

Bridging the Gap
Amy D. Gates-Young
Central College

Global Sustainability is an area of strength at Central College, and it is therefore infused throughout the various areas of the college. The administration of the college has visibly supported sustainability by signing the Talloires Agreement and the President's Climate Commitment. This dedication to sustainability also extends to our facilities planning, with three LEED-certified projects having been completed since 2003. Central College is in an especially active stage of curricular development for sustainability-related topics. We have a strong and vibrant program in Environmental Studies, offering both a major and minor. Having unanimously passed the Global Sustainability core requirement as part of recent curricular revisions, the number of courses with a focus on sustainability is increasing each semester. To encourage this growth, the college recently hosted the "Prairie Project", a three-day interdisciplinary workshop on sustainability curriculum development and the resources available to faculty members.

German Studies

The field of German Studies has a much less obvious connection to Global Sustainability than fields such as Environmental Studies or Biology. Notwithstanding, a number of professors in German Studies are engaged with topics of the environment, social justice and economic justice. The Coalition of Women in German, or WiG, has long showed a collective interest in both environmental and social justice topics within the realm of German Studies. For this year's WiG conference, one of the panels is entitled "Women Writers in German: Rethinking Space and Place", and includes environmental and social justice in its scope.

German culture, politics and economics lend themselves especially well to inclusion in discussions of sustainability. The German renewable energy industry is on track to surpass the economic prowess of the German automotive industry as early as 2020. (M. Jänicke, StudienForum 2009) As this development would not have been possible without a supportive constellation of political, economic and cultural factors, it is only logical to include them in any discussion of the topic.

Me

It is this context that serves as a starting point for my course on "Germany and the Environment" to be offered for the first time in the fall of 2010. With generous support from Central College, I had the good fortune to be able to attend a summer seminar on German

environmental and energy policy organized by StudienForum. What I learned at that seminar has become the basis for the course that I intend to teach in the fall. During this course, I will encourage students to consider the possibility that Germany is on a more sustainable path than the U.S. is. In addition, I plan to conclude the course with projects that are actually concrete proposals for how German innovations in sustainability can be implemented locally, either on campus or in Pella.

From a longer-term perspective, I hope to be able to encourage students to find ways to bridge the gap between the path that Germany seems to be on, and the one that the U.S. has chosen. About a year and a half ago, the New York Times ran an article about passive houses designed and built in Germany. These houses require extraordinarily little energy to heat and cool. The only thing that was preventing similar houses from being built in the U.S. is a lag in production of a few key components. As of last year, a group of engineers in Germany had designed a “plus energy house”, a house capable of generating more energy than it consumes. It is my hope that my students will take an idea from the German context, such as the passive house or plus energy house, and find ways to bring them to the U.S.

My goals for this workshop are fairly straightforward: I hope to continue to think about how to structure the course mentioned above, and I hope to think about additional ways to bring sustainability into my courses. I hope to be able to contribute my own knowledge and experience to the discussion.

Central College Information:

<http://departments.central.edu/globalsustain/sustain-partners/>

Women in German:

www.womeningerman.org

StudienForum:

http://www.studienforum-berlin.de/facultyseminar_2010.html

New York Times article on Passive House:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/27/world/europe/27house.html>

Plus Energy House:

<http://www.plusenergiehaus.de/>