

# Teaching & Learning

Volume 21, Number 1, Fall 2010

## In this issue:

- Incorporating Sustainability Across the Curriculum
- LEAP to Success at Saint Mary's
- Teaching Twilight: From Text to Popular Media

## Incorporating Sustainability Across the Curriculum

Dr. Carol Roderick, Centre for Academic and Instructional Development  
Dr. Cathy Conrad, Geography

*Dr. Cathy Conrad is Saint Mary's Teaching Scholar for the 2010-11 academic year. During her tenure, Dr. Conrad will assist interested faculty to integrate environmental sustainability into their courses.*

In achieving its mission, the Saint Mary's community is guided by the core values of academic integrity, the pursuit of knowledge, responsiveness to community needs, openness to change, concerns for a just and civil society, commitment to environmental sustainability, and fiscal responsibility.

The university's academic plan, *Engaging the Vision: Academic Plan 2008–2011* articulates a number of priorities for the university that include environmental responsibility and sustainability. For example, the plan stresses the importance of building on a tradition of community involvement, fostering a culture of civic engagement, and ensuring that social responsibility is recognized as a hallmark of Saint Mary's University. Similarly, the plan calls for the exploration into innovative approaches to curriculum, and the development of ways in which our curriculum supports our vision to be the university of choice for aspiring citizens of the world. The importance of engaging students, faculty and staff in



Photo: Steve Proctor

promoting environmental responsibility on campus and beyond is clear.

### Teaching Scholar Project Overview

The primary intent of the *Sustainability Across the Curriculum* initiative is to assist interested faculty to integrate environmental sustainability into a wide array of courses. In this context sustainability is approached as a "...broad, interdisciplinary paradigm, one that cannot be adequately addressed in one program or major and must be approached throughout the curriculum" (Chase and Rowland, 2004, p. 95).

As a result, fourteen faculty members from across campus came together in May 2010 for a one day workshop to discuss sustainability in higher education and to exchange ideas and practices of incorporating sustainability into their courses. The workshop concluded with the commitment by faculty to revise and 'green' one of their courses during the upcoming academic year.

continued on page 7



One University. One World. Yours.

# Incorporating Sustainability... continued from cover

While some of the participating faculty members already incorporated a focus on sustainability into their courses, it was new territory for others. Examining some of their efforts may help you to generate your own ideas should you wish to introduce sustainability into the curricula of your courses:

## **Dr. Veronica Stinson, Psychology**

Dr. Stinson plans to add a new focus into her Introduction to Psychology (PSY1200) course this fall:

*I plan to incorporate sustainability issues as we cover psychological theory and findings related to motivation and emotion as well as attitudes and social influence. Specifically, students will consider the emotional responses they experienced relating to the recent BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and evaluate any changes in their behaviour. We'll also consider the barriers that societies face as governments and NGOs try to change people's behaviour so that it is more environmentally sustainable.*

## **Dr. Jason Grek-Martin, Geography**

Students are currently introduced to key issues in environmental geography in Dr. Grek-Martin's course, GEOG 1200: People, Place and Environment:

*After discussing key concepts, we explore how people impact and are impacted by their various environments. We pay particular attention to 'real world' environmental issues that students hopefully will be considering in their daily lives. In the winter 2010 semester, I focused on our fossil fuel dependency, explaining how petroleum forms the basis for so many environmental issues: from smog in big cities, to plastics that end up in the oceans, to fertilizers and pesticides that form the foundation for our industrial agriculture and food processing systems. I next addressed climate change, relating it to increased greenhouse gas emissions since the Industrial Revolution and discussing its current and predicted impacts in various parts of the world (including the Canadian Arctic and West Africa). I then discussed how societies cope (or fail to cope) with various natural hazards, before concluding*

*the course with lectures on alternative energies to demonstrate that our fossil fuel dependency need not define our future energy commitments and to provide some 'good news' environmental stories to balance the environmental concerns documented earlier in the term. My goal is for students to understand that the multiple and complex ways in which people interact with their environment are worth taking seriously and studying carefully, and that geography makes people-environment relations its central focus.*

## **Dr. Anne Marie Dalton, Religious Studies**

Dr. Dalton teaches two Religious Studies courses that incorporate ecological issues: Religion and Ecology (RELS 2337) and Religion and Ecological Issues in the Developing World (RELS 3349). She explains:

*In Religion and Ecology, we examine traditional religious teachings, both positive and negative, that relate to the natural world. As worldviews, religions have been complicit in the ecological crisis; they have also been powerful positive influences in promoting sustainable ways of life. Most religions are now actively involved in recovering their teachings on the natural world and encouraging their communities to take an active part in confronting the ecological crisis. In Ecological Issues in the Developing World, we investigate the diverse ways in which the ecological crisis compounds problems of poverty, conflict and instability. We also look for religious values, attitudes and actions that are vibrant within poorer communities throughout the world. These courses are highly interactive and relevant to most students. While I provide significant input on the various religions, students participate in discussing the ecological implications of religious teachings. These issues enliven the classroom.*

## **Dr. Cristian Suteanu, Geography and Environmental Studies**

Although most of Dr. Suteanu's courses in Geography and Environmental Studies are explicitly environmental, during the upcoming year he plans to incorporate

sustainability into a less obvious context: Statistical Methods for Geographers (GEOG3326):

*The main focus of this course is statistics, which can be quite abstract. I will incorporate sustainability by having students apply their statistical knowledge to problems that have an environmental component. For example, I will ask students to assess future electric energy consumption in a region by analyzing past and future patterns of consumption. By processing real energy consumption data, students see that pattern characteristics – even those as simple as the average – depend on the time scale considered in the analysis, as it is often the case with sustainability issues. Trends may be present, fluctuations may be there as well, and students learn how to identify such influences. They also face the fact that the goal people had a decade or two ago – finding the right or 'optimum' scale – may not even make sense. It is rather a spectrum of scales that one should include in the analysis. Thereby, one of the key principles of sustainability – consider the problems not on one, but on many different scales – is experienced first-hand while students gain statistical knowledge.*

In August, faculty members involved with the Sustainability across the Curriculum initiative came together a second time to discuss how they are revising their curricula for the upcoming academic year. They will meet in the winter semester to discuss their experiences, as well as the benefits and challenges that come from incorporating sustainability into their courses.

If you are interested in learning more or want to get involved, please contact Dr. Cathy Conrad, [cconrad@smu.ca](mailto:cconrad@smu.ca). This initiative is an excellent venue to exchange ideas and to obtain support from like minded faculty members across campus.

## **Reference**

- Chase, G.W. & Rowland, P. (2004) *The Ponderosa Project: Infusing sustainability in the curriculum*. In P.F. Barlett & G. W. Chase (Eds.) *Sustainability on Campus: Stories and Strategies for Change* (pp. 91-105). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.