

TLEF Report

Course syllabi review and preliminary analysis of
instructor interviews

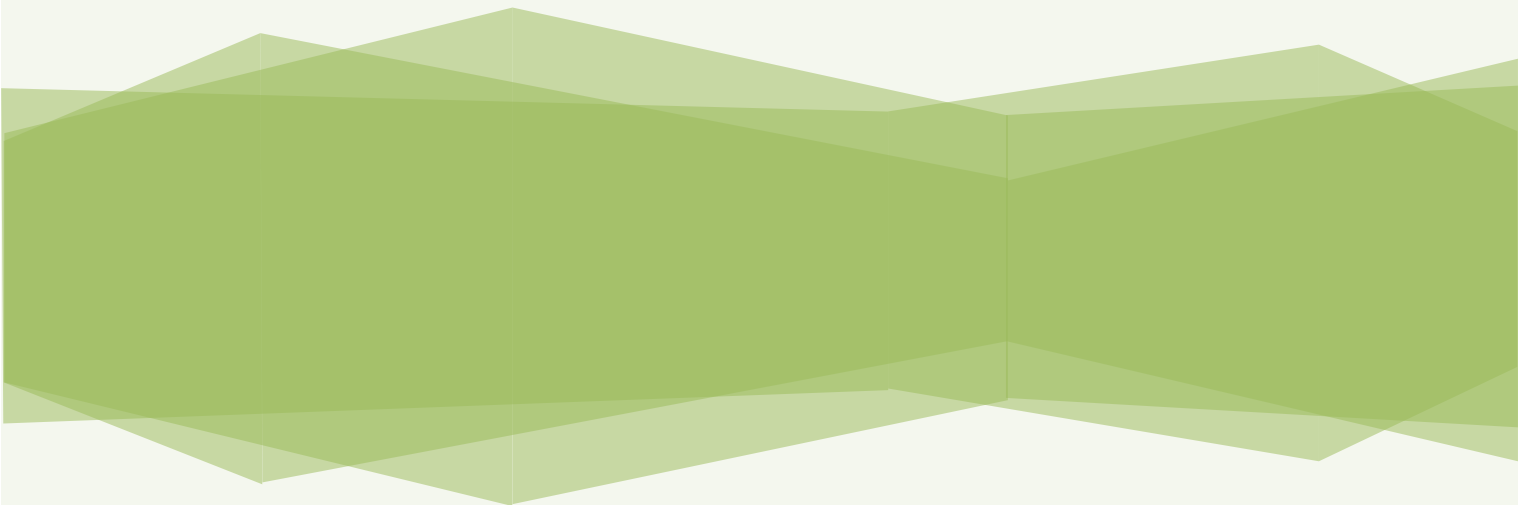


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Centre for Sustainable Food Systems: The Teaching and Learning Hub

In 2015, the Centre for Sustainable Food Systems underwent a process of renewal to identify strengths and areas for growth. As part of this process, the Teaching and Learning Hub identified the need to promote and support student learning opportunities and teaching efforts of all faculty on topics related to sustainable food systems, beyond just Land and Food Systems. In keeping with UBC's intent to expand the "Learning Laboratory" our goals were to first evaluate existing teaching and learning resources and efforts centered around existing sustainable food assets, identify areas for improvement, and then develop teaching and learning resources that will encourage faculty to incorporate existing sustainable food system assets into curriculum from a diversity of disciplines.

In Fall 2015 a Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund supported a project to increase, refine and evaluate food system sustainability experiential learning initiatives offered to our students. Over the course of the summer and fall of 2016 the first part of this project commenced, with a collection of syllabi from faculty who currently use the UBC Farm (the longest standing and most commonly accessed component of the food system used for learning purposes at UBC) to meet course learning objectives. As discussed below, we learned quickly that UBC Farm was accessed by many who were not in a UBC credit course. We also learned that a diverse group of faculty incorporate the UBC Farm into their courses in ways that reflect the increasing innovation in pedagogical strategies at UBC.

This report contains (1) a summary of the syllabi along with a thematic analysis, and (2) the initial results of interviews with faculty using UBC Farm as part of their courses with course summaries showcasing the ways that faculty incorporate food systems assets.

Our next step is to take the key points from this study and apply them to the second phase of this project: to develop teaching and learning resources that will encourage more faculty to utilize existing UBC sustainable food system assets in their courses.

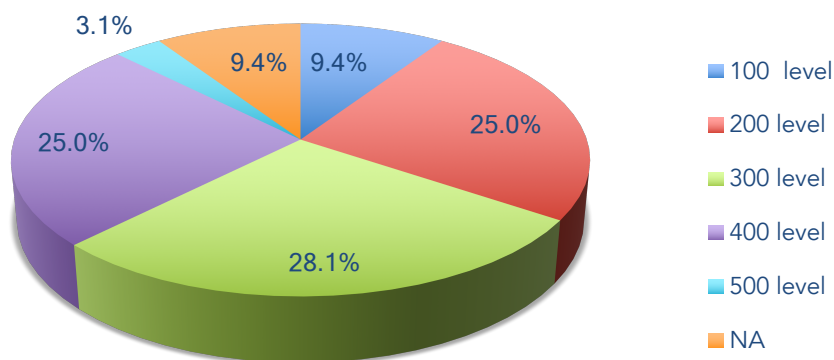
I. Course Syllabi Review

The GRA identified 45 UBC “farm visits” and 12 “course-based projects” that took place at the UBC Farm between 2013-2016. All contacts¹ were emailed in early May, 2016 and late August by the GRA and Work Learn Student. Follow up emails were sent to all contacts who did not respond after 1 week.

In total, 33 out of 57 faculty members responded with syllabi (57.8%)², 13/57 faculty responded, but without a formal syllabus (22.8%) and 11/57 did not respond (19.2%).

Responded with syllabi	33
Responded with no syllabi	13
No response	11
# Contacts	57

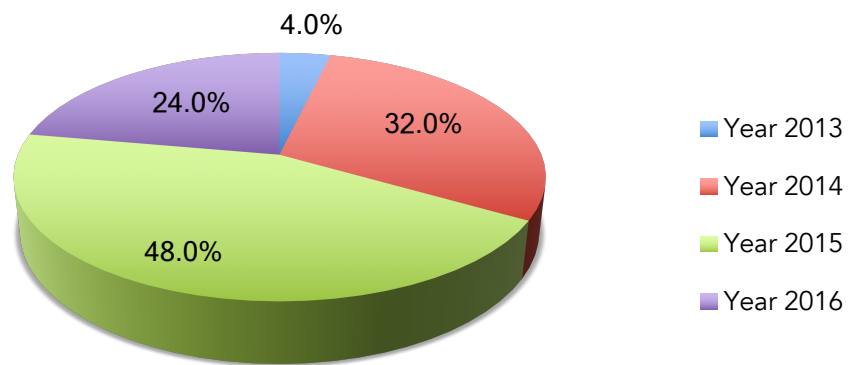
Figure 1 Syllabi distribution by course level



¹ This includes faculty, sessional instructors (both from UBC and outside of UBC), and administrative staff (both at UBC and outside of UBC).

² This figure only includes the number of responses, not the total number of syllabi received. One contacts sent syllabi for two courses, and some had the same syllabi (different instructor but same course).

Figure 2 Syllabi reviewed for each year



Year 2013	1
Year 2014	9
Year 2015	15
Year 2016	7
Year 2014-2015 (full year)	1
Total #	33

Departments and # of syllabi represented in review

Faculty	Department	Syllabi reviewed
Arts	Geography (GEOG)	6
	Italian (ITAL)	1
Education	Language and Literacy Education (EDUC)	1
Forestry	Forest and Conservation Science (FRST/CONS)	2
Law	Law (LAW)	1
Land and Food Systems	Applied Biology (APBI)	9
	Land and Food Systems (LFS)	5
Medicine	Midwifery (MIDW)	1
Pharmaceutical Sciences	Pharmacy (PHRM)	1
Sauder School of Business	Commerce (COMM)	2
Science	Environmental Science (ENVR)	3
Total³		32

³ APBI had the same syllabus from different professors, so it was not included twice; hence the total representing 32 syllabi, not 33.

Review of syllabi

Once all syllabi were organized and added to a Dropbox account (shared between Paulina, Melinda and Kerry), the syllabi were each reviewed individually.

Syllabi with explicit mention of the UBC Farm visit were reviewed first, totaling to 22. Particular attention was paid to the learning outcomes/goals of the Farm visits for these courses, as well as to the thematic focus of the course during the visit. Two of these course syllabi also included specific learning activities related to the Farm visit for students.

Syllabi without specific mention of the UBC Farm, and instead of “field activities” and experiential learning were reviewed second. These course syllabi highlighted the important role of hands-on learning and the practical development of skills outside of the classroom. Of all the course syllabi reviewed, 11/33 did not mention the UBC Farm visit that was taken. Of these, three courses (3/33) reviewed did not mention a focus on experiential (or “hands on”) learning through field trips (or the UBC Farm visit).

Emerging themes: Trends in learning outcomes for visits to UBC Farm

Theme 1: Immersive learning opportunities to encourage reflection and develop interdisciplinary thinking

A central theme for many courses that visited the UBC Farm has been to promote practical (“hands on”) learning experiences for undergraduate students. Overview of course syllabi with a fieldwork component (which included a UBC Farm visit, and visits to other sites) stated the following objectives for such activities:

Farm focus supports what is learned in class through **practical, hands on, and team building work**: "practical lessons in seed starting techniques, and builds team-based and experiential learning skills through an evaluation of farm case studies" (APBI 265)

In order to reflect on "**actual experience**" and to connect what was learned through images and textbooks" (LFS 250).

The description of the course states that it will "**use a hands-on, application oriented approach** to enhance student understanding of the techniques and procedures involved in managing seed inventories..."

Local field trips to local watersheds and key sites of urban development will be **used to illustrate the policies and practices** of environmental management and sustainable development in the Vancouver region.

"Field visits have been organized in order for students to **gain learning opportunities related to the themes of the course**" (EDUC 210)

The course learning outcomes will be met through various lab exercises and field visits. (APBI 403)

For many of the courses reviewed, field trips - including the UBC Farm - were intended to enhance and supplement classroom learning. This type of experiential learning was used as a mechanism to help leverage interdisciplinary thought and reflection. One course in particular (ITAL 100) was committed to implementing UBC's strategic plan to "include sustainability into teaching and learning across all disciplines". As stated in the syllabus for this course, the objective is to "increase awareness of food security and the environment into daily actions and behaviour". Some courses (ex: LFS 100) have specific assignments related to the UBC Farm, and use the UBC Farm as a "case study" for particular assignments (APBI 265). In the case of LFS 100 and APBI 265, the immersive learning opportunity carried on with students beyond the Farm visit, and was brought back into the classroom environment.

Theme 2: Enhancing learning through the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge

There were two courses that utilized the UBC Farm in order to deepen and enhance Indigenous knowledge. The Midwifery course (MIDW 102) used the farm tour as a "medicine walk" with Indigenous "guest leaders" Jeri Sparrow and Dr. Alannah Young. Plants harmful and beneficial to pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum were discussed as part of this visit (2014).

The course "*Pharmaceutical Care in Aboriginal Health*" (PHAR 457) toured the Indigenous plants exhibit and included discussions of traditional plants from a Musqueam Elder. The objective of this visit was to "assess the value of traditional medicines and their place in holistic therapy" (2014).

Theme 3: Enhancing international student learning

Some courses were catered specifically to international students. Two of these courses⁴, which were not “standard” UBC courses, were part of the “Vancouver Summer Programme (VSP)” – intensive summer programs marketed to international students. The VSP course “Essentials of Nutrition” utilized field trips to “explore... in the Canadian context” (2015).

Another course⁵ was taught as part of the “English for the Global Citizen” Program, at the UBC English Language Institute. Participants in this program learn about “civil society, global citizenship and sustainability in both a Canadian and a global context” (2017). One standard UBC course (EDUC 210) was designed to “prepare students for the Introduction to the Global Citizenship, part 2”. Finally, the UBC “Jump Start” program (no formal syllabus) was catered to international UBC students (see next section).

Non-Course Based Farm Visits

Some of the respondents who did not send an official course syllabi provided details regarding their visit to the UBC Farm. These included:

- One visit with a Planning 10 class (from the Vancouver School Board) in the fall 2014. The purpose of the Farm visit was to discuss career options such as urban agriculture as well as careers in “sustainability”.
- One visit was a part of UBC’s “Jump Start” program, which helps to orient new international students to campus (summer 2015).
- One visit with a group of Korean international students from Gyeongsang National University in the summer of 2015 (this tour was organized by a tour agency from Toronto).
- One visit from a group of students in the “French three-week summer institute” at UBC (summer 2014). This particular group had a tour of the UBC farm in French.

⁴ One of these courses (Dept. of Geography) was called “Environment, Resources and Sustainable Development” and the second was “Essentials of Nutrition”.

⁵ “The Politics of Food”.

Limitations of initial findings

One of the main limitations of identifying learning outcomes for UBC Farm visits is the lack of specific details regarding the UBC Farm in the syllabi reviewed. While 22/33 of the syllabi reviewed mentioned the UBC Farm, there was little mention of what the specific learning outcomes of the UBC Farm visit were. In these cases, it is highly possible that the visits to the UBC Farm were used to enhance students' knowledge of key issues related to course content and to connect them to "real world" examples and case studies.

An additional limitation is the limited scope of the syllabi review. As stated in the TLEF grant proposal, 60 course syllabi were to be reviewed, but only 57 courses were identified, and in total only 33 syllabi were reviewed (only 33 out of 57 potential contacts). Additionally, only 27% of the course syllabi reviewed were for the year 2014 (which was the year stated in the TLEF grant). As indicated in Figure 2, the majority (45%) of courses reviewed were for courses offered in 2015.

Conclusions

The UBC Farm is a central "learning hub" for "hands on" learning for both UBC and non-UBC students across several disciplines and contexts (refer to table on page 5). In particular, the UBC Farm is highly utilized in the departments of Applied Biology, Land and Food Systems and Geography in terms of Farm visits.

Many respondents that replied with course syllabi expressed positive experiences with the UBC Farm visit, and many have stated that they will continue to incorporate these visits into future courses as well as further develop curriculum in relation to learning outcomes. There was one respondent who said that while the UBC Farm visit was useful for the purpose of teaching the "Vancouver Summer Programme", he would not take UBC students to the farm. Two key reasons were outlined: 1) there is limited class time to make it to the Farm and 2) the level of the UBC Farm content is slightly "too rudimentary/introductory" for (non-international) UBC students. While this comment only reflects one respondent, it would be productive to explore these concerns in the faculty interviews (to be conducted July, 2016).

II. Faculty Interviews

Sample Interview Questions

1. How does the Centre for Sustainable Food Systems (and the visit to the UBC Farm for example) fit into the learning objectives of the course you teach/have taught in the past?
2. What is the specific learning activity linked to the UBC Farm visit? Is it linked to a project in the course? Please describe this activity/assignment in detail.
3. How accessible is the UBC farm? Do you encourage students to visit on their own time throughout the course?
4. Do your students fill out an assessment/evaluation of the Farm visit? If so, what has been the general response?
5. If you could change something about the UBC Farm visit, what would it be? Is this something you would do again, and if not, why not?
6. What other options do you have for teaching the course content? (as an alternative to the UBC Farm for example).
7. At the Centre for Sustainable Food Systems, we want to develop effective teaching objects that you can use in your classroom—is that something you would find useful/beneficial to teaching your course? (This could be an online tool, workshops put on by the Centre, etc).
8. Are there any other ways the Centre for Sustainable Food Systems can better support you in your teaching objectives?

Emerging themes

The feedback from the 3 professors interviewed was very positive. Some suggestions however, were made in regards to how the UBC Farm tour can be improved, as well as for learning resources on the LFS/ UBC Farm website.

Theme 1: Challenges and possible improvements to UBC Farm visit

Time: The time it takes to get to the UBC Farm with a large group of students was cited as a major challenge to utilizing the farm beyond a ‘farm visit’.

Tour focus: All three participants suggested a more ‘catered’ tour for the group, as well as having more time to wander around the farm and possibly engaging with it on a deeper level (such as trying/tasting some food). One participant said that he had to

select a 'set package' for the tour, but wanted something 'more flexible' where he could choose to skip some parts of the tour, but include a stronger focus on other things.

Outreach: Some outreach on part of UBC Farm/LFS might be helpful, as one of the professors "just stumbled" upon the Farm. Reaching out to professors who incorporate issues of food security, sustainability, etc. might be a productive way of expanding knowledge about how the farm can be utilized in courses.

Theme 2: Teaching supports needed

All participants interviewed had some suggestions for what teaching supports they'd like to see on the LFS/ UBC Farm website. These are divided into the following 2 categories:

- **2.1: Knowledge sharing**
- **2.2: Curriculum materials**

Theme 2.1: Knowledge sharing

2/3 of the people interviewed said they would like to have more workshops available to students from people who have 'specialized knowledge' in the field of food systems. For example: workshops available to students at the farm or offered as part of in-class instruction (facilitated by professors, those working in the field, or students). Another professor mentioned that it would be beneficial to have cross-disciplinary discussions between students in LFS and other disciplines (such as Law). Providing a contact list (online) of people doing interesting work related to these issues was also brought up, and these could be potential people to contact for in-class workshops. One of the professors said that not knowing who to contact is a problem, given how large and compartmentalized the university is.

Theme 2.2: Curriculum materials

Two of the participants interviewed expressed a strong interest in more teaching resources on the LFS/UBC Farm website related to issues of food systems. Mini case studies, or videos were suggested as possible formats. These participants said they are always on the lookout for resources and materials to use in their teaching, and that 'good' materials are hard to come by. The LFS/UBC Farm website has the potential to bring quality resources to teachers. One professor said that more information regarding food and social justice, especially in relation to indigenous issues would be helpful.

Conclusions

The UBC Farm occupies a unique position to bring classroom learning to life. As such, input on how to enhance the Farm as a learning tool is very valuable. As more feedback is received from different courses that utilize the Farm, additional themes may emerge.

The CSFS is currently improving their website to better engage and interact with students and staff. In addition to curating existing food-systems content on the website, new learning objects are being created as an interdisciplinary teaching resource. This TLEF-funded project is developing case-study style content, which focuses on campus food assets beyond the UBC Farm. The learning objects - alongside the website upgrade - will help to bring sustainable food systems learning into the classroom.