

2019 Associated Students

Outback Farm

Pending approval of the AS Board of Directors



Introduction

The AS Outback Farm presented to the AS Assessment Coordinator on January 14rd, 2019 these recommendations. 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 (Outback Experiential Learning Program) 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. These workshops vary year-to-year.

A small sampling of these workshops includes:

- 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

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
- Food Forest Work Parties
- Herb/Medicinal Work Parties

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
- Education Plots (Collaboration with the Child Development Center)

Donation Program

The Outback uses the Educational Garden rows to grow considerable amounts of food that are donated to the Food Pantry and other campus groups that request food. By primarily focusing food donations towards the Food Pantry students with food insecurity can have fresh food and the Outback is able to give back to the community and contribute to food justice. By increasing access to healthy food, campus groups can have a connection to local food and what it means to grow and harvest this food.

- Harvesting
- Bike Delivery Program
- Food pantry

Events and Community Gatherings

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 activities for people to connect. Note: Not all these events are planned by the Outback.

- Fall Harvest Jubilee
- Staff Potlucks
- Cider Pressing Demonstrations
- Concerts
- Open Mics
- Campfires

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 Meeting Space
- Experiential Learning and Research Opportunities
- Independent Study Projects

Community Service Learning Opportunities

The Outback welcomes many clubs, organizations, and individuals and offers service-learning opportunities. This strengthens partnerships within the University and Community, and increased the breadth of our Outreach

- Clubs like (LEAD, Bee Club, Student for Sustainable Food)
- Court Order Community Service
- Classroom Service Learning

Employment Opportunities:

The AS and Fairhaven employ students, providing job-related skill building, networking, leadership development, AS involvement and training. This gives students a valuable opportunity to be involved in the Outback and learn about farming, beyond volunteering.

- Summer Apprenticeships (x2)
- Outback Farm Coordinator Position
- Assistant Farm Coordinator Position
- Work-Study Positions
- Outback Farm Forest Garden Coordinator

Strategic Recommendations

The following are the recommendations for strategic goals over the next four years:

1. Increase Outreach and Publicity

The Outback is physically isolated, and its programming 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, social media, WIN, and more consistent use of publicity tools. Enhanced marketing and partnership with the AS Publicity Center will be key as well. 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.

2. Creating Publicity Support Staff

Due to struggles with having effective publicity for work parties, workshops, and events, we recommend that a position through the communication office is dedicated to assisting smaller offices like the Outback with publicity. This position would ideally be occupied by somebody experienced with communication and publicity and would meet weekly with Outback staff to assist with publicity work. This staff member would work with other offices that may have a large workload and not be able to effectively publicize their events.

Tasks of this position would include:

- Coordination with AS Publicity Center
- Advertisement via KUGS
- Putting Events on WIN

3. Establish Food Marketing Taskforce

We would like to look at and identify the best ways for the food from the Outback Farm to reach and feed people. Already the Outback donates food to the food pantry, and we would like to improve on this even more by identifying ways to increase our efficiency and distribution. This may include working more with a diverse set of constituents composed of: AS Board of Directors, AS Student Senate, clubs or specific members thereof as necessary. The taskforce will be selected by the Outback student staff, in coordination with the Outback Governing Council. After the taskforce completes their research, the Outback Leadership will be responsible for immediate implementation.

4. Move New Hire Position Entry to Reflect Growing Season

The AS Outback Farm can be complex and overbearing sometimes to new hires. Because we want our program to be as effective as possible, we would like to stagger the start time for student leadership positions at the Outback. For example, the outback coordinator's term of position would be Summer quarter to Spring Quarter and the other coordinators term of position would be January to December. This would allow far more overlap and knowledge sharing between positions than the two-week internship period can provide. The goal with this shift is to make sure new hires are competent and involved with the watering and planting process at an important time in the growing season.

Transitioning to staggered hiring would not have a direct impact on AS finances as the plan is to shorten the term of a couple positions to end December 2019. A hiring process would be conducted in the Fall of 2019 so incoming coordinators would start January 1st and be aligned with the growing season. The Outback Coordinator would remain on the current hiring timeline and because of their closer connection the AS and event planning.

5. Hire More Summer Apprentices

Currently, we have two summer apprentices which are responsible for keeping the farm itself productive and to work on various projects. These apprentices do valuable work. But they are also overworked, and there is simply too few of them to fully satisfy the needs of the Outback and the community in which it serves. We would like to add two more work-study positions for the summer apprentices, and they will work alongside the rest of the Outback to better serve the community.

Internal Office Recommendations

1. Improving Facility Needs

A. Build a bike rack

The AS Outback is currently a physically isolated program and is often inaccessible to many students. Students who wish to bike there have no easy way of safely storing their bikes at the Outback Farm. We would like to either build or transfer a bike rack (pulled from different location on campus) on the Outback Farm to increase the accessibility and safety of the program.

B. Addressing stolen tools

We would like to consider a more collaborative storage system with the Fairhaven office or a more robust storage unit at the Outback.

C. Crop Rotation Map

We will record and create a map for crop rotation and planting schedules. Doing this will help us mitigate pest damage and maintain healthy soil. The responsibility of this map will be primarily under the AS Outback Assistant Coordinator, with the proper direction of the AS Outback Coordinator, and other personnel as needed.

2. Create Community Mailing List

The Outback Farm has many constituents, including students and members of the general community. Because the AS Outback is a progressive office, we are constantly looking to improve ourselves and enhance the productivity of our program. To better achieve our mission statement, we are going to develop an email list to send monthly updates. The monthly update will contain new information regarding the Outback, and other information as necessary. The email list will be constantly updated, and there will be an easy way for constituents to suggest new areas of growth for the AS Outback Program. Implementation of this mailing list will be the responsibility of the AS Outback Coordinator, with the input as others as necessary. If the AS Outback Coordinator is unable to meet this obligation, the responsibility falls upon the AS Assistant Outback Coordinator.

3. Move Greenhouse Frame

We would like to move the greenhouse frame to a more productive area. The greenhouse frame in the South Field is not being used and should be moved to a more efficient and accessible area.

4. Assess Impact of Having Grazing Animals

Assessing the impact of grazing animals would likely look at how hooved animals may increase erosion or affect water quality in the riparian zone. It could also look at the total grazing area available at the outback farm and how animals might manage or degrade that environment. Containment of grazing animals may be difficult, especially as the farm is always open to students.

5. Hold Conversations to Increase Long-term Diversity and Inclusion

Now that a Farm Manager is hired through Fairhaven, the AS and Fairhaven College can work collaboratively to improve diversity and inclusion efforts.

6. Evaluate program structure

With the hiring of a Farm Manager position through Fairhaven College via an SEJF Grant, the Outback employees now have better technical knowledge and some redundancies among staff support between Fairhaven College and the Associated Students advising. We recommend evaluating the current structure and relationships the Outback currently operates under and deciding on a structure that best supports the future of the program and its educational goals.

Summary of Financial Requests

1. Creating Publicity Support Staff

This recommendation would not directly request more funding to the Outback program but rather establish a position within the AS structure that could support multiple smaller departments like the Outback that don't have a "Marketing Coordinator" position in their office. This could be accomplished at no cost to the AS by reorganizing the position responsibilities of an existing position. If this is not possible the added costs would be equivalent to a 4 quarter assistant coordinator approx. \$8,000 to \$10,000 annually depending on number of hours per quarter.

2. Hire More Summer Apprentices

Adding more work study in the summer does not have a direct cost impact to the AS. Work-study are also typically hired and supervised through Fairhaven College as well so the impact to AS employees would include supervising a larger workforce.

If the AS were to fund additional summer apprentices each employee would cost approximately \$2,700 since summer apprentices only work up to 15 hours per week through 15 weeks during the summer. This includes summer quarter and hours over intersession since the farm needs continual maintenance especially during intersession when most student are away from campus.