

Action on Values

Improving Sustainability in the Students' Union:

A Response to the 2010/2011 Students' Union Sustainability Assessment

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4 January 2012

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Overview

Sustainability is a core strategic value of the Students' Union.

As a part of our efforts to ensure that we manifest the values we profess, the Students' Union has developed this document to guide our efforts to improve our sustainability for the 2012 to 2013 time-frame. The ideas and approaches in this document are based on internal discussions and on the recommendations of the 2010-11 Sustainability Audit.

Our Strategic Approach

Sustainability is best supported not through top-down directives, but rather by empowering individuals at all levels in the organization to make more sustainable choices in how they conduct their business.

With that in mind, we believe the most important step is to identify a set of key, overarching goals that specific initiatives and objectives can connect with. This provides a framework for new sustainability ideas to be integrated into our overall sustainability efforts, and it provides a way to assess competing ideas. It provides us with a general conceptual understanding of how our sustainability efforts fit together.

We have identified four key goals for our sustainability activities:

1. Promote: Promote good sustainability practices to staff and students.
2. Track: Develop better systems for tracking sustainability-related metrics.
3. Train: Provide staff with improved training and support surrounding sustainability issues.
4. Policy: Develop appropriate operating policies and procedures to enhance sustainability.

Our Action Plan categorizes each action as contributing to one or more of these key goals.

Notes on the Action Plan

In drafting this program, all of the recommendations in the Sustainability Audit were reviewed and considered.

The Audit lays out over 100 recommendations, both large and small. As an organization of limited size and resources, it is not practical for us to fully implement all of them, but we have adopted a great number.

Adaptations

The Action Plan outlines a set of actions we plan to take over the next two years, all of which were drawn from or based on the Audit recommendations. We have adapted the recommendations to better reflect what we feel is practical and achievable in 2012 and 2013.

We also feel some recommendations lack required context or clarity. For example, recommendations to cut paper usage by a specific percentage do not account for the reduction in paper usage we have already implemented for administrative operations, and do not account

for the fact that paper usage in a public building is often a product of building usage. If our building becomes more successful, drawing more students, then paper usage (paper towels, toilet paper, napkins) is likely to increase.

Order and Headings

We have, in general, kept with the ordering and headings used in the Audit Executive Summary, but we have made some changes to heading titles for readability and consistency. The ordering may thus appear somewhat random, but it will allow the reader to more easily find corresponding parts of the Audit.

Duplication

We have also endeavored to remove some of the duplication of recommendations in the original audit, though we have retained some. We have also consolidated or broken up recommendations where appropriate for readability.

Blanket Omissions

One particular type of recommendation has been omitted entirely – those recommendations that involve advocacy to other organizations or entities. Management strongly feels these recommendations are a matter for Students' Council; it is inappropriate for management to be involved in political policy.

General Management Comments

Some elements of our thinking about sustainability bear special note here.

The Role of the University in Building Operations

Many of the most significant contributors to sustainability is basic building operations – heat, water, power, other utilities, and structure. Our scope of direct action in these areas is quite limited, as building envelope and systems are contractually an area of University domain. Thus, you will not see any recommendations on these areas here.

That said, we would like to note that the University has been very active in this area over the past few years. Their efforts have included re-lamping public spaces to eliminate incandescents, coating two sun-facing sides of the tower with a film designed to reduce thermal loading, and installing an air curtain at the south entrance. We have also worked with the University to obtain BOMABest certification. Currently, the University is examining replacing one of our air handling systems with a newer, more-efficient unit. Finally, as the University operates on a district-based heating and cooling system, our overall efficiency is quite decent, especially for 44 year old building.

We greatly appreciate the University's efforts and contribution in these areas.

Food Court and Food Operations

The single largest impact on sustainability that the Students' Union can have surrounds how we manage our food court and our food operations.

In recent years, we have made significant behind-the-scenes progress in these areas. From ECOS' reusable dish program to using local sources to our vendor composting program, we have made many small steps in the right direction. In addition, we are in the process of adopting

more user-friendly, socially sustainable policies and processes in our food operations, from expanding choices for those with restricted diets to improving how we label our food.

The biggest potential win, and the biggest challenge, however, is reducing the waste from the food court. Again, we are moving in the right direction with our own operations. For example, L'express is phasing out styro and plastic, and replacing it with compostable disposables (and we are working through sourcing and product performance issues as we encounter them). But we also believe we have a long way to go, and are continuing to examine options and understand the problem.

We view the waste issue as four-dimensional:

1. Product - styro v. compostable, for example. This is not always obvious, as there is a lot of product marketed as 'compostable' that, for practical use cases, is not.
2. Model - disposable v. re-usable. We currently operate on a disposable model with a minor customer-dependent re-usable component. A full re-usable model would be preferable, but has serious space, capital, and logistical implications.
3. Cost - how much will reducing waste cost, and how does that affect pricing for students? Simply running lower margins isn't practical without new funding, as it could lead to actual program cuts to our service and governance program.
4. Usability - no compost-based strategy, for example, will really work unless we remove the obstacles users face, such as difficulty in determining what is and is not compostable. For a compostable strategy to really work, we need to remove those obstacles - everything in the food court needs to be compostable or recyclable. Even condiment packaging is important!

We are continuing to actively work on these issues.

Other Operations

In terms of our other operations, we continue, in planning and implementing our programs, to seek ways to reduce our footprint.

Many of the policy recommendations in the Audit are already followed informally. Facilities staff use natural cleaners, carefully dispose of hazardous items, track mileage on vehicles, and rarely throw anything away (we have quite a collection of old doors and millwork!). Over the last two years, new printer purchases are generally for double-sided models (unless there is a unique use case). Paper usage is tracked, but not in a consolidated fashion. All paper products we use for operations are recycled or FSC-certified; we would use more recycled FSC paper, and have worked hard at finding recycled paper with a low enough static charge to prevent machine jams. We also purchase energy-use certified equipment and try to keep our equipment – computers, printers, refrigerators, etc. – as long as possible, both to reduce cost and reduce footprint.

This is not to say that there isn't a lot of room for continued improvement – there is. Providing more information and training to staff about sustainability issues can do nothing but help. That, along with better systems for tracking performance, are likely to be the elements most significant to our ability to improve our sustainability footprint.

Action Plan

1 Buildings

- 1.1 Continue to participate in the BOMABest sustainability assessment program. We will pursue the BOMABest Level 3 certification, if achievable within the operating constraints of the Students' Union, in time for our BOMA assessment in 2014.
 - 1.1.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote, Track, Train
 - 1.1.2 Timeframe: Ongoing, with a target of Level 3 certification by 2014.
 - 1.1.3 Notes: SUB has recently been certified as BOMABest Level 2. BOMABest incorporates measures for tracking metrics and for tracking staff understanding and implementation of sustainability practices.
- 1.2 For all renovation and construction projects exceeding \$250,000 in value, we will consult an environmental design professional for advice on sustainable renovation practices. Where reasonable and cost-efficient, we will also do so for projects below the \$250,000 value.
 - 1.2.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Policy
 - 1.2.2 Timeframe: Add to Operating Policies in 2012.
- 1.3 Where practical, strive to achieve LEED Silver or better performance on renovation and construction projects. Alternative certifications may also be considered if LEED is impractical.
 - 1.3.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote, Policy
 - 1.3.2 Timeframe: Add to Operating Policies in 2012.
- 1.4 When renovating, consider building designs that allow for fresh air intake and operable windows.
 - 1.4.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Policy
 - 1.4.2 Timeframe: Not Applicable
- 1.5 Improve signage in building regarding sustainability-related items. This can include leak and air-quality reporting, menu and dietary information, and waste-reduction efforts such as the own-plate discount programs.
 - 1.5.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote
 - 1.5.2 Timeframe: Leak signage by April 2012, menu information by September 2012, improved discount program signage by January 2012.

2 Paper

- 2.1 Post notices on all office copiers and printers urging that printing be minimized where possible.
 - 2.1.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote
 - 2.1.2 Timeframe: January 2012
- 2.2 Implement an operating recommendation that new printers that are purchased should be capable of double-sided printing, except where use cases dictate otherwise. (For example, plotter purchases.)
 - 2.2.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Policy
 - 2.2.2 Timeframe: Implemented – current practice
- 2.3 Implement a paper-usage tracking system through our accounting systems.
 - 2.3.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Track
 - 2.3.2 Timeframe: This is implemented in some departments already, but to achieve a consistent and complete assessment, this responsibility will move to accounting, as per 7.2, below.

3 Solid Waste

- 3.1 Review our waste bin placements and composition, with a goal of encouraging more recycling.
 - 3.1.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote
 - 3.1.2 Timeframe: Update waste bins in summer 2012
 - 3.1.3 Notes: May require a non-trivial capital budget allocation in the next budget year, and may affect staffing/service levels in Facilities.
- 3.2 Work toward a waste-free food court.
 - 3.2.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote, Policy
 - 3.2.2 Timeframe: This is an ongoing project, with many components and options. For this fiscal year, the goal is extreme reduction (ideally, elimination) of non-degradable products in SU operations.
 - 3.2.3 Notes: We have already implemented vendor composting for all tenants, and are moving our operations to compostable disposables. Significant movement on our operations will occur over the next year, but leased operations may take longer. Sustainability will be made part of the evaluation criteria in the next round of food court lease renewals, and that process will provide an opportunity to advance this goal. We will also be examining other options, such as a full-scale, universal re-usable dish program, and often-overlooked details (condiment packaging), with an emphasis on making any program as user-friendly as possible.
- 3.3 Recommend development of an operating policy recognizing source reduction as an important component of procurement. (Goal 4)
 - 3.3.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Policy

3.3.2 Timeframe: Add to Operating Policies by December 2012.

4 Hazardous Materials

4.1 Track hazardous material purchases.

4.1.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Track

4.1.2 Timeframe: Though some tracking is already done, full implementation along with accounting department tracking systems – December 2012

4.2 Wherever possible, use eco-labeled chemical, cleaning, and paint products. (Major Goal(s) 1 and 4)

4.2.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote, Track, Policy

4.2.2 Timeframe: Informally implemented already. Should be added to Operating Policy by December 2012.

4.3 Provide information and/or training to employees on how to dispose of electronic and hazardous waste. (Goal 3)

4.3.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Train

4.3.2 Timeframe: Begin by April 2012

5 Food and Food Services

5.1 We will continue to make efforts to reduce waste in the food court, through improving promotion of re-usable dish programs and discounts and encouraging the use of compostable disposable products. (See item 3.2, above.)

5.2 Internal catering should utilize reusable plates, cutlery, and associated materials wherever possible.

5.2.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote, Policy

5.2.2 Timeframe: Implement as a management directive in January 2012.

5.2.3 Notes: We do this in some cases, but are very inconsistent. Certain catering elements will need to remain disposable until we develop appropriate cleaning and sanitation capabilities.

5.3 Where costs are comparable (within 10%), use locally-sourced food when available. Local sourcing should be tracked through accounting systems for reporting purposes.

5.3.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote, Track

5.3.2 Timeframe: Already implemented; accounting tracking being worked on for 2012.

5.4 Work with campus partners to make Farmer's Markets a regular occurrence on campus.

5.4.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote

- 5.4.2 Timeframe: Make Farmer's Market self-sustaining and a regular occurrence by fall 2012. In January, a group of CSL students will be developing a business plan for the Farmer's Market.
- 5.4.3 Notes: The October 2011 Farmer's Market was very successful for both vendors and consumers.
- 5.5 Offer vegetarian and vegan options on all food venue menus, with a goal of making at least 30% of menu options vegetarian or vegan.
 - 5.5.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote
 - 5.5.2 Timeframe: Vegetarian and vegan options exist on all menus currently. Working to ramp up the proportion of items to 30% by the end of 2013.
- 5.6 Make nutritional breakdowns of all menu items easily accessible to customers.
 - 5.6.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote
 - 5.6.2 Timeframe: April 2012
 - 5.6.3 Notes: Software to assess nutritional content arriving in December; it will take some time to run through all existing menu items and develop consumer materials.
- 5.7 Improve food labeling to allow customers to select diet-appropriate choices.
 - 5.7.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote
 - 5.7.2 Timeframe: Develop food labeling system by April 2012, deploy by August 2012.
 - 5.7.3 Notes: This is on deck as a CSL project for the Winter 2012 term. If no CSL students take up the project, we will work on it as an internal project sometime between February and July 2012.

6 Human Resources and Diversity

- 6.1 Adopt as an operating guideline that at least one member of all hiring committees be trained in employment equity and human rights issues.
 - 6.1.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Train, Policy
 - 6.1.2 Timeframe: All hiring committees by January 2013. This already occurs in many cases already – making it universal will require additional identification and training of select staff throughout 2012.
- 6.2 Establish a set of central interview and evaluation guidelines for hiring processes.
 - 6.2.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Train, Policy
 - 6.2.2 Timeframe: January 2013 (set to align with 6.1 for efficiency reasons).
 - 6.2.3 Notes: Individual departments may augment or deviate from these guidelines where necessary to meet their operational requirements.
- 6.3 Add a statement to all job descriptions recognizing the importance of considering sustainability issues in the performance of work.

- 6.3.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote
- 6.3.2 Timeframe: August 2012
- 6.4 Provide training on sustainable procurement to individuals with purchase responsibilities.
 - 6.4.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Train
 - 6.4.2 Timeframe: Begin offering training opportunities to staff on an annual basis, coinciding with transition related training, in April/May/June 2012.

7 Tracking and Reporting

- 7.1 Select and adopt a consistent method of reporting on sustainability efforts and metrics, and include sustainability reporting in the SU's Annual Report.
 - 7.1.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote, Track
 - 7.1.2 Timeframe: Inclusion of a sustainability component, without metrics, in 2011 Annual Report; with metrics, in the 2012 Annual Report.
- 7.2 Wherever possible, the accounting systems of the Students' Union should be utilized to generate actionable metrics and data regarding items of interest for assessing and managing sustainability impacts.
 - 7.2.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote, Track
 - 7.2.2 Timeframe: Identification of metrics to track by August 2012; implementation of tracking practices by December 2012.
- 7.3 Transition to use of STARS reporting system, appropriately adapted, to become the Students' Union's primary sustainability program guidance.
 - 7.3.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Track
 - 7.3.2 Timeframe: January 2014.

8 Events and Recreation

- 8.1 Seek to expand the space available for recreational and social activities.
 - 8.1.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Policy
 - 8.1.2 Timeframe: Not Applicable/Unknown
- 8.2 Where practical, work with the Office of Sustainability to improve the sustainability footprint of Students' Union events.
 - 8.2.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote
 - 8.2.2 Timeframe: Ongoing/as appropriate

9 Energy

- 9.1 Continue policy of purchasing only equipment with appropriate EnergyStar, EnerGuide, Ecologo, or EPEAT certification.

- 9.1.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Policy
- 9.1.2 Timeframe: Already current practice. Add to Policy Manual by December 2012.
- 9.2 Pursue installation of vending misers on vending and refrigeration units, where feasible.
 - 9.2.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote
 - 9.2.2 Timeframe: September 2012.
 - 9.2.3 Notes: Will depend on cooperation of Coke and Edmonton Vending; we are limited to persuasion until contracts expire. Coke has demonstrated a willingness, however, having already installed several high-efficiency units in SUB. Not all units have usage patterns amenable to vending misers because of operating delays.
- 9.3 Work the University to track building energy usage.
 - 9.3.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Track
 - 9.3.2 Timeframe: Secure records from the University by April 2012 and annually thereafter.
- 9.4 Pilot participation in the ETS@Work program to promote use of public transit by employees not covered under the UPass.
 - 9.4.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote
 - 9.4.2 Timeframe: Implementation in progress on a 6-month pilot program, expected to begin in January 2012.
- 9.5 Monitor fuel consumption of fleet vehicles and provide annual report on distance traveled and fuel usage.
 - 9.5.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Track
 - 9.5.2 Timeframe: Data is already collected. We only need to determine where reporting should occur.

10 Water

- 10.1 Improve fixtures: Install low-flow showerheads, aerators on faucets, and consider water usage when replacing damaged plumbing or installing new fixtures.
 - 10.1.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Policy
 - 10.1.2 Timeframe: Summer 2012 for installations; December 2012 for policy.
 - 10.1.3 Notes: The University is responsible for fixtures, but we can make some changes during renovations, and will advise the University that replacements need to be low-water usage.
- 10.2 Install a water-bottle refilling station.
 - 10.2.1 Major Goal(s) Addressed: Promote
 - 10.2.2 Timeframe: Implemented

Appendix A: Action Summary Table

Action	Goal 1: Promote	Goal 2: Track	Goal 3: Train	Goal 4: Policy	Status or Timeline
1 Building					
1.1 Participate in BOMA Best	✓	✓	✓		Implemented/ Ongoing
1.2 Policy: Consult on renovations				✓	Dec 2012
1.3 Aim for LEED Silver on capital projects	✓			✓	Dec 2012
1.4 Operable windows/fresh air				✓	N/A
1.5 Improve sustainability-related signage	✓				Leaks: Apr 2012 Menu: Sep 2012 Plate: Jan 2012
2 Paper					
2.1 Copier and printer signage	✓				Jan 2012
2.2 Purchase only DS printers				✓	Current practice
2.3 Paper usage tracking		✓			See 7.3
3 Solid Waste					
3.1 Review/upgrade waste bins	✓				Summer 2012
3.2 Waste-free food court	✓			✓	Ongoing, complex - multiple targets
3.3 Policy: Source reduction				✓	Dec 2012
4 Hazardous Materials					
4.1 Track hazardous material purchases		✓			See 7.3
4.2 Eco-friendly cleaning, paint products		✓			Current practice
4.3 Hazardous material disposal			✓		Apr 2012

5 Food and Food Services					
5.1 Reduce food court waste	✓			✓	See 3.1
5.2 Internal catering guidelines	✓			✓	Jan 2012
5.3 Local sourcing	✓	✓			Implemented
5.4 Self-sustaining Farmer's Market	✓				Fall 2012
5.5 Vegetarian/vegan options	✓				Current practice; expand during 2012 & 2013.
5.6 Nutritional information	✓				Apr 2012
5.7 Food labelling	✓				Aug 2012
6 Human Resources and Diversity					
6.1 Hiring committees to include a person trained in equity issues			✓	✓	Jan 2013
6.2 Common interview standards			✓	✓	Jan 2013
6.3 Add sustainability note to job descriptions				✓	Aug 2012
6.4 Sustainable procurement training			✓		Begin Apr 2012
7 Tracking and Reporting					
7.1 Add sustainability to Annual Report	✓	✓			Start 2011; expand 2012
7.2 Accounting to add sustainability tracking services		✓			Plan: Aug 2012 Implement: Dec 2012
8 Events and Recreation					
8.1 Expand rec and social space				✓	N/A
8.2 Improve sustainability of events	✓				Ongoing
9 Energy					
9.1 Purchase certified equipment				✓	Current practice

9.2 Install vending misers	✓				Sep 2012
9.3 Track energy usage		✓			Apr 2012
9.4 Pilot ETS@Work program	✓				Jan 2012
9.5 Monitor fleet fuel consumption		✓			Ongoing
10 Water					
10.1 Improve fixtures				✓	Dec 2012
10.2 Install water-bottle filling station	✓				Completed