist oriented
2. Strong faculty

b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals?

1. Lack of funding
2. Lack of science classes (especially regarding agriculture)

2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture?

1. Sustaining local food systems
2. Farmland protection
3. Food system education (k-12)

3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why?

1. Soil management
2. Economics
3. Education

4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student?

1. Hands-on, experiential
2. Small group interactive discussions
3. Trial-by-error

5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a student?

1. Lecture (being talked at)
2. Large groups

Summary: Student Needs and Interests Assessment

Ph.D., Environmental Studies, 5th year
Agroecology

1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?

1. To understand agricultural systems as ecosystems embedded in a social context so that I can help in the process of making them as environmentally sustainable and socially just as possible.
2. To learn about a breadth of agronomic topics so I can put agricultural problems in context (e.g., knowing a bit about *Verticillium* wilt helps me understand that part of growers' concerns, even when I'm working on something that seems at first unrelated, e.g., nitrogen cycling).
3. To meet growers, other researchers, and activists working on sustainable agriculture to build our network of good thinking and collaboration.

a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals?

Our program is extremely good at helping me understand agricultural systems as part of a social system and all the considerations that come with that. It also is good at helping students understand agricultural systems as ecosystems. Individual professors are good at helping students meet growers, other researchers, and sometimes activists.

b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals?

Probably the biggest weakness of our program is its limited agronomic focus. While it is very good at helping students see the big picture, we have extremely limited opportunities for formal training in topics such as crop nutrition, plant diseases, and basic pest management. Much of this we have to pick up on our own from conferences, grower meetings, interactions with growers, etc.

2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture?

1. nutrient management – to optimize nutrient availability during key periods of plant growth while limiting excess nutrients when they're not needed
2. the price of food – to manage the price of food such that farmworkers are paid fairly, with benefits, and environmental costs are accounted for, while making food inexpensive enough to be accessible to all people
3. foodsheds – to carefully consider what food should be grown where and how such that people can have access to a variety of nutritious foods while minimizing environmental and social costs

3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why?

The interaction between elements in an agroecosystem is crucial to studying sustainable agriculture. The study of standard ecology is very important for helping to see the big picture of agroecosystems and their components, both biotic and abiotic. Rural sociology is crucial for understanding the social context of these systems. Some basic agronomy is important for learning the language of farm operations and being able to talk knowledgeably with growers.

4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student?

As a student I learn best from digging in, either literally, in lab projects, or metaphorically, in delving into a topic to write a paper or compose a poster.

5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a student? I have much more trouble learning from instructor-driven oral lecture or straight, traditional textbooks.

Summary: Student Needs and Interests Assessment

PhD, Geography, 3rd year
Agricultural Geography

- 1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?** learning about diverse aspects of definitions of ‘sustainable’ and ‘agriculture’; studying aspects of farming that are relevant to farmers, especially disadvantaged farmers; maintaining my individual identity and goals while working toward my degree.
 - a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals?** Geography is a flexible program that focuses on interdisciplinary research and thinking, and be approached from an applied perspective, which is my intent.
 - b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals?** The program is in a perpetual crisis of self identity, which at times leads research toward more theoretical perspectives that do not necessarily pertain to my topic of interest in agriculture.
 - 2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture?** structure of the social system of agriculture; access to resources; ecological implications of the status quo of standardized farming.
 - 3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why?** social justice and agroecology
 - 4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student?** in-field followed by theory/overviews followed by in field.
 - 5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a student?** rote memorization of out-of context theory
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Summary: Student Needs and Interests Assessment

B.A., Cultural Anthropology, 4th year
Human Ecology/Traditional Agriculture and Land Management

1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?

1. Prepare myself to contribute to a global movement towards sustainable agriculture 2. Learn how to connect my efforts to the efforts of others and organizations to be more productive 3. Acquire the understanding and skills I need to make my contribution

a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals? There is very little in the anthro department of [University] itself that is helping me meet these goals.

b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals? There should be more courses dealing with the human-environment interface (i.e. ethnobotany, traditional agriculture, environment and religion etc.) The department also should be more interdisciplinary and work with other departments such as environmental studies and give credit for courses in other departments that are related to anthropology (such as the ethnobotany class offered by env. Studies) The anthro department should also put more emphasis on field studies for undergraduates instead of discouraging them from such projects.

2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture? Hard Question

but I think that the social/cultural aspect is often overlooked. Making agriculture more sustainable is going to require a huge change of values, beliefs, worldview and new modes of social organization.

3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why? I think the most important thing is to take an interdisciplinary approach. Like I said, I think that the social cultural aspect really needs to be brought into the picture.

4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student? Hands on, putting things into practice, and living it. Most importantly for me, the MEANING of what I am learning has to be made clear. Why it is important and relevant to me and the world I live in.

5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a student? Material is taught, but it is not given meaning. This is why students study to get good grades and to graduate, not to learn something that is meaningful to them.

Summary: Student Needs and Interests Assessment

Ph.D., Nutrition, final (4th) year
Sustainable Food Systems, Public Health, and Disease Prevention

1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?

Build networks of communication and support of existing and on-going efforts
Institutional and social change to support sustainable food systems
Hold policy-makers accountable for improving human and environmental health

a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals?

Networking opportunities

b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals?

Lack of inter-disciplinary teaching in the program
Narrow perspective limited almost primarily to a positivist approach

2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture?

Coalition building across groups and specialties
Setting long term goals to be worked toward on a multi-level basis by cross-coalition groups
Re-orient land-grant universities, research in general, and university extension towards working together towards a common goal and addressing the immediate needs of the public

3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why?

I believe it's important to form pathways of understanding agroecology that can be accessed by all disciplines. That being said, disciplines that pursue solutions in a multi-disciplinary, qualitative, active way will be most helpful.

4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student?

Hands-on, direct application, outreach-oriented, progressive approaches

5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a learner?

Conventional, subject-specific, quantitative, analytical approaches

Summary: Student Needs and Interests Assessment

Ph.D., Energy and Resources, 6th year doctoral candidate
Certified organic agriculture and small family farming communities in southern Brazil

1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?

- 1.1. Academic goal: study the role of certified organic agriculture in rural communities of the South for contesting destructive global agro-food systems.
- 1.2. Professional: develop interdisciplinary research frameworks that successfully address the study of sustainable agro-food systems in relation to social progress and environmental conservation in the global South.
- 1.3. Personal: build up a solid international network of scholars, students, and practitioners interested in the issue of social contestation of destructive global agro-food systems in rural communities.

a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals?

- a.1.1. [Program] has allowed me to work with people from outside the department who specifically work with those issues.
- a.1.2. The interdisciplinary nature of my program has allowed me to frame my dissertation likewise.
- a.1.3. my program has many international students and alumni

b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals?

- b.1.1. not many faculty and almost no students are focusing on the issues I am focusing
- b.1.2. Ph.D. students working on the social aspects of environmental issues are facing very limited funding options and collaborative groups within the department
- b.1.3. not many faculty and almost no students are focusing on the issues I am focusing

2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture?

- 2.1. social, economic, political and environmental aspects of organic certification and other standards for rural communities of small family/traditional farmers.
- 2.2. the “agrarian question” (who the farmers are, where they farm, and how they farm), specifically in relation to generational change and rural exodus
- 2.3. cultural studies that address social change issues within the context of ‘liberating’ sustainable agricultures in the South.

3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why?

Anthropology/sociology and their interplay with the natural sciences (in the sense that those are the less developed areas within agroecology): to better understand how agroecology is embedded in the social reality of rural communities in the South.

4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student?

Problem-based approach, interpretive strategies, participatory projects, collaborative groups, “democratic” grading.

5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a learner?

Memorizing, work overloads, subject-matter questions detached from problem-based approaches.

B.S., Global Resource Systems, 3rd year

Land and Food Systems, Culture and Agriculture –educational models, intent to teach

1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?

- a. *Wide base of knowledge of land/food/cultural systems*
- b. *Practical agricultural skills*
- c. *Educational/teaching/facilitation skills*

a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals?

The [University] Faculty is very contemporary in their conception of land and food systems. They encourage students to seek experience and to think outside the box. Some of the professors in the faculty are incredible.

b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals?

Minimal formalized practical experience available on campus – must be sought by individual students.

2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture?

The understanding of the science/theory behind food production, distribution and land use systems, as well as the practical skills of sustainable agriculture. I believe it is important to empower as many individuals as possible to grow at least a portion of their own food.

3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why?

I believe that a broad understanding of human cultures, as well as the science and practice of agriculture is vital. Our food systems are embedded within cultural mythologies and social structures – and I believe we need to understand these elements if we wish to support positive change.

4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student?

A combination of hands on, readings, discussion and lectures. Definitely need hands on with respect to agriculture.

5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a learner?

Same as 4.

Summary: Student Needs and Interests Assessment

B.A., Human Ecology, 2nd year
Sustainable Agriculture Education

1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?

- acquire the ability to teach students to grow food organically in order to ultimately become self sustainable
- be able to educate students about the importance of food systems, nutrition and where their food comes from
- develop a curriculum that fits the state's criteria for learning

a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals?

The willingness to support my endeavors.

b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals?

The program doesn't have an accredited program of study concentrated in sustainable agriculture. Most interest is solely student initiated and developed.

2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture?

- How to incorporate such educational services into the overall curriculum and goals of the school.
- Ideas on how a sustainable agriculture/ organic gardening program can be instituted in urban, inner city school systems
- Guidance and support on how to become a sustainable agriculture educator, and provide an experiential learning experience for students.

3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why?

Education, and Agricultural Sciences

4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student?

A mix of lecture and hands on fieldwork.

5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a student?

Strictly classroom learning.

Summary: Student Needs and Interests Assessment

Ph.D., Agriculture Education, 2nd year

1. What are your three most important goals for your studies in (sustainable) agriculture?

1. Learn about Permaculture
2. Become qualified to be a professor
3. Become familiar with the history, philosophy, theory, and issues in (sustainable) agriculture education.

a. What are the strengths of your program in helping you meet these goals?

1. Offers some theory and history of education classes
2. Allows me to take classes outside the department/discipline
3. Faculty member supportive of my educational/professional goals.
4. Good funding opportunities

b. What do you see as the weaknesses of your program in serving your goals?

1. Few Agriculture education classes offered
2. No sustainable agriculture classes offered

2. What are the three most important content areas, topics, or issues you think need addressing in sustainable agriculture?

1. How to integrate college-level curricula
2. How Permaculture could serve as a model for integrating college curricula.

3. What discipline or disciplines do you consider to be most important in studying sustainable/agroecology and why?

1. Education – because we live in a time when few of us feel any connection to our food and have little knowledge of where our food comes from. Education efforts can help people become more informed about their food and how their choices affect agriculture.
2. Permaculture – because I think it could serve as a model for curricular integration. Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences are all interconnected and there is potential for them to be integrated in college curricula.

4. What teaching and learning approaches work best for you as a student?

1. I learn best experientially. I like to do something, formally reflect on what I have learned from doing it, make abstractions (eg. theories, big ideas, connections to other learning) about what I have learned, and then act on my newfound knowledge.
2. Lecture and discussion seem to be the teaching approaches that work best for me so far – but that might just be because I haven't tried much else.

5. What teaching and learning approaches are least effective for you as a student?

1. I do poorly when asked to memorize.
2. I bore quickly of aimless class discussions.