INTEGRATING SUSTAINABILITY INTO THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON’S UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM

Austin Blevins\*, Program on the Environment, University of Washington

Site supervisor: Ruth Johnston, Ph.D., Associate Vice President of the Environmental Stewardship & Sustainability Office and Associate Vice President for Strategy Management in Finance & Facilities, University of Washington

Faculty advisor: Christine Ingebritsen, Ph.D., Professor and Director of the Center for West European Studies, University of Washington

Higher education plays a pivotal role in addressing global environmental challenges though better educating students and their surrounding communities. The University of Washington stands among its peers as a role model by properly equipping a great deal of students with the tools and skills required to tackle these obstacles. That being said, more can be done to integrate sustainability into the University of Washington’s curriculum. Recognizing this, our provost put together a sustainability in the curriculum committee to come up with a variety of options for improving our own undergraduate curriculum. The purpose of this study was to determine the best practices of peer institutions, ultimately concluding with several recommendations for our own university. This task was accomplished by analyzing AASHE’s Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System database, surveying sustainability coordinators of peer institutions, investigating online program backgrounds, and delving into pertinent research articles and literature. The study resulted in offering the following recommendations based on the best practices of other universities: the name of our Environmental Studies program should be changed to Environmental Studies & Sustainability to better reflect what the program offers to students, the university ought to set a goal of having every undergraduate take at least one sustainability-focused course in their career as a student, and interdisciplinarity should be embraced across the university in the form of more accessible sustainability-related, cross-disciplinary certificates, minors, and/or degrees. These improvements may help the UW remain competitive among its peer institutions and should allow for a more environmentally educated populace in general.