

Academic Working Group on Sustainability

Annual Report FY2019

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WINNIPEG

Campus
Sustainability Office

Members of the Academic Working Group on Sustainability FY2019

Ian Mauro – Geography/Richardson College for the Environment (chair)
Lee Anne Block – Education
Andrew Park – Biology
Royden Loewen - History
Joseph Wasylycia-Leis – Campus Sustainability Office (Administrative Support)

Background: Academic Working Group (AWG)

The Academic Working Group on Sustainability (AWG) has existed as a senate-approved body operating under the auspices of the Campus Sustainability Council since 2012. The AWG brings together faculty members from different departments who share an interest in sustainability teaching and research at UWinnipeg. The group works closely with the Campus Sustainability Office (CSO) on achieving UWinnipeg's strategic objectives relating to environmental education and knowledge mobilization. The academic working group generally meets 2-3 times per year but did not convene in person in FY2019. Members of the group, especially Ian Mauro, acted in a consulting role as the CSO moved forward on plans for course tracking and creating a community of practice around sustainability research and education. We plan to return to a regular meeting schedule in FY2020.

Sustainability Course Inventory Completion and Analysis

Over the last few years, the AWG and the CSO have worked together to develop an inventory of sustainability-related courses taught at UWinnipeg. The ultimate goals of this project are to gain a better understanding of the breadth, depth and scope of sustainability education at UWinnipeg and to generate better results moving forward by modeling the best practices of other leading post-secondary institutions. An initial list of sustainability courses was compiled in 2015 as part of UWinnipeg's first Sustainability Tracking, Rating and Assessment System (STARS) application. In 2017, the University's new Institutional Sustainability Strategy called for the establishment of a formal, published sustainability course index and the ongoing tracking of enrolment in these courses. An updated inventory was also required for UWinnipeg's 2019 STARS application. The AWG provided feedback and expertise throughout this process, including coordinating a review of all campus syllabi in 2018.

In FY2019, the CSO worked with the Registrar's Office to establish a system for tracking enrollment in these courses. The system was first ready for CSO testing in January, and the CSO is still working with technology services to be sure that the information collected will be of use to the AWG. With more accurate data on sustainability course enrollment, the AWG will have a baseline to establish targets in enrollment and offerings, and the University can improve its ranking in STARS reporting categories. We look forward to working with the AWG in the coming fiscal year on this continuing project.

Partnership with Richardson College for the Environment (RCFE)

With input from the AWG, the CSO and RCFE began campus education and research programming in FY2018 and launched a speaker series designed to attract students, staff, faculty and the larger community interested in environment and sustainability. This speaker series allows participants to share knowledge, experiences, and discuss ideas for collaborative, interdisciplinary research and teaching that engage networks on and off campus. This partnership continued into FY2019 with two major campus events.

In September 2019, the CSO and the RCFE provided logistical and outreach support to the Axworthy Distinguished Lecture series for the *Climate First Tour*, a nationwide effort to engage Canadians in an urgent dialogue about climate change. This event featured speakers David Suzuki, Steven Lewis, and Pam Palmeter and was attended by over --- members of the University community.

In February 2020, the CSO and the RCFE co-hosted the University's first Sustainability and Environmental Research Fair. The event was a mix-and-mingle event for faculty, staff, students, and community partners interested in environmental research taking place at the University of Winnipeg. It showcased the work of both departments and individual researchers, including initiatives by several members of the AWG, like Leanne Block's Langside Learning Garden. Over 50 people attended this event.

In FY2019, the CSO and RCFE also collaborated on a proposal for a sustainability credential at the University. This credential would be awarded to students who complete certain sustainability courses and other non-classroom-based, experiential learning elements such as sustainability-focused coop placements. These sorts of alternative credentialing programs are becoming increasingly popular at post-secondary institutions, and would provide an incentive for students outside of environmental studies programs to pursue sustainability courses. This proposal was based on a long-term vision established by the AWG, and we hope to continue to refine the proposal with the group in the coming year.

Next Steps of the AWG

It is truly unfortunate the University is doing away with the Richardson College for the Environment in its institutional form. While the building will still exist, the idea of it being a dynamic setting for coordinated interdisciplinary teaching and research on sustainability topics is dead. This present major challenges for the AWG who had worked closely to with RCE principle to develop long term plans, specifically the sustainability alternative credential. This is a lost opportunity for our institution and the CSO and the AWG would appreciate having more discussion with top administrators as to how we should move forward if we, as an institution are serious about achieving our stated goals on enhancing sustainability education at UWinnipeg.