

2014 Associated Students

# Outback Farm

AS Structure and Program Advisory Committee

Assessment Program  
Proposed Recommendations



## *Introduction:*

The Outback Farm presented to the AS Structure and Program advisory Committee on January, 2014. The currently approved statement of purpose for the Outback Farm is:

The Outback, a joint program of the Associated Students and Fairhaven College, is a 5 acre farm and wetland restoration site. The purpose of the Outback OELP is to coordinate a wide range of opportunities for students to learn about, develop and implement sustainable land use practices. These opportunities include personal and collaborative events and projects involving habitat restoration, organic gardening, green building, academic partnerships, independent study projects (ISPs), workshops, lectures and classes. The OELP also provides job-related skill building and community networking opportunities for students. These include serving on the Outback Governing Council, volunteering, and participating in work-study, AmeriCorps Students in Service, and salaried employment.

## *Program/Services Provided:*

### **Workshops:**

The Outback organizes multiple educational workshops every quarter, responsive to the season and student interest. By giving students access to leaders and experts in their field, these workshops enhance the educational opportunities Western provides. A small sampling of these workshops include:

- Soil Fertility and Composting
- Botanical Medicine
- Beneficial Insects
- Permaculture Design
- Fruit Tree Pruning
- Garden Planning
- Cob Oven Building
- Mushroom Growing Workshop
- Natural Water Systems Design
- Chicken Care
- Beekeeping

**Work Parties:**

By hosting weekly work parties in various areas of the Outback, the program provides volunteer and experiential learning opportunities for students and community members. The work parties accommodate all areas and levels of interest, making the Outback accessible to the diversity of the student body.

- Lead Work Parties
- General Garden Work Parties
- Harvest Parties
- Herb/Medicinal Work Parties
- Forest Garden Work Parties
- Beekeeping Classes

**Community Garden Plots:**

With over 50 plots, the community garden provides students and community members with free resources and educational opportunities to garden. By providing the necessary resources, we are able to make the opportunity more inclusive.

- Orientation
- Educational Resources
- Physical Resources
- Early Childhood Education Plots

**Food Bank Donation Program:**

The Outback has utilized the Educational Garden to grow enough food to donate over 5,000lbs to the Bellingham Food Bank in the past three years. This program allows us to give back to the community and contribute to food justice. This increases access to healthy food by underserved community members, many of which are students. In addition, the harvest parties and bike delivery program provides other opportunities for students to get involved.

- Harvesting
- Bike Delivery Program

**Events:**

The Outback Farm hosts a variety of events that can utilize the different areas of the Outback, including the Amphitheatre, Forest Garden, Outdoor Classroom, and various garden spaces. Many events are hosted in collaboration with students, community members, and other groups. The events hosted by the Outback aim to contribute to student life on campus by providing an enjoyable space and activity for people to connect.

- Cob Oven Parties

- Potlucks
- Cider Pressing Parties
- Square Dances
- Concerts
- Open Mics
- Campfires
- Movie Screenings

**Academic Partnerships:**

The Outback provides a demonstration site for classes, professors and students to utilize for experiential learning, research, independent studies, and by accommodating classes in the Outback.

- Tours
- Outdoor Classroom Space
- Experiential Learning and Research Opportunities
- Independent Study Projects

**Service Learning Opportunities:**

The Outback accommodates many clubs, organizations, and individuals who need to fulfill service-learning requirements. This strengthens partnerships within the University and Community, and increased the breadth of our Outreach

- Clubs
- Court Order Community Service
- Classroom Service Learning

**Employment Opportunities:**

The Outback employs students, providing job-related skill building, networking, leadership development, AS involvement and training. This gives students a chance to be involved in the Outback, beyond the privilege of having the time to volunteer.

- Summer Apprenticeships
- Outback Farm Coordinator Position
- Assistant Farm Coordinator Position
- Work-Study Positions

SW/COT Chart:



## Section 7: SCOT Analysis

		HELPFUL	HARMFUL
		(S) Strengths	(C) Challenges
INTERNAL		<p>Infrastructure: Outdoor classroom, Amphitheater, Community Gardens, Educational Garden, Forest Garden, Wetland Rehabilitation, Herb and Medicinal Programs, Apiary, Chickens.</p> <p>Financial resources through the AS and Fairhaven College.</p> <p>Programs: Donations to Bellingham Food bank (over 2000 lbs donated last season). Work parties provide educational and community service opportunities. Workshops and events give participants access to local experts and resources that allow them to pursue interests related to sustainable agriculture.</p> <p>Collaboration with L.E.A.D.</p> <p>Collaboration with academic departments and other AS offices</p>	<p>There needs to be a more cohesive transition of student positions, especially coordinators, with the transition of information, experience, and goals, including information on the upkeep of existing infrastructure.</p> <p>Collection of data on demographics, program evaluations, and student feedback.</p> <p>Considering the potential for learning opportunities, the Outback is underutilized by western's academic programs. Establishing more long-term connections with professors and departments could improve classroom utilization of the Outback.</p> <p>Student awareness of the Outback Farm is challenging to improve, as the Outback Farm is not currently located on Western maps.</p>
		(O) Opportunities	(T) Threats
EXTERNAL		<p>We are currently in collaboration with a community club working on organizing bike deliveries to the food bank to reduce our carbon footprint.</p> <p>There are many community collaboration opportunities including WSU extension office programs, Community to Community, Common Threads Farm and Garden Collective, Whatcom Farm to School Program, Northwest Youth Grown Garden, etc...</p> <p>Collaboration with other AS offices and clubs to increase the number and diversity of students served by the Outback, and encourage events to be hosted at the Farm. There is huge potential for western classes to utilize the Outback space, and integrate it into curriculum. Strategic outreach and publicity to improve student awareness and participation at the Outback Farm.</p>	<p>The Outback relies heavily on funding from the AS and Fairhaven in order to sustain the productivity and educational value of the site. Budget cuts could potentially threaten funding for the Outback.</p> <p>Unrealistic work and time demands on the two student coordinator positions.</p> <p>Access to funding for large infrastructure maintenance projects such as fencing, greenhouses, etc...</p>



### *Areas for Improvements/ Recommendations:*

The following are the Structure and Program Advisory committee's recommendations for strategic goals over the next four years:

1. **Establish Consistent Legacy Documentation and Strategic Planning**

The nature of the Outback Program requires continuity between coordinator and assistant coordinator positions to ensure ongoing success of the program. Coordinators should design and implement a structure allowing for quarterly review of existing recommendations and the supporting documents. This required assessment by coordinators will reflect upon materials covered, date collected, challenges faced, and solutions reached. This system for compiling information will be incorporated into the strategic plan and any relevant information added on a quarterly basis to existing legacy documents. The integration of the role of documentation into the coordinator job descriptions will allow for clear expectations and preparedness in recordkeeping between SPAC assessments. As part of this quarterly review there will be emphasis on creating structures within which future coordinators can easily access and input pertinent information. It is helpful for hiring to be started early in the fall quarter—opening the positions by mid-October—allowing adequate time for training and the internship.

2. **Improve assessment/evaluation methods for documenting information regarding site activities**

In order to better serve Outback participants, coordinators should implement regular assessments and evaluations of program services. Collecting information on demographics and other statistics is difficult due to the nature of the Outback as an open site-based program. Coordinators will develop and utilize evaluation structures for collecting feedback and attendance to

activities while tailoring these assessment methods to the unique environment of the farm. Strategies can include post-event surveys, work party sign-ins, community garden surveys, input forums, and harvest weight totals. The turnover and workload of the coordinators makes this a difficult area to improve in, and efficient, accessible systems of evaluation are still needed.

3. **Create Forest Garden and Native Habitats Assistant Coordinator Position**

The forest garden provides a unique experiential learning site where students research and implement specialized studies in permaculture, ecosystem restoration, ethnobotany, and urban planning as well as resilient agriculture practices. Coordinating and maintaining the forest garden (and native habitats therein) calls for a dedication to the specialized field study surrounding that of perennial systems, native habitat restoration, and permaculture techniques. Student projects, work-study positions, and volunteer involvement have played crucial roles in maintaining and growing the garden to this point, but they cannot provide the long-term management and organization that a paid position can. In making the well-established educational and community gardens a rich resource for students, current coordinators fulfill and often exceed their maximum hours. The addition of an assistant forest garden coordinator position would not only ensure focused and reliable management to support the current assets of the existing site; this position would enable the Outback Farm to provide educational programming around permaculture-related techniques that students have and continue to seek.

This proposed position is not an expansion on Outback offerings; it is a foundational building block necessary to strengthen the existing program by improving its organizational resources. The position we are proposing would be a 4-quarter Assistant Coordinator salaried at 15 hours/week, amounting to \$6,910. This would serve to increase student accessibility, productivity, and community participation. A coordinator is responsible for fostering partnerships and developing programs at a level exceeding what volunteers and apprentices can be expected to maintain in their allotted hours, further it should be noted that this separate responsibility is something that cannot be gleaned from existing Outback positions. By way of maintaining cohesiveness with the land-

management and educational goals of the Outback Farm, the Outback coordinator would be responsible for ensuring activity on the farm as a whole. The implementation of competent leadership--found through sound coordination--would guide the forest garden's vast biodiverse educational potential in such a way as to reach new students, faculty, and community members. Seeing this position into fruition would result in an increase of resilient agriculture programing provided to Western students, as well as the availability of permaculture resources within Western's campus.

4. **Continue to seek funding to support non-student program manager position**

As far back as the previous TAP report in 2012 (the predecessor to SPAC), the Board of Directors has discussed the need for a non-student program manager in 2012. This need still exists. The excessive demands on the coordinator positions leaves little time to create and facilitate the communications needed to create this position. In order to provide quality education experiences, we continue to suggest the hire of a non-student manager to facilitate long-term consistency in academic collaborations. This position would be in addition to the student coordinator positions. Multiple options have been discussed, including having a facilities management employee or Fairhaven faculty member working part-time in the Outback as a long-term manager. Coordinators, in conjunction with Fairhaven College and the AS Board, should continue to explore academic and non-academic sources of funding to bring stable management and continuity to the Outback OELP. The timelines required to complete construction and major maintenance projects are incompatible with the short duration of student involvement.

5. **Increase hours for Coordinator and Assistant Coordinator positions from 15 hours to 19 hours per week.**

The Outback coordinator currently makes \$7,311/year and the assistant coordinator makes \$6,801/year. The amount of work consistently exceeds the

estimated 15 hours per week in the job descriptions. The amount of time and responsibility demanded of these positions requires 19 hours/week, and the salaries of these positions should be adjusted accordingly. The coordinators at the Outback are faced with the unique challenge of addressing administrative responsibilities, providing interactive/educational programming, and ensuring the continuous health of a six-acre working farm. Based on other coordinator positions throughout the AS, the coordinator salary for a 4-quarter Coordinator at 19 hours/per week would thus increase the Outback Coordinator salary to \$9,325 per position term and \$8,673 per position term for the 19 hours/week Outback Assistant Coordinator position. The coordinator salaries haven't changed since their formation.

6. **Increase Outreach and Publicity**

The Outback is physically isolated and the program is still unknown to much of the student body. Continued effort for raising awareness and access to services would benefit the program and the student body. Coordinators should use strategies such as increased signage, tabling, an outreach campaign, and more consistent use of publicity tools. Overall, improved consistency and communication would be beneficial in all aspects of the program. Maintaining work-study positions devoted to outreach and publicity is helpful.