**Why are environmental issues important?**

These days sustainability is a buzz word, global warming is an imminent threat, and environmental issues are climbing political agendas. Businesses are becoming more interested in environmental issues, and the demand for workers competent on sustainable business practices is on the rise. Environmental education makes graduating students more marketable. It is both lucrative and imperative to social change for our generation to recognize and pursue sustainability.

Industrial companies like Ford are trying to move in the direction of sustainability by incorporating green architecture into their facilities. Insurance companies are on board because the risk of severe storms will continue increasing with climate change. Our university also has stated their commitment to the environment in the current mission statement.

For all of these reasons we decided to ask an important question: does WMU do a sufficient job teaching students about sustainability?

**Are students at Western Michigan University well educated on sustainability issues?**

Survey out of 110 students of various backgrounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WMU Students: Do you feel Western has taught you sufficient information about environmental issues?</th>
<th>WMU Students: Would you be interested in taking a class at Western that focuses on environmental and sustainability issues?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No 51%</td>
<td>No 37%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes 49%</td>
<td>Yes 63%</td>
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The results of this survey imply that over half of the students surveyed do not feel like they’re receiving an adequate education on environmental issues. Almost two thirds said that they were interested in taking a class on environmental and sustainability issues.

Also in the survey were questions about environmental facts. On average, the students scored around 62%, with a large standard deviation. The median score was even lower: 57%.
How can a peer education program help?

It is difficult to change the curriculum in a university. The process can take months, or even years. A peer education program is a realistic and effective way to begin educating a broad range of students without delay. A student initiated peer education program is easily implemented, and serves to spark curiosity and interest in the student body concerning issues they may not be learning about in their chosen curriculum. We have taken the first steps in launching an environmental peer education program that will address a wide variety of topics concerning sustainability.

The presentation (in the form of an interactive PowerPoint with built in discussion questions) covers a broad range of subjects including different kinds of pollution, the environment’s affect on human health, depletion of resources, the importance of biodiversity, agriculture, simple living, and creative solutions to environmental problems including green building, permaculture, biomimicry and appropriate technology. The goal of the presentation is for students to leave with a greater understanding of the consequences of their current lifestyles, alternative options available to them, and empowerment to take steps toward obtaining a more sustainable lifestyle.

How will the program operate?

Our program is based off of the Sexual Health Peer Education program out of the office of Health Promotion and Education at Sindecuse Health Center. The SHPE program includes a slide show presented by students who are acting as peer educators for class credit, to build their resume, for the experience or for all of the above reasons. The Environmental Peer Educators can and will be set up the same way with some funding and student commitment.

In order to launch a successful program we will need student volunteers to act ask presenters, equipment including a projector and a laptop, and stipends to pay the student director and coordinator of the program. We will also need a small budget to order professional polo shirts that will serve as uniforms.

Students for a Sustainable Earth, a highly active registered student organization on campus, has volunteered to provide the first set of student presenters. SSE is an ideal group because the members are self-motivated and knowledgeable about environmental issues. It is possible that they may take on the project indefinitely, but as of now they are only committed to two semesters of involvement.

Western Michigan University’s reputation can greatly benefit from student initiated programs such as the Environmental Peer Educators. Supplementation of sustainability issues into the general curriculum addresses the student demand for environmental education at the college level. With the support of the administration, the Environmental Peer Educators will strengthen the current course offerings by providing an interesting, meaningful, and informative addition to WMU students, by WMU students.