



National Wildlife Federation®
CAMPUS
ecology®

**University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Oshkosh, Wisconsin
Spring 2008, Environmental Education and Outreach**

BACKGROUND

Campus Profile

The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh is the third largest institution in the University of Wisconsin system, with 12,700 students, including 1,600 graduate students in 15 master's programs. It has four colleges: the Letters and Science, Business Administration, Nursing, and Education and Human Services. Chief majors include biology, nursing, psychology, elementary education, and finance. Environmental studies became a major in 2003 and currently has 82 students. Over the last seven years, campus greening efforts have increased dramatically. The university won an EPA Green Power Purchaser Award in 2003, a Campus Ecology Recognition Award in 2004 for its environmental audit and an Energy Star award in 2005. It recently completed a Recreation and Wellness Center according to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver standards and is planning a new academic building that will be LEED certified at least at the Silver level. In this spring's Recyclemania, UW Oshkosh was the highest ranking university or college in the state. In spring 2008 it approved a Campus Sustainability Plan, which includes the formation of a Campus Sustainability Council and the hiring of a Campus Sustainability Director.

Contact

David Barnhill
Director of Environmental Studies
Cochair, Campus Sustainability Council
Phone: 920-424-0644
Email: barnhill@uwosh.edu

GOALS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Goals

The primary goal of this initiative is to infuse knowledge about environmental issues and sustainability in both in-class and out-of-class learning. This includes the formal curriculum as well as campus-wide environmental events. The quantifiable targets were participation in a faculty workshop on sustainability and the inclusion of sustainability into the general education goals. Other targets included the number and diversity of events and the attendance at them. These goals will continue for the foreseeable future.

Accomplishments

Perhaps the most innovative accomplishment was the inclusion of sustainability into the university's perspective on a liberal education. As part of the campus's liberal education reform initiative, the faculty approved a statement of Essential Learning Outcomes. In the section on responsibility, the first outcome mentioned is "knowledge of sustainability and its applications." The result is that sustainability has been designated as an essential part of the general education that students receive at the university. (See <http://www.uwosh.edu/news/?p=933> and <http://www.aashe.org/archives/2008/0529.php>.)

National Wildlife Federation • Campus Ecology • 2008

In order to make sustainability a more common and intentional part of class offerings, the university offered its first faculty workshop (“faculty college”) on infusing sustainability into the curriculum. Two faculty members received training in leading workshops on this at conferences offered by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). In May 2008, they lead a faculty college titled “The Winnebago Project” (with Winnebago referring to the local bioregion). The ten participating faculty members came from ten different departments and three different colleges. Topics included the notions of sustainability and a sense of place, a bioregional perspective on Wisconsin, models for infusing sustainability into courses and assessing student learning about sustainability. The faculty were given two different sustainability tours of campus and heard from a representative of the Department of Natural Resources on the cleanup efforts for the polluted lower Fox River. Meals and snacks were vegetarian and as organic as possible (see <http://www.uwosh.edu/sustainability/winnebago>).

Much learning goes on outside of classes, and UW Oshkosh held a variety of successful environmental events during the academic year. As is common elsewhere, we had a number of Earth Week events. These included: a student-faculty panel on sustainable development in Belize, Central America; author Derrick Jensen speaking on civilization and resistance; environmental historian Nancy Langston speaking on “Toxic Bodies: Endocrine Disruptors and the Lessons of History”; a talk by the university director of facilities on “The Clean Water Act, Stormwater and U.W. Oshkosh”; and a discussion of the new Campus Sustainability Plan. The most innovative event was an “Earth Dinner” sponsored by Organic Valley with the cooperation of Sodexo. This was a formal dinner with almost all ingredients organic and as local as possible, and with chicken that was humanely raised. One hundred people, mostly students, attended. Our guest speaker was John Peck, director of Family Farm Defenders.

October 6–12, 2007, we also held an Earth Charter Community Summit, reportedly the largest in the world. Events centered on the four key values of the Earth Charter—respect and care for the community of life; ecological integrity; social and economic justice; and democracy, nonviolence and peace—which highlight the link between environmental and social issues. Summit events included Jim Evanoff, environmental specialist at Yellowstone National Park, speaking on “Wolves and the Greening of Yellowstone”; Mike McCabe of the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign speaking on “Restoring Wisconsin’s Good Name”; and the mayors of Madison and Oshkosh speaking on “Creating Sustainable Communities.” In addition, the mayor of Oshkosh signed the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement at the event. (See <http://www.uwosh.edu/earthcharter/>)

Other events aimed at raising environmental literacy included the annual Fair Trade Festival, with information about the fair trade movement; Aldo Leopold Day, with readings from Sand County Almanac; a presentation on community gardens by the natural areas coordinator for Troy Gardens in Madison; and the NWF national webcast Chill Out!.

Challenges

There was some faculty resistance to including sustainability in the Essential Learning Outcomes, with some members believing this was a political aim. In particular, there was strong resistance to an effort to use the wording of “commitment to sustainability.” The faculty agreed instead on “knowledge of sustainability and its applications.” These compromises disappointed some faculty members, but the inclusion of sustainability as an essential learning outcome was nonetheless a victory.

With the Winnebago Project, we thought that the challenge would be getting 10 faculty members to sign up. Instead, we had 24 applications. The challenge for the future will be to get continued funding for an

annual workshop. This year's workshop was supported by faculty development funds and the provost's office.

The key challenges for campus events were the logistical difficulties and attracting an audience. The Earth Dinner was the most time-consuming in preparation, but after doing this once, the arrangements for an annual dinner should go more smoothly in the future. Events during Earth Charter and Earth Week were well attended, as these have become expected annual events. The other events were fairly new, and attendance was less than desired. However, offering these events every year should help make them a more prominent part of the life of the university.

ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Leaders and Supporters

Sustainability is strongly supported by the administration (from the chancellor to the director of facilities), many faculty (especially those in the Environmental Studies Program and an assistant dean who leads the Earth Charter Summit) and a number of students and student groups (in particular the Student Environmental Action Coalition [SEAC]). There is an ongoing group that organizes the Earth Charter Community Summit, and the director of environmental studies and SEAC take the lead on organizing Earth Week. We have also developed a paid position of Green Events Coordinator, who assists with arrangements and promotion for all events and has been particularly helpful to us.

In winning the inclusion of sustainability in the Essential Learning Outcomes, the advocacy of one environmental studies professor, who was part of the Liberal Education Resource Group, which advised those charged with developing the list of outcomes, was essential. But we also had several other faculty members on the team who were very sympathetic.

The Winnebago Project was led by two faculty members who were willing to receive training in incorporating sustainability into the curriculum and to organize the workshop.

Funding and Resources

There was no special cost in approving sustainability as an Essential Learning Outcome. There was, however, substantial cost in offering the Winnebago Project. The provost's office gave \$1,500 in support to each of the leaders to attend training workshops. Faculty development funds paid the two leaders a combined \$3,000, as well as \$750 for each of the participants. Food for the workshop cost approximately \$500 and was paid by the provost's office. This funding was available in part because the goal of infusing sustainability into the curriculum is a major part of the recently passed Campus Sustainability Plan. Expertise from AASHE was crucial.

The campus events had a wide range of costs and diverse funding sources, including student groups, academic departments and the university lecture series.

Community Outreach and Education

Community outreach was primarily seen in several of the Earth Charter Community Summit events. Every year the Oshkosh Common Council declares its support for the summit, and having the Oshkosh mayor sign the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement at one of the events was a highlight. At the request of a UW Oshkosh professor, the Common Council also signed a proclamation supporting Earth Week. We hope to promote our events more extensively off-campus in the future.

Campus Climate Action: Your School's Carbon Footprint

The focus for campus climate action this year was in finalizing and getting approval of the Campus Sustainability Plan (<http://www.uwosh.edu/assets/announcement/sustainability/>). Much of that plan (more than 100 pages) concerns conservation, from reducing our carbon footprint to limiting water usage. The first public presentation of the plan-in-process occurred during the Earth Charter Community Summit in October, and the final approved plan was introduced by the chancellor on Earth Day. The webcast of NWF's Chill Out, of course, focused on climate change. The other event that directly related to climate change was "Creating Sustainable Communities" at which, as noted above, the Oshkosh mayor signed the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement.

CLOSING COMMENT

Incorporating sustainability into the curriculum is an important way to go beyond normal campus environmental events and sustainability in operations, as important as those are. AASHE (<http://www.aashe.org>) is a great resource for those wanting to go that route. Connecting environmental events and issues with those of social, political and economic issues (as found in the "triple bottom line" concept of sustainability and the Earth Charter principles) is a way to broaden environmental literacy to "ecosocial" literacy and engagement.