Summary: Proposed Minor in Sustainability Studies

This proposal requests approval for a new Minor in Sustainability Studies. For purposes of the minor we define sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,” and it addresses issues concerning environment, society and markets, and social justice. Sustainability is, by nature, an interdisciplinary endeavor which means that it cannot be taught from a single discipline. Therefore, the minor brings together courses from across the university to provide students with the knowledge they need to carry sustainability into their professional lives. It is an appropriate minor for any major and in most cases will enhance a student’s major field of study. According to a number of recent studies, graduates with experience in sustainability are more competitive on the job market. Some experts believe that job applicants without knowledge of sustainability will very soon find themselves at a significant disadvantage. In their recognition that education in sustainability is a key to the future, colleges and universities across the country are creating minors, majors, graduate degrees, and certificate programs in sustainability. Just a few examples: Duke University’s certificate program in sustainability, University of Rhode Island’s Sustainability Minor, University of Colorado’s Sustainable Development Minor, University of Arizona’s undergraduate, master’s, and PhD in sustainability, University of California-Davis’s Interdisciplinary Minor in Global Sustainability.

The Minor in Sustainability Studies will consist of fifteen hours, six of which are the two required courses: a new Introduction to Sustainability and a new Senior Research Seminar in Sustainability. These two courses will provide students with the necessary common foundation to the minor. They will be co-taught, ideally by one faculty member from Science and Mathematics or Engineering and another from Liberal Arts, Human Sciences, Architecture, or Business. The remaining nine hours of the minor will be chosen from a selection of approved courses that already exist on campus and are cross-listed with the new minor. A list of those courses is included in the following pages. This list will be expanded as additional courses are identified.

Based on the regular inquiries the Sustainability Office receives from students, there is growing interest among students to study sustainability. In addition to the general interest, there are currently two sets of courses that will serve as feeders to the minor: the freshman class Earthsmart and multiple sections of Composition II courses that focus on sustainability (as of Spring 2008 there are 8 sections, and the English department plans to double that number in 2009). Students who take these courses often want to continue to study sustainability and have no means of doing that. The Sustainability minor will provide a way for interested students to pursue a deeper knowledge of this important subject.