

Administrative Life Breakout Group—Sustainability Retreat 2007 Minutes

Breakout group:

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Morning Discussion:

Our conversation began by discussing the goals we are trying to achieve when we talk about institutionalizing sustainability at Willamette. We identified two primary ideas:

- *Reach the folks who haven't yet been reached*—Events like workshops, talks, Campus Sustainability Day and Earth Day celebrations bring attention and raise awareness within part of the community but inevitably not all of it.
- *Practice what we preach* – The events described above are primarily consciousness-raising but we want find ways to help translate that message and the values embodied in it into our everyday decision-making across the university.

What follows is a list of concrete steps that might help achieve this goal:

- *Some kind of public “top-down” announcement/event/reaffirmation of sustainability as a priority from the President/Trustees*
Although President Pelton and the board of trustees are very much in support of efforts to make Willamette a model of sustainability, it isn't clear that the campus-at-large is aware of this. Clear and open commitment from the top seems crucial because institutionalizing sustainability requires that we change the way in which Willamette (faculty/) staff are evaluated (see below). Without commitment from the top, it will be difficult to change those evaluation structures. So: How do we make that commitment more visible? An announcement or “kickoff” event might be one way.
- *University mission statement rewrite might be a starting point*
Changing the University mission statement is another way to make this commitment public and transparent. However, changing the mission statement is bottom-up as well as top-down because it will require building consensus about what should be in the new statement. The advantage of changing the mission statement is that it provides a lasting, public, commitment and can be appealed to in order to justify future actions regardless of personnel changes over time. Thus, the long term commitment to sustainability does crucially rest on the energy of few particular people.

- *Change evaluation structures*
 People have to be evaluated and rewarded for bringing all four E's into their decision-making, not just financial savings. This again points out the necessity of having commitment at the top because it is the top (and near top) level administrators (Deans, VPs, operational supervisors) who have the opportunity to change job descriptions/performance evaluation criteria.
 - An evaluation system includes concrete goals and metrics that can be used to determine whether those goals are accomplished.
 - As an issue of equity and also to achieve greater buy-in, the goals and metrics should be determined collaboratively with the people who are going to be evaluated by them.
 - In order for this to work, there will probably need to be some education about sustainability, which is a role that the Council and the Center might play.
 - Legally, can we include sustainability in job descriptions? If so, how?

- *Hire a sustainability coordinator/educator*
 This person would be an expert who could help provide leadership and support for the kinds of institutional changes described above. It is crucial that this person be described/perceived as an educator (though not necessarily a faculty member) to avoid compartmentalizing sustainability efforts at the University. That is, this person would help develop resources that make it easier for the rest of us to identify and implement sustainable decisions. Ideally, this position would be created at a high enough administrative level to be a member of the Administrative Council and participate in long-range strategic planning. Such a hire would signal institutional commitment. It would also provide a consistent energy level over time, which is difficult for the Council to provide since Council members all have full-time responsibilities in other areas.

- *Make sustainability a part of acculturating new students, staff and faculty*
 It is important to help to communicate community values and priorities to new community members. The Council and CSC might help accomplish this by developing materials that could become a part of existing orientation procedures (Opening Days for students—TIUA is a model here, new faculty orientation, orientation for new staff—Does this exist in a formalized way?)

- *Promote sustainable resource use by making recycling stations more obvious and more easily accessible, big donation day at the end of the year.*
 There are opportunities to make a significant impact on our waste streams, but we have to carefully consider the implications for staff workloads as we move forward with them.

Afternoon Discussion:

The afternoon discussion focused on barriers to institutionalization with an eye toward the role the Council and Center for Sustainable Communities might play in helping overcome these barriers.

- *Barrier: Lack of incentives to make sustainable choice/perverse incentives.*
 - Example: Paper distribution to classes online versus printing the paper out. Will do whatever seems easiest rather than what has minimal impact. What does have minimal impact?
 - Example: Decision made by purchasing department are evaluated primarily in terms of how much money the university spent/saved. Thus, it is difficult to choose more costly alternatives that might have lower environmental and social impact.
- *Barrier: Lack of information about sustainable alternatives/ lack of framework to help identify sustainable alternative.*
 - Potential roles for Council and Center
 - Workshops/discussion to help talk think about meaning of sustainability within a particular area or unit;
 - Help develop a list of preferred products (either internally or by consulting with a sourcing consultant). Ideally this list would provide information about the strengths and weaknesses of particular products even when it cannot identify a particular product as uniformly preferred.
 - Develop a framework for decision-making that would help decision-makers think through decisions not covered by the above list. Would include a list of questions that assist decision-makers in assessing their own decisions. Perhaps this could take the form a scorecard.
 - Webpage sustainability tips:
 - Could be linked to theme if we pursue a thematic model of institutionalization.
Example: Ways to reduce your carbon footprint.
 - Links for students, faculty, administrator, staff
 - Page should indicate which tips have the potentially the greatest impacts.
 - ◆ How much energy does it use to leave my computer on over night?
 - ◆ How much energy does it use to leave computer, cell phone charger, etc plugged in? (sleeper load)
- *Barriers: Lack of operational assessment of processes at departmental/unit level*
 - Budget performance is typically the only (non-academic) department-level assessment tool.
 - University-wide assessment process will not necessarily address this lack because it is intended to track trends and provide information at the University-wide level rather than at the level of an individual department.

- If departments are to institute a broader assessment process, they may need assistance in thinking about how to do so.
- *Barrier: Certain activities are inherently resource intensive and it is difficult to see how we might change that.*
 - Example: Need to travel for recruiting students and faculty. Need to travel associated with educational mission.
 - What is the carbon footprint of flying candidates in for position interview? Or traveling for recruitment?
 - Could we make carbon offsets an expected part of the travel budget.
 - This will likely be an important part of the discussion of the Presidential Climate Change Commitment.
 - Example: Paper use associated with human resources record-keeping. Paper use associated with the communications department.
 - Is there something equivalent to a carbon offset that we might think about here?
 - Are we already taking this into consideration if we are buying sustainably produced paper?
 - Would greater use of electronic systems reduce this impact or just shift it from one kind of impact (paper) to another (energy)?
- *Barrier: Are there some important ways in which our desire to be sustainable by reducing environmental and social impact seems to be in conflict with other institutional priorities, in particular student recruiting.*
 - Example: Transportation policy—especially parking on campus.
 - Should we raise parking fees and reduce the availability of parking on campus?
 - There are equity issues associated with people who need parking and don't have the money to pay for high priced parking spaces. This is especially true for many staff members.
 - One way to avoid these equity impacts would be to ration parking spaces in a different way. For example: No cars for first year students
 - Potential benefit—new students might be forced to really explore alternatives such as Flexcar, Cherrits free pass, and the Bike shop.
 - Potential cost—we might make ourselves seem less attractive in what seems to be an increasingly amenity-driven market for students.
 - Any policy used to ration parking on campus is tricky because there are different types of drivers, driving for different reasons.
 - Example: Alternative to the traditional green lawn—native plants that require less water, weed-free lawn space
 - What is the impact of green, dandyion-free lawn space in terms of recruiting? Will we lose students by not having the expected expansive green lawns? Alternatively, will we turn off eco-savvy students by having vast expanses of lawn?