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CAMPUS
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**Arizona State University
Tempe, Arizona
Spring 2008, Dining Services**

BACKGROUND

Campus Profile

Arizona State University (ASU), a public research institution located in metropolitan Phoenix, is notable for its campaign to become the prototype of a “New American University,” a university that takes responsibility for the environmental, economic, social and cultural well-being of its region. With the second largest university enrollment in the United States, ASU boasts a student body of approximately 80,000 undergraduate and graduate students; and the university anticipates further growth as it becomes increasingly accessible to the population. Consisting of four campuses in the metropolitan Phoenix area as well as two research and innovation parks, ASU offers 250 majors for undergraduates and more than 100 graduate degree programs.

In the past few years, ASU has emerged as a national leader in sustainability. In December 2006, ASU President Michael Crow became one of the founding signatories of the American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment, pledging to develop a plan to “reduce and ultimately neutralize” greenhouse gas emissions on all campuses. Some 500 faculty and staff are engaged in research projects that address sustainability challenges; and student initiatives such as recycling and clean energy clubs have a strong campus presence and are constantly working to increase the campus community’s awareness of environmental issues. Over 300 courses across all disciplines incorporate sustainability principles into their curriculum, and ASU offers 80 sustainability-related degrees. Most significantly, ASU is home to the Global Institute of Sustainability, which launched ASU’s School of Sustainability in 2007. The first academic program of its type in the world, the School of Sustainability provides degree programs, facilitates partnerships between ASU and the community and creates a unique opportunity for transdisciplinary faculty and student research projects. In the past year, ASU has participated in several local and national sustainability and climate-change events, including National Wildlife Federation’s (NWF) Chill Out: Campus Solutions to Global Warming webcast and Focus the Nation.

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GOALS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Goals

In 2007, NWF granted a Campus Ecology Fellowship to support the development and implementation of the Serving Sustainability to Sun Devils award program for ecologically healthy food services. The mission of the program is to provide a comprehensive mechanism for recognizing food services that

demonstrate an outstanding commitment to sustainability goals such as waste reduction, pollution management and energy efficiency.

Serving Sustainability to Sun Devils was inspired by the need to combat the enormous amount of waste that the food service industry produces. The following statistics outline some of the unique challenges that this sector faces:

- The restaurant industry is the single greatest energy user in the retail sector and accounts for one-third of all U.S. retail energy use.
- The average full-service restaurant washes 9–20 pounds of grease down the drain for every 150 meals it serves. Food wastes that enter the wastewater stream can contribute to sewage overflow and may contaminate natural water sources, kill marine life and leak into the drinking water supply.
- If only one-quarter of the 70 million customers who buy a meal in the food service industry declined water service, 26 million gallons of fresh water would be conserved every day.

Although Serving Sustainability to Sun Devils establishes standards and a procedure for evaluating sustainability in the food service industry, this program is as much an educational program as it is an evaluation tool. Participating food services receive access to a comprehensive set of strategies and resources that these businesses can use to reduce waste and to “green” their practices. Further, the Serving Sustainability program is designed to educate consumers about sustainability challenges in the food service industry and to generate support for those businesses taking positive steps toward implementing practices that are sensitive to both the natural environment and the local community. By providing local food services with strategies and resources for minimizing their waste output and by recognizing exemplary businesses, the Serving Sustainability program aims to reduce ASU’s carbon footprint; make a positive impact on the surrounding community; and encourage businesses on and near campus to become leaders in sustainability.

The Serving Sustainability to Sun Devils program seeks to engage the food service industry in zero-waste business practices that simultaneously enhance, rather than degrade, the natural environment; support a thriving local community; and improve bottom-line costs through resource efficiency and waste reduction. By providing an educational and evaluation mechanism through which Arizona State University and local food services can partner, the Serving Sustainability program has created a path to reducing ASU’s carbon footprint. In addition, this program has encouraged businesses on and near campus to become leaders in sustainability. The support of an NWF Campus Ecology Fellowship has been instrumental in developing a strong foundation for the Serving Sustainability to Sun Devils program, which will continue to expand and positively impact the community in the coming years.

Accomplishments

Research and Development

The first half of the fellowship period was devoted to researching sustainability practices in the food service industry, compiling resources relevant to sustainability in the food service industry and developing an award structure. The Serving Sustainability to Sun Devils award is a certification (similar to the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design [LEED] Certification for green buildings), rather than a competition-based prize. The criteria for the Serving Sustainability award were designed to be as broad and comprehensive as possible, with the philosophy that a food service’s sustainability cannot be described solely by, say, its recycling practices or use of energy/water-efficient devices, but instead by its commitment to sustainability in all aspects of its service. Accordingly, the 60 criteria questions for the award were divided into several different categories, including:

- management and leadership
- food supply (i.e., how many of the food service's products are bought from organic, local, and/or fair-trade sources)
- food waste reduction
- packaging/serviceware reduction
- recycling/aero-waste practices
- energy efficiency
- chemicals/cleaning
- water conservation
- inventory control
- other sustainability practices (e.g., green building, green fleet, employee welfare programs, etc.)

This project was successful in facilitating the creation of a set of criteria and standards by which sustainability in the food service industry can be evaluated. These criteria are serving as the foundation for a pilot of the Serving Sustainability to Sun Devils program. However, as more food services participate and provide feedback on the program, the criteria will likely be modified slightly to reflect the sustainability practices that are most relevant to food services.

In addition to an organized set of criteria for sustainability in food services, one of the most tangible deliverables from this fellowship is the 50-page *Resource Manual and Strategy Guide for Food Services*. This booklet was written based on extensive research into the best sustainability practices for food services and into resources that are currently available to food services interested in sustainability (e.g., the Green Restaurant Association, ENERGY STAR, Local Harvest, etc.). As a whole, the food service industry faces substantial challenges in reducing its waste output and resource consumption.

Fortunately, many resources are available to food services to decrease their waste while maintaining a quality, profitable business. The *Resource Manual and Strategy Guide for Food Services* represents a compilation of these resources and is intended to provide easy access to the vast quantity of information available to food services that are interested in greening their practices. Copies of the award criteria and *Resource Manual* are available upon request.

After the primary research and development of the Serving Sustainability to Sun Devils program was completed, the program was introduced to food services on and near the ASU's Tempe (Main) Campus. The original plan proposed that ASU's primary food service provider—Aramark—would pilot the award program. However, due to a fire in ASU's Memorial Union, Aramark representatives were too busy to meet this semester. They have expressed an interest in participating in the program next semester.

Aside from Aramark, a total of five local restaurants were contacted by phone regarding the program. These five restaurants were chosen to pilot Serving Sustainability because they have already exhibited an interest in sustainability and are currently implementing some zero-waste practices.

The owner of one restaurant, Mucho Gusto, met with me in April to complete an informal, educational Serving Sustainability audit of his food service. This meeting indicated great promise for the program: Between our first informational meeting and the audit (approximately one month), Mucho Gusto's owner made several positive changes in his service. The restaurant has replaced all of its polystyrene containers with Green Restaurant Association™ Certified products containing 100 percent post-consumer recycled content. The owner of Mucho Gusto is also beginning to spearhead collaboration among local restaurants to collect waste grease for conversion to biodiesel fuel. He is also negotiating to purchase an ENERGY

STAR–certified dishwasher that uses environmentally friendly cleaning chemicals. According to Mucho Gusto’s owner, the Serving Sustainability program directly motivated these changes; and he complimented the *Resource Manual and Strategy Guide for Food Services* for its usefulness. The informal audit of Mucho Gusto indicates that this food service already meets the lowest level of certification (the Silver Award). Presumably, when Mucho Gusto undergoes its formal evaluation in August, it will be receive an even higher-level award.

Challenges and Responses

One of the key challenges associated with this project was to design graphics to meaningfully represent the award program to food services and the general public. The graphic design unit of the Global Institute of Sustainability, together with the ASU Provost’s graphic designer, played a key role in creating a visually appealing logo (see Appendix I), which incorporates the ecology, economy and society themes of sustainability. This logo became central in the design of “prizes” for food services that achieve Serving Sustainability designation (see the designs for window decals and certificates in Appendix I). Notably, the Serving Sustainability to Sun Devils award program consists of three levels of certification: the Silver, Gold and Maroon Awards, with Maroon representing the highest honor for food services. These designs are not final; both the Global Institute of Sustainability and the National Wildlife Federation logos will also appear on the final design. (The Institute’s logo is currently under development, so production of the Serving Sustainability promotional materials has been put on hold until summer).

A program website was also created with the help of the graphic design group in the provost’s office. The website (<http://servingsustainability.asu.edu>) provides information about the program, as well as general facts and resources regarding sustainability in the food service industry. It also contains a blog that will ultimately be used to publicize the Serving Sustainability–certified food services themselves.

The biggest challenge in working with businesses has been their tight schedules. The busy season for food services in Tempe occurs between November and May. Although all five restaurants seemed excited about the program and expressed a desire to participate, all of the restaurants asked to undergo the Serving Sustainability audit in August of this year because of their busy schedules. These restaurants have received the promotional materials and *Resource Manual and Strategy Guide for Food Services*, and most of the managers indicated that the summer was an optimal time for them to explore these resources and to implement further sustainability practices. Thus, these food services will participate in a formal Serving Sustainability evaluation late this summer.

ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Leaders and Supporters

NWF Campus Ecology Fellow Jessica Katz worked closely with the Global Institute of Sustainability, Aramark, dining services staff and the provost’s office on this initiative.

Funding and Resources

This project was supported through a fellowship grant from NWF’s Campus Ecology program

Campus Climate Action: Your School’s Carbon Footprint

By providing local food services with strategies and resources for minimizing their waste output and by recognizing exemplary businesses, the Serving Sustainability program aims to reduce ASU’s s carbon footprint; make a positive impact on the surrounding community; and encourage businesses on and near campus to become leaders in sustainability.

CLOSING COMMENT

The Serving Sustainability to Sun Devils NWF Campus Ecology Fellowship has been highly successful in laying a strong foundation for a lasting, meaningful education and evaluation mechanism for food services. Several food services on and near ASU are interested in participating in the program later this summer; and at least one of these businesses has already adopted sustainability practices because of this program.

Several challenges must still be addressed to fully implement Serving Sustainability. Once the pilot restaurants have been formally evaluated, the program will be widely publicized in the ASU and Phoenix communities so that consumers are encouraged to support local food services that are implementing sustainability practices. The program will also be present at this year's Green Summit conference in Phoenix to facilitate discussion among food service leaders about sustainable food procurement, energy and water efficiency, waste reduction and certifications (e.g., Fair Trade, Organic, ENERGY STAR, etc.) useful to restaurants that are interested in sustainability. Serving Sustainability will continue as an honors thesis project until May 2009, when it will most likely be adopted by students and administrators in the School of Sustainability and the Global Institute of Sustainability for future implementation.