

## Conference on Innovations in Technical Education to Advance Sustainability

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TITLE: ***INSTITUTIONALIZING SUSTAINABILITY IN CLEAN COAL COUNTRY: The experiences of a Green Yankee in King Coal's Court...***

AUTHOR: Robert R. Jones, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Environmental Science, Southwest Virginia Community College

Southwest Virginia Community College (SWCC) has initiated a series of steps to assist in institutionalizing environmental, social and economic sustainability within Southwest Virginia. This is set against a backdrop of southern Appalachian coal and gas production that continues to be a major regional employer and economic driver. The initiatives involve an up-front recognition of the economic and social contributions that coal and gas production have historically contributed and continue to contribute to the region and a spirit of collaboration with industry leaders to continue a long and successful relationship of providing for their educational needs. SWCC continues to maintain a strong trades program and is rolling out additional offerings to support the regional energy industry. However there is a growing awareness that the country's and region's future energy needs must include a mix of renewable and non-renewable energy sources and thus it is imperative to develop training methods, facilities and skill sets that can capitalize on this demand. How then does a small rural community college transition to a new greener economy without alienating a major sector of traditional support?

It is important to remember the three legs of sustainability. While there are voices in the community that advocate the wholesale dissolution of the carbon energy economy, the pragmatic course calls for a reasoned and well-planned transition from mineral extraction to more carbon-neutral opportunities. This protects the socially important components of the traditional energy economy while promoting alternatives to meet the growing gap between supply and demand. SWCC recognizes that competing economic realities exist and these are acknowledged. Indeed, much can be done to improve the region's financial health through an emphasis on energy conservation rather than an attempt to transform the region into a green energy *Mecca*. It is also important to address the long-term environmental benefits to the region as a whole by reducing our collective carbon footprint through the adoption of energy conservation and renewable energy strategies over a transition period that seeks to increase job creation in renewables while non-renewable energy sources inevitably decline due to supply and environmental factors. Lastly, leadership is best served by example. SWCC has embarked on a series of sustainability measures that, while not bold in comparison to some other institutions, are nonetheless significant to our region by developing a new sustainable living classroom project, sustainable small-scale agriculture programs, development of solar photovoltaic, solar thermal and wind energy career studies training and the implementation of small-scale wind and solar system installations on campus as demonstration projects.

All of these programs are being promoted through multi-media sources in order to enhance their acceptance in the community and to drive recruitment into the program. But are we doing enough? How do we stay abreast of the energy curve without estranging long-term partners and stakeholders in the region? The presenter provides experiences and results to date on these considerations.

Contact: Dr. Robert R. Jones, REM; Assistant Professor of Environmental Science, Southwest Virginia Community College, Cedar Bluff, Virginia

Email: [robert.jones@sw.edu](mailto:robert.jones@sw.edu)

Phone: 276 964 7549