



Oregon State University

Corvallis, Oregon

Environmental Outreach-Student Sustainability Initiative

SCHOOL

Oregon State University (OSU) is a four-year public university located in Corvallis, Oregon. The university has a student population of 23,761.

ABSTRACT

The Student Sustainability Initiative (SSI) was created in 2006 with the general goals of reducing the ecological footprint of OSU and advancing sustainability awareness. The SSI has project coordinators in major areas of sustainability, including: food systems, energy, waste reduction, landscaping, transportation, political engagement, and partnerships. These coordinators work with other departments and student volunteers to plan events (often with goals of education and community building around sustainability issues) and carry out projects. In 2007, students voted for an \$8.50 per term student fee to go towards Renewable Energy Credits to offset the environmental impacts from the university. The appropriation of these funds was to be overseen by the Student Incidental Fee Committee and the SSI Fee Advisory Board. Since then, the total fee per student per term has stabilized at \$11.86, and provides for eleven student staff positions, maintenance of the Student Sustainability Center (SSC), sustainability projects, renewable energy installations, grants for student sustainability projects, and free public transit options for students. The SSI's increasing outreach through funding contributions, collaborative projects, and events illustrates the student-lead organization's ongoing commitment to sustainability.



GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Goals

When it was created in 2006, the goal of the SSI was to reduce the ecological footprint of OSU and advance sustainability awareness. An early goal was to purchase Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) for 100% of the electricity used by Oregon State University.

The SSI's mission is to "support student efforts in creating a culture of sustainability at OSU through action, education, and opportunity." This mission is accomplished through five general goals, and quantifiable targets towards these goals are still being set. The general goals are:

- Increase the awareness of the OSU community on issues related to sustainability and the environment.
- Empower students to tackle issues they care about – whether the outcome be social, environmental, artistic, or other.

- Develop leaders among the OSU student body who are driven enough to carry their skills and passions with them into the world.
- Connect organizations from OSU and the greater community, building a network of diverse constituents all interested – in some fashion – in a more sustainable culture.
- Assist and encourage the University in creating infrastructure, policy, curriculum, and outreach that strengthen and employ standards of sustainability.

Accomplishments

The goal of purchasing RECs for 100% (funded by student fees) of the electricity used by Oregon State University was met in the spring of 2007. Responsibility for the provision of such certificates has since shifted to an increasingly cooperative administration. The 2007-08 year was a year of beginnings and establishing a presence in the community. The summer of 2007 saw its first student worker positions created and the SSC was renovated based on green building principles. We had a grand opening and open house during Connect Week and began our regular 11am-5pm weekday hours for the first time, covered by SSI staff and volunteers. We began establishing connections and relationships with other sustainability organizations, including the Corvallis Sustainability Coalition (then a new organization itself). Activities that year included “ElecTrick or Treat” (in which we handed out CFL bulbs in the Residence Halls), two worm bin workshops, Focus the Nation, a sustainability discussion with Corvallis Mayor Charlie Tomlinson, the completion of the solar trailer, promotional events for our new reuse-a-cups, Recyclemania, and Earth Week. In 2007 SSI was the primary organizer of Earth Week, organizing an event nearly every day.

During the 2009-10 school year, we brought forty students to Powershift West '09 in Eugene to attend trainings and meet other students working on environmental issues from around the Northwest. The “Campuses Beyond Coal” campaign hit the ground running with notable projects such as the “Energy Civil War” and “Cultural Center Energy Challenge.” Compost pilot projects were started in McNary Residence Hall. The SSI became more connected to the community and the Corvallis Sustainability Coalition’s work groups. Our fee board successfully changed our renewable energy purchases at OSU to actual on campus energy projects that will be finished throughout the 2010-2011 school year. During the summer after the school year the SSI successfully made a programmatic move to the Memorial Union with new advisers through Student Leadership and Involvement and the Sustainability Office.

In 2011, \$20,000 was awarded in grants to students pursuing sustainability projects at OSU. Some of these funds were attributed to a student writing contest with the prompt of creatively re-imagining humanity as the planet changes. Some grant money went to software development for a project known as the Campus Carbon Challenge, in which students, staff, and faculty make online pledges to reduce their carbon footprint. During the same period, \$400,000 was spent on renewable energy installations.

Recent projects of the SSI staff and volunteers include a green roof on the Kelly Engineering Building, free sustainable cooking classes, and a campaign to promote alternative transportation on-campus and within the community. Recent events include the Bike Extravaganza, which provided free bicycle safety and promotion resources, and the Sustainaball, which connected the arts with environmental awareness and activism. By bringing sustainable lifestyles to the general consciousness, we increase awareness of species equality and the importance of the environment. By shifting electricity usage to renewable forms

of energy, we help address climate change and deterioration – trends whose eventual impact on wildlife we can only project.

Challenges and Responses

One of the main challenges of 2007-08 was establishing who we were as an organization. Our mission statement was very broad, and we struggled to determine our role and niche within a sea of environmental organizations on and off-campus. During its second year of operations trying to find ways to incubate student ideas into projects was difficult. When projects or ideas became reality, hiking them through the OSU administration was challenging given little initial knowledge of how the system worked. Morgan Dumitru (currently the SSI's co-facilitator) and Nathan Jones (The ASOSU Director of Environmental Affairs at the time) felt the SSI organizational structure could be improved. Approving this new structure required buy-in from the previous coordinators of SSI.

Many of our challenges included: a large, well-established bureaucracy within which the SSI seeks to effect change, competing beneficiaries, tenacious apathy among the student population, and a high rate of turn-over among volunteers and staff, which results in a drain on resources, lack of institutional memory, and project/campaign disruption.

These challenges have been addressed by reaching out to existing organizations, emphasizing the training of volunteers and staff, developing tools and resources, and maintaining a consistent, open, and innovative culture that actively encourages students to get involved, get empowered, and do something.

Campus Climate Action: Your School's Carbon Footprint

The SSI contributes to lowering carbon emissions by purchasing RECs, funding renewable energy installations, helping increase recycling and composting activities, increasing the ratio of bikes-to-cars, and shifting landscaping practices towards lower carbon impact activities.

Commentary and Reflection

Stay in tune with what other OSU and community organizations are up to and constantly seek collaboration; otherwise you may step on toes, replicate services, or miss opportunities. Always keep in the back of your mind that you are developing leaders; your greatest legacy is an awesome leader who takes your place. Providing SSI coordinators a specific budget and power to use it might lend greater responsibility and dispersion of funds. Setting up student projects integrated with academic studies is a win-win for sustainability experiential learning. It is very important to create experiential learning opportunities through the classroom. The flexibility of the SSI structure allows for amazing space and creativity for staff, but given the limited time and hours we are given without job the more focused and visible projects seem the most effective. What you learn in this working environment is both practical and fulfilling.

ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Leaders and Supporters

The official leaders of the SSI include (chronologically): Justin Fleming, Andrea Norris, Jesse Boudart, Daniel Force, Brian Laird, and Morgan Dumitru. Key supporters have included: Pete Lepre (Recycling Program Manager), Brandon Trelstad (Sustainability Office Director), and Eric Alexander (Student

Leadership & Involvement Director). Generally speaking, the Student Sustainability Initiative is managed and run by students, and housed under Oregon State University's Department of Student Leadership & Involvement. The success of the SSI has depended on dozens of staff, hundreds of volunteers, and thousands of supporters. A strong network of student groups, OSU departments, and off-campus organizations have been involved throughout the years.

Funding and Resources

Between 2006 and 2011, the SSI spent around \$2.5 million on sustainability related efforts. Of these funds, 100% was furnished by student fees. A small portion of these fees went towards the employment of students to plan, execute, and oversee the SSI's activities. Space was secured in 2007 in the form of the OSU Student Sustainability Center. Additional resources were provided by the Sustainability Office, Campus Recycling, and Student Leadership & Involvement. None of the support for the program was through NWF, or its Campus Ecology program.

Education and Community Outreach

SSI Outreach methods include: Events, hundreds of social media interactions, blog posts, listserv announcements, newsletters, tabling, clipboarding, news stories, workshops, classes, tours, symposia, lectures, presentations, grants, volunteer opportunities, employment, and local, regional, and national trainings, rallies, and summits. The local community has been consistently interested in and supportive of our efforts.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Contacts

Morgan Dumitru, Co-Director (p: 541-753-4072, e: morgan.dumitru@oregonstate.edu) [Undergraduate Student, graduating June 2012]

Brian Laird, Co-Director (p: 541-753-4072, e: brian.laird@oregonstate.edu) [Undergraduate Student, graduating June 2012]

Justin Russell, Fee Board Chair (e: ssi.feeboard@oregonstate.edu) [Graduate Student]

Case study submitted by: Bo Bestvina, Graduate Program Assistant, OSU Sustainability Office

Email: sustainability@oregonstate.edu

MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL

Campus Sustainability History

Sustainability is huge at OSU. A short list of some sustainability-related groups on campus reads: ASOSU Environmental Affairs Task Force, Community Service Center, Ecological Engineers Student Society, Energy Efficiency Center, Engineers Without Borders, Fisheries & Wildlife Club, Food Group, Organic Growers Club, Solar Vehicle Team, and the Sustainable Energy Initiative. Each of these – and of those not listed –are actively working on events, projects, and campaigns to make OSU a more sustainable community.

Image credit: OSU Student Sustainability Initiative 2011