

## **2017 Sustainability Challenge Grant Final Report**

### **Date Submitted:**

Date Submitted: 1/29/2018

### **Project Title:**

Community Engaged Sustainability Education in the First-Year Experience: GEN100 and Retention (Nickname for the Project: REO Tracks)

### **Report Submitted by:**

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### **Summary of the project**

GEN100 is a required course for all first-semester freshmen in the College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment (CAFÉ). As part of this project each of the twenty-two GEN100 Instructors chose a REO (research-education-outreach) Track topic and facilitated the semester-long project which included:

- Introduction to the project, sustainability, the land grant mission
- Guest lecture on the topic
- Information literacy training & workshop
- Diversity session
- Hands-on outreach activity
- Student group research project & in-class presentations
- Project reflection and evaluation.

REO Track topics included (1) Hunger, Malnutrition and Food Security, (2) Urban Forestry, (3) Community Gardens, (4) Diversified Organic Vegetable Production, (5) School Nutrition, and (5) Watersheds.

### **Objectives –**

- Strengthen the first-year experience by providing new GEN100 Instructors with a pre-planned, engaging, and effective class activity.
- Increase interdisciplinary networks across the College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment, and across campus & community.
- Expose students to the land grant mission – research, education, and outreach. Help students feel a part of the community, the University, and the College. Build

student research abilities, presentation skills, and group dynamics. Provide students with deep knowledge of a key issue in Agriculture, Food, and Environment. Instill a sense of community responsibility.

- Increase student retention through accomplishment of the above objectives.
- Provide a useful service to the community – local agriculture benefits to fellow UK students, expanding urban forests to the city, nutrition education to underserved elementary school students, and community garden vitality to food insecure neighborhoods in Lexington.

## **Methods**

Project facilitators worked with GEN100 instructors to explain the goals of this project and to facilitate the quite complicated logistics of 22 sections and 350 students participating in a multi-part project. An essential part of the project was collaboration with partners including UK's Diversity Team, Agricultural Information Center Librarians, and Community Stakeholders including UK Campus Kitchen, the UK Urban Forestry Initiative, Lexington Seedleaf Community Gardens, UK Organic Community Supported Agriculture program at the Horticultural Research Farm, Fayette County Public School Nutrition department, the UK Water Week group, and the GEN100 Instructors.

Using a Google doc spreadsheet to coordinate scheduling, each GEN100 instructor chose a REO track topic and adjusted their semester schedule to fit the approximately seven steps of the project, as below.

- Introduction to the project, sustainability, the land grant mission
- Guest lecture on the topic
- Information literacy training & workshop
- Diversity session
- Hands-on outreach activity
- Student group research project & in-class presentations
- Project reflection and evaluation.

## **Outcomes –**

Students achieved many of these goals (above) and studied specific topics including: the role of urban forests in climate change, biodiversity, inequality and food access, childhood malnutrition, and public perspectives on organic agriculture.

GEN100 Peer Mentors (undergraduate instructional assistants) were key facilitators in the project. They provided guidance to student research projects, documented the process, and facilitated reflective dialogue about the overall educational and outreach experience.

Because GEN100 enrollment jumped by over 50% this Fall it was the first time teaching this class for most of our instructors. However every instructor signed on gladly to participate in this REO tracks project, and it provided a shared project across the 22 GEN100 sections which facilitated commonality. The majority of instructors felt that the REO projects achieved the stated goals and objectives, while 2 felt that it did not. The primary challenges were logistics (e.g. scheduling) and integrating the project with the rest of the course curriculum.

Community Stakeholders raised awareness of their missions and activities, and utilized stipends to purchase materials and equipment. The main challenges were weather and coordinating roles and expectations between stakeholders and instructors.

The campus served as living laboratory in a few ways – students participated in Campus Kitchen gleaning, preparing, and packaging food, they planted and mulched trees around south Campus with the Urban Forestry track, they maintained the rain gardens with the UK Water week, and they observed and did a bit of work on the Horticultural Research Farm.

Nearly all of the collaborations mentioned above were new relationships (except the library, diversity, and urban forestry ones) and all were strengthened by this project. Again, all community stakeholders said they enjoyed and benefited from the project.

The project facilitators are planning on presenting on this project at the Rural Sociology Annual Meeting July 2018; other scholarly products are still being discussed.

### **Reflection –**

The outreach component was especially valuable for student community-building and hands-on learning. We have a meeting planned with all 2018 GEN100 instructors to discuss in detail how to maintain and even deepen this component in the future. The in-class student group research and presentations were less effective than hoped; future manifestations of this project may redirect this time and energy to enhance and extend the outreach activity.

Overall we feel strongly that this project provided direction and commonality across the expanded GEN100 program, especially considering the large proportion of first-time GEN100 instructors. In some cases, though, it restricted the breadth of issues that the GEN100 curriculum usually covers. The challenge is how to make a community-integrated outreach project be simple enough for first-semester freshmen, but also sufficiently in-depth for maximum impact.

**Budget Analysis: Include planned and actual spends in the following categories:**

*Planned* 12-month January-December 2017 budget

- (a) \$300/section (\*20 sections) for materials - \$6000
  - (b) \$500/section (\*20 sections) for stakeholder stipends – \$10000
  - (c) \$1640 total Urban Forestry Initiative involvement – \$1640
  - (d) \$6400 total research facilitation stipend for co-PI
- TOTAL \$24040

*Actual* 12-month January-December 2017 budget

- (a) \$300/section (\*20 sections) for materials - \$5737.02
  - (b) \$500/section (\*22 sections) for stakeholder stipends – \$11000
  - (c) \$0
  - (d) \$6400 total research facilitation stipend for co-PI
- TOTAL \$23, 137.02 (was \$24,040, mid-project adjustment budget \$23,400; \$262.98 was unspent & returned)

- Direct consumables - \$5737.02
- Travel - \$0
- Salaries (and honoraria) - \$17,400

**Visuals- If available, please include 5-7 captioned images directly related to the program**

\*\*We collected several dozen photographs from our projects; If you would like access to the full album I can add you to the Canvas page on which they are stored. Here are a few examples.



GEN100 students working on campus raingarden maintenance for the Watersheds REO track (top and bottom right), and student creation of a “veggie person” for the Childhood Nutrition REO track (bottom left).



Hands-on learning about weeds at the UK horticultural research farm as part of the Diversified Organic Vegetable Production REO track (top left), making a delivery of gleaned food as part of the Hunger, Malnutrition, and Food Insecurity REO track (top right), learning about the benefits of urban forests and best practices for planting trees as part of the Urban Forestry REO track (bottom left), observing and end-of-season Lexington Seedleaf community garden (bottom right)