Curriculum for the Bioregion: Connecting Teaching and Learning to a Citizenship of Place
"life places"... Our environment is everywhere around us. Puget Sound is right out the car window as well as in the headlines. Yet, most college students say they know little to nothing about the issues facing the Sound and this region. If we come to understand our local piece of the environment through active learning, our understanding will last. And it will become the foundation for understanding broad, complex, systemic issues—healthy communities and ecosystems, environmental justice, and sustainability. Undergraduates tell us that this is the way they want to learn; growing numbers of faculty are excited about teaching this way too. The Curriculum for the Bioregion initiative is working to make active learning about our local environment a part of every undergraduate’s academic experience. Bioregions are, literally, “life places”—defined by the intertwined natural and social systems upon which we rely for our well-being. Situating learning in our bioregion means engaging students with the immediacy and significance of what is happening here, connecting classroom learning to local places, issues, people, and practices. Creating curriculum for our bioregion aims to give students both the tools—and the inspiration—to assume responsibility for environmental and community stewardship here, or wherever they live.

Strategies
Curriculum for the Bioregion is now in development—a planned array of place-based learning opportunities across multiple academic disciplines created by a community of faculty members from institutions across the bioregion. Activities include:

- “Faculty learning communities” within and across disciplines to build place-based learning and sustainability concepts into college and university classes;
- Leadership institutes on curriculum development for campus teams, with seed grants for those teams to involve additional faculty members on their home campuses;
- Workshops and conferences to share teaching approaches and resources;
- Field- and community-based workshops that update faculty about pressing bioregional issues as well as the people and organizations working on solutions; and
- A website that shares curriculum activities, learning opportunities, and teaching resources.

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Participating Campuses in the Puget Sound Bioregion

- Antioch University Seattle
- Bellevue College
- Cascadia Community College
- Centralia College
- Cornish School of the Arts
- Edmonds Community College
- Everett Community College
- Grays Harbor College
- Green River Community College
- Highline Community College
- North Seattle Community College
- Northwest Indian College
- Olympic College
- Pacific Lutheran University
- Peninsula College
- Pierce College
- Seattle Central Community College
- Seattle Pacific University
- Seattle University
- Saint Martin’s University
- Shoreline Community College
- South Puget Sound Community College
- South Seattle Community College
- Skagit Valley College
- Tacoma Community College
- The Evergreen State College
- University of Puget Sound
- University of Washington Bothell
- University of Washington Seattle
- University of Washington Tacoma
- Whatcom Community College
- Western Washington University

“Learning in this way has made me not only a more conscious and compassionate citizen, it has evoked personal lifestyle changes... I have never felt more engaged in my living space.”

Student reflection, “Bioregional Field Studies” class at University of Washington.

The Washington Center
Established by the Washington State Legislature in 1987, the Washington Center is a statewide resource for two- and four-year higher education institutions, with a national reach and a sustained record of educational reform. The Center serves as a National Resource Center for Learning Communities—a proven strategy for accelerating student progress, increasing student engagement, and improving student learning. Washington Center’s work is focused on: (1) improving students’ college readiness and completion rates; (2) providing professional development, technical assistance, and developmental evaluation for educational reform initiatives; (3) offering intensive curriculum planning retreats, institutes, and consultations; and (4) connecting campuses and communities through projects like Curriculum for the Bioregion.

How You Can Get Involved
To learn more, contact Jean MacGregor (360-867-6608) or macgjean@evergreen.edu
Website: Visit http://bioregion.evergreen.edu

Visuals and photos: Cover created by Tom Carlson, University of Washington Tacoma, with 2001 Landsat 7 imagery; territorial view by Ross Mulhausen, University of Puget Sound; inset photos from The Evergreen State College, University of Washington Seattle, North Seattle Community College and the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE).