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**Bemidji State University
Bemidji, Minnesota
2008, Environmental Management Systems**

BACKGROUND

Campus Profile

Bemidji State University (BSU), located in Bemidji, Minnesota, is an institution where the natural environment has been a strong selling point from its founding in 1919. Many of the 5,000 members of the student body, as well as faculty and administrators, are drawn to this four-year liberal arts school by the scenic surroundings and Northwoods atmosphere. While some of the more prominent programs include professional education, business administration, mass communication and the sciences, there are also environmentally oriented degree programs, such as aquatic biology, environmental studies and wildlife management. Greening efforts on campus include installation of energy-efficient lighting and water-conserving fixtures, an extensive lakeshore restoration, and various projects taken on by Students for the Environment (SFE), a campus organization. BSU has taken additional steps towards sustainability with the establishment of an Environmental Policy Statement and an Environmental Advisory Committee, and by incorporating environmental education into the required curriculum.

Contacts

David Bahr
Physics and Engineering
Bemidji State University
Phone: 218-755-2916
Email: dbahr@bemidjistate.edu

GOALS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Goals

Our main goal was the passing of “the green fee,” a five-dollar-per-semester fee designed to help enhance environmental sustainability at Bemidji State University. A set fee per semester such as this will guarantee the availability of funds to allow environmental stewardship ideas to become reality.

The green fee is to be used for environmental sustainability projects at BSU. Such projects will enhance the atmosphere of BSU, as well as promote environmental stewardship on campus. Green fee projects will remain non-fixed expenditures to ensure resources are not depended upon to fund annual expenses.

The fee will be assessed on the first enrolled credit to all on-campus and online students, and, by recommendation of the Student Activity Fee Allocation Committee, will fall under the jurisdiction of the Bemidji State University Student Association Student Senate. The Student Activity Fee Allocation Committee Chair and a new Sustainability Coordinator are charged with developing the necessary process to account for green fee expenditures.

A Sustainability Coordinator will be hired to help Bemidji State University pursue its signature theme of environmental stewardship through the education, communication, planning, and management of environmental issues and sustainability on the campus. The Sustainability Coordinator will be responsible for managing and allocating the green fee.

Accomplishments

Based on a survey of 10 percent of the student body, in which more than half supported the idea of a \$5 green fee, the assessment was accepted by the student government and will be put into effect in the fall of 2008. The green fee will be used to pay for half of the Sustainability Coordinator's salary.

Challenges and Responses

It has been frustrating at times, because it seemed like the same questions had to be answered multiple times about the green fee. Persistence and patience paid off, though! It was also a benefit to get to know the student senators better, and to try to talk to them individually about the green fee proposal. They have such an important and difficult role to be the voice of all the students on campus; and some students are difficult to reach because they do not understand or care about how politics and actions within the university work. If students know about these actions, they will not be opposed; and optimism for progress is always a beautiful step in the fight for environmental action! Within the Student Senate, there were fears that additional fees passed by them would contradict their actions to help lower book and tuition costs for students, although most understood that this fee could be a very worthy investment for everyone.

ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Leaders and Supporters

The key players, as noted above, include the BSU Student Association Student Senate, the Student Activity Fee Allocation Committee and the Sustainability Coordinator, in addition to the Environmental Advisory Committee and Students for the Environment. Becky Boe helped write up the bills to bring to the Senate table, and we had help from SFE members and Erika Bailey-Johnson in supporting the green fee on the Senate floor.

Funding and Resources

The green fee will support sustainability initiatives at Bemidji State University. The surveying of the student body and passing of the fee did not require additional costs.

Community Outreach and Education

The green fee was initiated by just a couple dedicated students. One was a member of the Student Senate, and she decided to write up a bill to get the ball rolling. The initial bill was to create a committee to investigate the creation of a green fee. While tabling on campus to promote green fee awareness, our efforts to explain the reasoning for the fee were aided by a report written by Gail Clendening, a former BSU student, in which the main point was that we all generate waste on campus and should all aid in offsetting that waste and emissions. We also gave interviews to the school newspaper, the school radio station, and the local Bemidji news station.