APPLIED STUDENT RESEARCH

TOOLKIT

This toolkit will provide you with examples and inspiration for how you can bring the academic and operational sides of your campus together. By the end of this toolkit, you will be ready to start exploring how you can create Applied Student Research projects and food systems change to your campus.

The Campus Food Systems Project builds the student movement to get healthy, local sustainable food onto university campuses in Canada. The CFSP launched in October 2011 to work with campuses across the country. The project aims to help students improve the multi-stakeholder organizing, procurement practices, and research capacity of their institutions. By doing so, students have unlocked the potential for Universities to lead the healthy, local and sustainable food movement.

The resources used, best practices developed, and lessons learned from these campuses are shared on studentfood.ca to inspire and support change on campuses nationwide.

This project was developed by Sierra Youth Coalition and Meal Exchange, two national organizations with over 20 years of experience bringing students, faculty and administration together on university campuses to deliver social justice and environmental programs. The partnership of our organizations on this initiative was supported by three years of funding from the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation.

For questions or further support, contact national@studentfood.ca

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Introduction & Goals

Applied Student Research (ASR) connects the academic side of higher education to the needs and opportunities of the communities that they're part of. ASR is one name (and the one we'll use in this toolkit), but you'll also see it termed Action Research, Experiential Learning, Community Service Learning. This toolkit will help you understand how you can use student research to provide solutions to food systems challenges on campus and in your community.

What is ASR?

Applied Student Research are independent studies, courses or class projects that:

- Bring the academic and operational sides of your campus together
- Make use of your greatest "renewable resource" the energy and skills of students
- Accomplish projects that staff don't have the time or resources to do on their own
- Provide an opportunity for students, staff, chefs and administration to know each other, and collaborate on things you all care about.
- Give students the opportunity to get hands-on experience, have a concrete impact on their campus, and get class credit for it!

The Bigger Picture

The most important part of setting up ASR is about starting conversations, building your relationships, finding common ground. This toolkit can help you find solutions to campus garden locations, composting mechanisms, supporting your campus food bank and working on procurement.

Working on procurement? Take a look at our Food Service Overview Toolkit. The challenges and opportunities that you identified when talking with your food service provider are perfect priorities around which to set up ASR projects.

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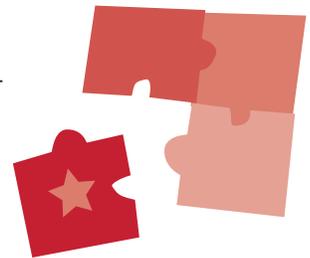
Some important things to know

1. Your campus will welcome ASR

Campuses are looking for ways of providing meaningful and new experiences for students. ASR gives students unique opportunity to solve real world problems. ASR helps students build the knowledge, skills and experience that will help them succeed and find careers. Here's what one student said about their ASR experience:

> *"I feel like my brain is valuable right now. My projects are relying on real life connections and future careers, and it keeps me engaged to work to the best of my abilities because I know that I can."*

2. Finding the perfect course fit may be easier than you think

An important step in finding ASR opportunities is to perform curriculum mapping-looking through your University Course Catalogue, Programs and Professors' areas of study. Curriculum mapping will help you determine right course and professor to approach with an ASR opportunity.

3. ASR is about collaboration

To ensure that an ASR project or course provides tangible results and meaningful experiences, it is important that many stakeholders are involved in its construction. You'll need to find the right professor and stakeholders who will be able to ask questions and provide information. By finding out who would be interested in this project you'll be able to strengthen your work and may find champions on the ground.

4. It's important that the community comes first

 Start with what your stakeholder/community members needs, and then figure out how to fit this into the structure of the course, not the other way around.

5. Coordination is key

Though students are often very independent, it is essential that you have proper coordinator for an ASR project. ASR projects require background research, community connections. Students will often need support and coaching. Finally, the results from the ASR often need coordination and support to be implemented and make tangible change. This coordination can happen in a few different forms, outlined below.

Setting-up an Applied Student Research Project

1. To begin, you'll need to help create an ASR Research Question(s)

Which questions need answers? Which knowledge gaps need filling?

Look around at your campus food system. Speak to people on campus and in the community. Chances are, there are some questions that need answers. Many student coordinators keep a running list of ASR questions and potential courses that can help answer them. Here's an example.

Which projects and movements need support? What is the timeline?

Sometimes, there is not just a question, but a need. A need for a survey, a need for event support. ASR can provide student power and capacity. ASR courses have helped in planning and executing events, providing student support and attendance at events and engaging a wide variety of students.

What sort of solutions are needed?

Once you have your question, you'll have to think through what skill-set, knowledge and approach is needed to answer it. For example, the engineering department may be ideal to help find solutions to a composting challenge. Marketing and communications may be ideal for understanding how to communicate the importance of healthy, local, sustainable food choices to students.

Take a look at the Sustainable Campuses Database to learn what sort of solutions students are creating across the country!

2. What will the "product" look like, and how will it be used?

A key component of figuring out what would be an appropriate goal for the course is looking beyond the course and thinking about how the end-product will actually be used. Who will use it, how will they use it, when will they use it? What would be most useful in addressing the need/opportunity, and what would be realistic for students to accomplish in a semester? Here are some examples: A guide, a logo, posters, a video, blog entries, a theme song, a survey, a public event.

For examples of final projects, take a look at the SEEDs Library!

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3. Who will be involved with this ASR and what will be their roles?

Once you've identified some key questions about what an Applied Student Research will explore, it is essential to determine who will help facilitate and actualize the project.

Professors: Professors play crucial roles in facilitating ASR experience. Many professors will use an ASR project in place of a paper, exam, or the entire course, which provides incentive for students to work diligently and effectively. It's essential that you speak with them to ensure that the project is a good fit with their course and that you have a clear idea of what the process will look like.

Stakeholders: Whether it be staff at a community group, the campus chef, or a student-run food service collective, stakeholders play an essential role in ASR. They will provide an explanation of their needs, information to help students with research and direction for the project. Often it is helpful if the ASR Coordinator brings students and stakeholders together at the beginning of the process and stay in touch throughout.

Students: Students are core to Applied Student Research. This may be the first time that students are going out into the community to ask questions and provide real-life solutions. It's often useful to have an orientation session to explain ASR and introduce them to the campus food system, background research and stakeholders. If the research group has many students involved, it's useful to divide them up and have one or two key students to liaise with stakeholders.

ASR Coordinator: Setting up and running an applied research project takes a lot of work, even after these preliminary questions have been addressed. These roles could all be taken care of by the same person, different roles could be filled by different people, or the different tasks under each role could be split between people ASR coordination is essential to introduce students to the topic, gather background research, make valuable connections, coaching students and ensuring the best outcome of the results. Speak with your stakeholders (professors, community organizations, office of sustainability, office of service learning etc.) to determine how the organization, process and reporting of the ASR project will go and see who will be able to coordinate or share coordination responsibilities.

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Examples of how other schools have coordinated ASR:

At the UBC Food Systems Project, the preparation and supervision roles are filled by the coordinator of the SEEDS office, a subsection of the UBC Sustainability Office that coordinates all applied research projects. They then hire someone for an internship position who follows up with course results over the next summer.

At McGill, the McGill Food Systems Project had student coordinators work full-time in the summer to prepare for courses, and then part-time during the school year to supervise them and follow-up with their results.

Vancouver Island University hired a recent graduate to enhance the Applied Student Research on Campus. In 4 months, she connected with 47 professors across 19 disciplines to create meaningful learning opportunities and tangible change.

These questions above should help you fill out the table below to start planning possible ASR projects.

	What questions need answers? What projects need help?	What faculties, schools, and departments could be involved?	Which professors and courses could be involved?	Who could help organize this?	Who will follow-up to make this happen?
Class opportunity #1					
Class opportunity #2					
Class opportunity #3					
Class opportunity #4					

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Courses to Explore!

Often, students who go through ASR want to continue working on the issue they've explored, this is a great way to build your network and the student food movement!

- **Environmental Sciences, Agriculture and Aquaculture:** product life cycle analysis or sustainable purchasing standards, researching producers in the area, even doing food production through a farm, garden, or greenhouse!
- **Human Geography:** strategy recommendations based on best practices at other universities is a common fit, but with such an interdisciplinary focus these courses can often do just about anything!
- **Nutrition and Dietetics:** menu planning and recipes, demonstrating the health benefits of eating local sustainable food
- **Management and Marketing:** feasibility studies, student focus groups and surveys, cafeteria labeling systems, local sustainable food publicity campaign
- **And many more!**

Background Resources

- Example Course Proposal - students gave this to a professor to integrate into their course
- UBC SEEDs Library - See the range of research topics students at UBC have explored
- Sustainable Campuses Database- See the projects and research students across the country have completed!

Once you've determined your question, approach and the stakeholders involved, you're almost ready to go. The ASR Template will help you set up and actualize the project.

ASR Planning Template

Once you've determined your question, approach and the stakeholders involved, you're almost ready to go. The ASR Template will help you set up and actualize the project.

Steps for setting up ASR	Ideas
A) Come up with a clear research question that will be useful to the stakeholder(s)	
B) Fit this research question with course requirements and professor interests	
C) Decide on an end-product (the "product" could be anything from recommendations or a guide, to a logo, posters, video, blog, theme song, or podcast)	
D) Decide what will happen to this "product" once the course is finished. Who will use it, how will they use it, when will they use it?	
E) Prepare background resources and orientation that students will need	
F) Find someone who can coach students during the semester and make sure that the relationship between them, professors, and stakeholders goes well.	

The final step is bringing this forward to students and check-in with students throughout the process. At the end of the semester or year, students can present their findings to the stakeholder group and determine the best way to continue with the project (does it need further research, an intern to help implement?) It is always valuable to evaluate how the project went for everyone involved!

Conclusion

Applied Student Research is an incredibly effective way to build student engagement, foster cross-campus collaboration and make tangible change. That said, ASR does take a lot of coordination and thought to ensure that it is relevant and meaningful. Take a look at the examples listed throughout this toolkit and start brainstorming and asking questions. Use the tables below to help you get things started. If you have any questions or ideas, please do be in touch at national@studentfood.ca, and enjoy the ASR journey!