

An In-Depth History of Campus Sustainability at The University of Winnipeg

Coming together is a beginning.

Keeping together is progress.

Working together is success.

~Henry Ford~

A Multi-stakeholder Mandate

The University's Campus Sustainability Initiative marks the convergence of several different initiatives undertaken by University students, faculty, and staff.

- The University's Physical Plant has a long history of initiating and supporting projects that reduce the environmental impact of the University's daily operations by seeking to maximize energy efficiency, especially with the support of Manitoba Hydro. For over 10 years, students and physical plant staff have also cooperated to promote and run recycling on campus.
- University faculty also has a long history of supporting and encouraging students to apply their classroom learning about environmental and social issues to the real world.
- Students, for their part, have been organized around campus sustainability issues for over fifteen years.

These various threads of student, faculty, and staff commitment to environmental and social responsibility began to converge in 2003, when a group of students from the student group EcoMAFIA (now EcoPIA) attended the first Sierra Youth Coalition's *Academia to Action* Initiative (formerly *Greening the Ivory Towers*) conference in Montreal. From the conference a national network of students working together to address campus sustainability issues at the grassroots level was created.

The University of Winnipeg's contribution to this network (SUNSET) was established early in 2004 when a handful of students in an environmental sustainability class, along with the students who attended the *Academia to Action* conference, presented a comprehensive proposal for the launching of a campus sustainability audit to the University of Winnipeg's Administration. The proposal was well received, and the students were connected to Physical Plant and Facilities Management staff to further discuss the concept.

From 2004-2008, SUNSET was an active student group, strongly supported and helped along by the members of the University's Faculty. From 2007 to 2009, SUNSET also ran a Student Led-Initiative in Experiential Learning to promote course-based student research in all academic departments on sustainability issues affecting our campus and larger community. The project was funded by the Winnipeg Foundation and Eco Canada. Parallel to and independent from SUNSET's work, a faculty member prepared a concept

paper proposing the development of a Sustainability Management System (SMS), which was tabled with the President of the University in 2005. The paper outlined the major drivers for such a system, its potential benefits and costs, an outline of what such a system would comprise, a work plan for system development, and a request for Presidential endorsement of the project.

The concept paper provided a well-articulated framework for a campus-wide sustainability initiative, while the existing student, faculty, and staff engagement provided the necessary support base to carry out the proposed project. In April 2005, an independent contractor was hired as Campus Sustainability Coordinator to work with students, faculty and staff to facilitate SMS development.

Senior Management Endorsement

Following the Presidential endorsement, a presentation was made to the Senior Administration of the University (Vice-presidents and Academic Deans) which again reviewed the proposal to develop an SMS and seeking senior level management endorsement for the project. This was received in June 2005.

Establishing a Project Task Force

A Campus Sustainability Task Force was assembled consisting of individuals identified by the project coordinator and appointed by Presidential endorsement. The Task Force assembled the various groups and individuals who had been engaged in sustainability-related work into a coherent body. These people included Physical Plant staff, staff from other University departments, students from SUNSET and EcoMAFIA (now EcoPIA), and interested faculty members (many of whom who had supported SUNSET students in their efforts).

The Task Force was charged with overseeing development of the SMS under the guidance of the Campus Sustainability Coordinator. Development of the SMS was subdivided into components addressing environmental, social and economic sustainability. The ISO 14001-2004e standard for environmental management systems was adopted as a template for SMS development. In its first year of operation, the Task Force focused on environmental policies and procedures as these appeared to be most urgently in need of development and deferred attention to social sustainability to subsequent years.

Special Working Groups of the Task Force were also established to address specific aspects of system development. Under Task Force oversight, the Policy and Procedure Writing Working Group developed a suite of draft policies containing environmental performance goals, responsibility assignments, reporting protocols, and auditing commitments. An omnibus Sustainability Policy was created for Board of Regents adoption that committed the entire University to certain broad sustainability goals. Eight more administrative policies were prepared that were designed to implement the intents of the Sustainability Policy through specific objectives addressing energy use, air quality, water conservation, green procurement, transportation, risk management and emergency response, waste minimization, and land use planning and property management.

Consultation and Revision

Following drafting of the policies a series of three internal consultation processes were organized inviting “internal” members of the University (students, faculty, employees) to comment on the draft Sustainability Policy. In addition, one “external” consultation was organized for invited participants representing alumni, neighborhood organizations, government regulators, ENGO representatives, and selected consultants and academic experts in the field of sustainability management and ISO standards. Input and suggestions from all four rounds of consultation were then incorporated in another generation of draft policies.

Proposal Development

Once draft policies were secured, the Campus Sustainability Coordinator assembled a number of other proposals which together with the draft environmental management policies formed a package of initiatives intended to (a) establish the policy foundation for institutional change; (b) identify a senior management level executive as responsible for oversight of campus sustainability activities; (c) establish a standing Campus Sustainability Council to replace the Task Force and continue its functions; (d) propose a GHG emission reduction plan to enable the University to meeting Kyoto Protocol compliance targets; (e) table a plan for further development and implementation of the SMS. This document was tabled with Senior Administration in May, 2006.

Policy Adoption and Procedure Development

The entire SMS Proposal was adopted in stages. First the Sustainability Policy being adopted by the Board of Regents in October, 2006, and then all other elements of the proposal were adopted by Senior Management Council in November, 2006. In December 2006, the University appointed a new Vice-President Human Resources, Audit and Sustainability, with senior responsibility for the sustainability portfolio. Day-to-day management of the campus sustainability initiative has remained under the supervision of the Director, Campus Sustainability Office, who reports directly to both the VP-HR, A&S and to the President. Also in December, 2006, the Campus Sustainability Task Force was disbanded and reconstituted as the Campus Sustainability Council with expanded Working Groups, and enlarged membership.

Current Activities – Indicators, Procedure Development, and Social Sustainability

Currently, the Campus Sustainability Council is focusing its attention on social sustainability goals by conducting research on the meaning of social sustainability, best practices, model policies, and a process for consultation which can inform another round of policy development. The Council is also conducting a review of existing University policies relevant to social sustainability in preparation for a “gap analysis” on what needs to be added to existing University policies to return a well-rounded and well-grounded policy framework.

In addition, Working Groups of the Council have developed or adopted indicators of environmental performance for each major policy goal. Reporting systems have been established to gather information on as many indicators as possible, and to develop

reporting mechanisms if none currently exist. Annual reports of campus sustainability performance based on the indicator set have been issued annually since FY2006. Performance targets have been set for most indicators and work is now under way, in collaboration with operational departments, to construct action plans intended to move indicators toward the policy goals identified for the system. In some cases this exercise will include development of new procedures in addition to adjustment of existing procedures to achieve the desired continuous improvement in sustainability performance. Looking forward, the campus sustainability initiative will continue working on aspects, policies, goals, indicators and action plans for promoting social sustainability objectives. Work has also begun to use internet and other information technology applications to automate as many performance data collection, analysis and reporting functions as possible. The university also continually welcomes opportunities to partner with community organizations, all levels of government and non-governmental organizations to promote sustainability specifically among post-secondary education institutions and more generally in Canadian society.

Note: Content current as of 2010.