

Academic Working Group on Sustainability

Annual Report 2018-2019

4/9/2019



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WINNIPEG

Campus
Sustainability Office

Members of the Academic Working Group on Sustainability 2017-18

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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 meets several times a year and works closely with the Campus Sustainability Office (CSO) on achieving UWinnipeg’s strategic objectives relating to environmental education and knowledge mobilization. The AWG met three times between May, 2018 and March 2019, working primarily on developing a new campus sustainability course index and establishing a community of practice for sustainability researchers. Moving forward, the AWG will be working closely with the Richardson College for the Environment which, under the direction of Dr. Ian Mauro, has a renewed mandate to support innovative, interdisciplinary approaches for enhancing sustainability education and research at UWinnipeg.

Sustainability Course Inventory Completed

Over the last few years, the AWG and the CSO have worked together on developing 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 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 2018-19 STARS application.

As such, the AWG has put a lot of energy toward completing the project over last two years. The group’s recent efforts the criteria use to determine whether courses receive STARS’ “focused” (F) or “related” (R) designation and established a process for designating new courses moving forward. Given the high volume of courses that needed to be reviewed for a comprehensive inventory, the AWG – Under the guidance of Chair, Dr Ian Mauro – enlisted the help CSO staff in January, 2019.

Through a wage subsidy program offered by Success Skills Centre, the CSO hired Vanathy Kandeepan, who took the AWG's criteria and existing course evaluations and worked to fill in the gaps by reviewing course syllabi. Between December 2018 and March 2019 Vanathy reviewed 189 courses from 28 departments, summarizing sustainability content and proposing F or R designations where applicable. At luncheon hosted by the AWG and CSO in March, faculty and instructors who submitted syllabi were invited to discuss the status of courses requiring further discussion. In the end, this project identified 37 sustainability-focused and 69 sustainability-related courses currently on offer at UWinnipeg.

Over the next few months, the CSO will work with the Registrar's Office to establish a system for tracking enrollment in these courses. With more accurate data on sustainability course enrolment, UWinnipeg can improve its ranking in STARS reporting categories. This data will also help the AWG understand the intersection between sustainability and academic excellence at the UW and will provide a benchmark that the AWG, CSO, and RCFE can use to promote and incentivize academic courses and programs that offer sustainability content.

Partnership with Richardson College for the Environment (RCFE)

The 2018-2019 academic year marked the beginning of a more formal alignment between the AWG, the CSO, and the RCFE. Overall, these groups are interested in coordinating and streamlining their efforts to increase the profile of sustainability teaching, research, and service within and beyond the campus, and this past year we piloted a number of initiatives to increase campus collaboration and integration.

With input from the AWG, the CSO and RCFE began campus educational and research programming 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 pilot year allowed us to test the type of topics and timing of events that were of most interest to campus colleagues. This informed our longer-term objective of establishing a "community of practice" that formally aligns sustainability focused research and academic efforts on campus.

To launch this new partnership, the CSO and RCFE, with support from the AWG, hosted a mix-and-mingle event on September 18, 2018, called "*Growing a Collaborative Environment: Sustainability Education and Research at UWinnipeg.*" Dr. Annette Trimbee opened the event, with additional speeches by Dr. Mauro (RCFE) and Joe Wasylcyia-Leis (CSO) to set the context for the collaboration and steps moving forward. The event was attended by over 30 people and led to discussions amongst students, staff, and faculty about sustainability efforts on campus.

The RCFE and CSO held three additional events, building towards the AWG's vision for a "community of practice" on campus, including "*Halloween with the Batprof*" (October 28, 2018) featuring Dr. Craig Willis; "*Climate Change and Our Common Future*" (November 1, 2018) featuring Drs. David Suzuki and Ian Mauro; and "*Winter Climate Change*" (January 30, 2019) featuring Dr. Nora Casson. For each of these

events, there was substantial participation from both the campus and larger community, as well as extensive media interest that resulted in print, broadcast and social media coverage of UWinnipeg's educational and research efforts regarding sustainability. In total, roughly 140 people participated in these events, including forty faculty members.

Next Steps of the AWG

Given the success of this pilot year, we hope to have the AWG act as an advisory board to the RCFE, which will create a formal and integrated management structure for sustainability education and research efforts on campus. This past year has informed an emerging strategy for RCFE and demonstrated that the AWG has a role to play in guiding new initiatives within the College, with the CSO providing necessary supports along the way. In the coming year, these groups will continue working together to enhance and incentivise sustainability learning opportunities in the classroom and beyond. They will also collaborate on programs and events that support a sustainability community of practice at UWinnipeg while connecting with networks and communities off campus.