SUSTAINU

Goals & Recommendations for a Sustainable Northwestern

Executive Summary

On February 27, 2009 and May 15, 2009, more than 100 students, faculty, staff, and administrators participated in two workshops about sustainability at Northwestern. Participants talked about the importance of developing public awareness and an institutional culture that favors sustainability at Northwestern. Participants also mentioned the value of taking part in larger civic sustainability initiatives- both with other academic institutions and with the City of Evanston and City of Chicago's Climate Action Plans.

Comparisons with other higher education institutions noted the benefits of creating more centralized sustainability authority, increasing resources, publicizing information about existing programs, and strengthening cross-departmental and vertical communication.

The broad participation in the workshops (each lasted about half a day) was surprising and encouraging. One Vice President noted he had never seen students, faculty, and administrators sitting together and collaborating like this before. The turn out demonstrated the serious interest on campus in promoting sustainability at Northwestern.

This document summarizes the goals discussed in the two workshops and offers recommendations in the areas of Energy and Water, Procurement and Business Practices, Food and Dining, Solid Waste, and Curriculum. The proposed goals and strategies are a step in developing an integrated plan for university resource sustainability. The report is intended to spur further discussion and action.

Summary of goals for advancing sustainability at Northwestern:

- Create a greenhouse gas emissions profile and impact assessment
- Set targets for greenhouse gas emission reductions
- Develop cost savings through sustainability initiatives
- Raise awareness about sustainability opportunities in each of the five focus areas

Summary of proposed strategies for a joint effort to increase sustainability at NU:

- Create a formal sustainability task force and hire a sustainability coordinator (or provide staffing dedicated) to lead sustainability efforts on campus, increase participation, and centralize information and knowledge
- Develop incentives for best sustainable practices and create specific plans that integrate environmental, economic, and educational benefits
- Increase institutional support for sustainability programs and identify external sources for funding
- Raise awareness among students by including required sustainability information sessions during new student week
- Increase awareness of sustainable practices on campus by nominating a sustainability representative in departments and units
- Facilitate collaboration with student groups on sustainability initiatives

Background

In fall quarter 2008 Dr. Steve Perkins, Senior Vice President of the Chicago Center for Neighborhood Technology and an adjunct faculty in WCAS Environmental Policy and Culture Program, taught a class on Climate Change and Local Action. As part of the class students examined sustainability issues at Northwestern and presented their findings to interested faculty and students. Following the student presentation, on February 27, Jeremy Friedman, New York University's sustainability coordinator, gave a talk about sustainability in higher education institutions. He also led a workshop on sustainability at Northwestern. On May 15th, 2009, a second workshop, The Sustainability Strategy Workshop, was held in Norris Center. The workshop identified specific goals and strategies for sustainability education and practice in five areas: Energy and Water, Food and Dining, Procurement and Business Practices, Recycling and Solid Waste, and Curriculum. Participants first heard presentations about sustainability efforts on campus by Associate Vice President for Facilities Management Ron Nayler, Manager of Recycling & Refuse Julie Cahillane, Co-Chair of SEED (Students for Ecological and Environmental Development) Emily Wright, and Director of the Environmental Policy and Culture Program, Yael Wolinksy. Participants then split into five working groups moderated each by a faculty or staff with expertise in that area and by a student. This workshop was led by Jesse Sleamaker, former co-chair of SEED.

Jeremy Friedman's talk and the two workshops that followed were co-sponsored by the Environmental Policy and Culture Program (EPC), the Initiative on Sustainability and Energy at Northwestern (ISEN), the Sustainability Working Group (SWaG), and Facilities Management.

The report was written and edited by the group moderators in the workshops, other participants, Jesse Sleamaker (WCAS 09), and Yael Wolinsky, Director of the Environmental Policy and Culture Program, WCAS. However, SustaiNU is a representation of the hard work and dedication of hundreds of individuals who have devoted their time and energy to a vision of a greener Northwestern. It is a testament to the strong support behind sustainability measures, and the power of a collaborative approach. It is also an example of the existing institutional capacity for mitigating environmental impacts.

The following sections summarize specific recommendations in five areas of sustainability at Northwestern.

ENERGY & WATER

The group talked about recent efforts on campus including FM energy audits and Green Cup (energy reduction competition among student residence halls). Participants alluded to the lack of awareness of sustainable practices among students, faculty, and staff. Majority of energy use at NU happens in a small percentage of campus buildings with

heavy lab use presenting a potential for focused effort in this area. The largest current water user are lawns, which also presents an opportunity for landscaping changes leading to greater conservation and savings. Participants mentioned that current FM audits do not focus on water use. The group identified the following goals and recommendations:

Goals

- Conduct an environmental impact assessment for all energy and water use (including energy and greenhouse gas audits)
- Expand meter system
- Increase communication and coordination between FM, administrators, and students
- Increase project visibility
- Build cultural awareness for behavior change regarding energy and water use

Recommended strategies

General

- Continue commitment to renewable energy purchases after Northwestern's renewable energy credit purchase contract expires in 2010. Efforts should be made to make the purchase more visible.
- Expand inter-dorm competitions similar to Green Cup (especially in Greek organizations)
- Increase the visibility of existing programs as a broad educational tool
- Create an online "sustainability directory" of all stakeholders who could serve as resources for others to foster a network of communication
- Identify and utilize grant money for pilot programs and demonstrations
- Create incentives for reporting water leaks or energy waste
- Create a more user-friendly reporting tool and more accessible FM website
- Increase awareness to the importance of turning off computers and lights

Buildings

- Meter all existing buildings to collect real time consumption data, which will help identify high usage and intervene with location checks
- Continue FM commitment to energy audits
- Educate high energy users, such as lab students and faculty about fume hood usage
- Develop a decentralized approach that encourages leadership in individual departments via "green teams" or energy/eco representatives
- Generate capital for projects through an allocation from (or increase in) student activity fees to be used with the new Northwestern Sustainability Revolving Fund

Transportation

- Promote alternative modes of transportation to, from, and on campus
- Improve intercampus shuttle operation including better arrangements in stops (benches and shelters)

- Develop a campaign to promote greater use of the intercampus shuttle
- Start a bike rental and share program through Norris
- Expand student use of I-Go car sharing
- Minimize utility truck usage by grounds and FM

Water

- Integrate current storm water collection rather than using individual cisterns, and use this "green" water for irrigation and toilet applications conditional on local code restrictions if any.
- Create programs to increase awareness on campus about the importance of reducing water waste

PROCUREMENT & BUSINESS PRACTICES

The discussion centered on the potential for reducing both environmental impact and costs by improving procurement and business practices. Stakeholders noted several problems including low use of centralized purchasing and poor communication with procurement office. Participants suggested there are few incentives to buy green products, citing their low visibility as a key obstacle to greener purchasing. Higher costs of some green products also present a challenge. Participants were also concerned about high levels of end of lifecycle waste at NU.

Participants proposed the following goals:

- Consolidate environmental products information in a one-stop online site
- Increase levels of environmental purchasing, particularly for office supplies
- Maximize longevity of products
- Minimize overall lifecycle environmental impacts
- Purchase increased levels of recycled content materials, esp. office paper
- Reduce overall consumption

Participants suggested the following strategies:

- Begin targeted negotiations on specific contracts and purchases and gain the commitments of individual departments to certain standards
- Incorporate 'take back' or other packaging waste reduction options for campus deliveries.
- Form a purchasing advisory group in Fall 2009
- Create incentives for green purchasing
- Create a centralized green-product guide for purchasers
- Collaboratively produce a comprehensive environmentally preferable purchasing policy
- Recognize green purchasing via student group's recognition on the web and "green certifications" acknowledging certain benchmarks in office sustainability
- Begin a surplus trade program for furniture, hardware, and office supplies (like the Reusable Office Supply Exchange, ROSE).

FOOD & DINING

The group discussed the serious environmental effects of non-organic and non-local food, the difficulty in procuring local crops in the Midwest, and the high costs of more sustainable local and organic products. Participants explained that the size of NU operation and safety regulations make connecting with local farms difficult. It is evident that the culture of eating on campus generates too much waste and generally doesn't support healthy and sustainable habits. Disposable packaging also creates excess and unnecessary waste. Participants commented that it has been difficult to increase awareness of current sustainable initiatives in dining. The group suggested the following goals and strategies:

Goals

- Increase education and awareness about existing programs, including vegetarian dining
- Add organic, vegetarian, and local food to menus and highlight these options
- Decrease reliance on disposable dining materials and purchase more sustainable options
- Reduce food waste

Recommended strategies

- Benchmarking of food waste levels and procurement of local and organic foods
- Create a food and dining advisory group to formalize a process for benchmarking and goal-setting and develop criteria for "sustainably grown" food
- Encourage vegetarian dining options
- Increase labeling of sustainable products and food offerings
- Collaborate with student groups, especially Kellogg, to help market food sustainability
- Reduce disposable dining materials in Norris by procuring a dishwasher and offering non-disposable options (an efficiency study may be necessary)
- Expand tray-less dining to Allison Hall (all other dining halls are now tray-less)
- Expand the food pulping program
- Begin composting pre-meal food waste (as much as possible given state laws)
- Make a connection with the Talking Farm and SEED's organic community garden
- Offer one meal a week of all sustainable ingredients (similar to Yale) in all dining halls
- Work with SEED and other students groups to increase awareness (co-sponsor a screening of the new documentary "Food Inc")
- Work with departments and programs to decrease use of disposable cups and plates in daily use and events
- Reduce the use of box lunches and other heavily packaged meals, and work with NUCuisine to develop alternatives

RECYCLING & SOLID WASTE

Northwestern has increased recycling in recent years, however, there is more that can be done to reduce waste and increase diversion. The lack of a culture of sustainability on campus makes it difficult to engage and educate the community regarding the importance of recycling. More recycling bins are needed across campus and options for combined trash/recycling units should be considered. Awareness and availability of E-waste recycling, office supply exchanges, and furniture swaps should be improved.

Goals

- Provide more education about what is recyclable
- Expand recycling by creating a comprehensive plan for bin locations with the goal of placing a recycling bin next to every garbage can on campus and vice versa.
- Encourage institutional priority for sustainability programs and waste reduction initiatives

Recommended strategies

- Make all alternatives to landfill disposal (reuse and recycling) more convenient
- Encourage top-down direction by departments, such as green teams or mandated waste reduction protocols
- Create dorm and building pickups, as well as centralized drop locations for E-waste especially at the end of every quarter
- Develop a comprehensive online database about all recycling resources on campus
- Develop a centralized and readily available reusable office supply exchange, or "ROSE"
- Institute sustainability as a behavior quality in staff reviews (non-graded goals, positives but never negative)
- Begin a "green team" program for students and staff that provides an "advisor"-person who can offer advice on all waste-related activities. This could possibly be a work-study job
- Create an NU course or required information sessions about recycling and sustainability issues

CURRICULUM

During the past few years the number of courses on environmental issues has increased significantly, and enrollments in these courses more than doubled, while the number of tenure track faculty had declined (due to 4 retirements). There has also been an expansion of academic activities on sustainability and environmental policy. Greater communication between the central academic programs (Environmental Policy and Culture, Earth and Planetary Sciences, Environmental Science, and Civil and Environmental Engineering) would improve opportunities for students. With growing student interest especially in social sciences courses on the environment more resources are necessary. More

information about the environmental programs should be offered to incoming freshmen. The group has suggested the following goals and recommendations:

Goals

- Develop the strengths of the central environmental fields (policy, earth science, and engineering), and offer students within the programs a base of common knowledge while maintaining each program as an intellectually separate field
- Foster more communication between programs
- Expand student involvement and interest in all programs

Recommended strategies

- Build program capacity by creating tenure lines to replace retiring social sciences faculty who taught environmental courses (and have been replaced by their departments with faculty who do not study environmental issues). A similar recommendation was made by the Weinberg Student Advisory Board.
- Create an Environmental Curricula Committee which will include the directors of the environmental programs and departments
- Develop research opportunities related to sustainability for students in these programs
- Each program should offer a clear mission statement describing its goals and philosophy, based on desired opportunities for students after graduation
- Provide adequate administrative support for each of the programs (especially EPC and ES) so faculty can focus on curriculum and program development and on student advising.
- Consider a distribution requirement/option of one course on environmental/sustainability/energy issues

SUMMARY

Changing behavior and institutional culture are challenging tasks that require initiative, commitment, dedication, and resources. Northwestern has already started to adopt some sustainable practices, and has both the opportunity and the responsibility to advance specific goals under a comprehensive plan. With the active involvement of hundreds of students, faculty, administrators, and staff, we believe this is a critical time to develop and advance sustainability on campus. This document offers specific goals and strategies, many of which can be implemented quickly and can lead to significant savings and reduced environmental impact. Participants in the campus sustainability events hope the university will enhance its commitment to sustainability and place high priority on further development and implementation of these plans. We look forward to helping in this process.

Participants who helped run the workshops and/or write or edit the report:
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