



People and Nature: Our Future is in the Balance

National Wildlife Federation

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Dalhousie University

EMS/Audits

Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

(status of project, Spring 2001)

Campus Profile

Dalhousie University is located in downtown Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. We have 10,000 full-time and 2,000 part-time students. The University offers a range of undergraduate, graduate and professional degrees, including Engineering, Dentistry, Medicine, Law and Environmental Studies. The School for Resource and Environmental Studies, which was established in 1973, has offered a Masters of Environmental Studies program since 1978. The University Environmental Committee of students, staff, faculty and administration was set up in 1990.

In 1991, Dalhousie co-sponsored an international conference in Halifax on University Action for Sustainable Development. The outcomes of this conference were the "Halifax Declaration" and "Follow-up Plan", a preparatory session for the Rio Earth Summit in June 1992. Dalhousie signed the Halifax Declaration in 1992, adopted an environmental policy in 1994, signed the Talloires Declaration in 1999, and signed the Declaration of Cleaner Production in 2000.

Dalhousie University has a history of environmental action including: an excellent waste management system (almost 80% diversion), an award-winning hazardous waste program, no pesticides are used on campus, and it is a scent free campus. The province of Nova Scotia passed a law that will not allow organic material in the landfill. Dalhousie University is now using various approaches to collecting compost on campus and successfully diverted 102,100 kilograms of organic waste last year.

Group/Class Profile

The Sierra Youth Coalition - Dalhousie (SYC-Dal) formed in the fall of 1999. It is a part of the national Sierra Youth Coalition and Sierra Club of Canada. In the past two years, this campus student group has developed a core organization, built a good reputation, and secured an office with a staff person. SYC-Dal has been active regarding many current environmental issues and has organized demonstrations about the World Trade Organization and genetically engineered food, made presentations to city Council, and campaigned for the Halifax Pesticide Bylaw, which was successfully adopted in the spring of 2000. SYC-Dal's Harbour Campaign Coordinator recently made a presentation to Halifax Regional Municipality Council, as part of their work towards the clean-up of Halifax Harbour. We also participate in the Rural Youth Education Project, which reached students from 25 rural Nova Scotia high schools this year with an ecological footprint workshop. The group organizes outings, speakers, and video presentations aimed at educating fellow students on issues relating to the environment. Finally, SYC-Dal has been very involved in the national SYC-Sustainable Campuses Project.

Accomplishments

Sustainable Campus Project Achievements by the SYC – Dal Group:

1. Participated in the last two Canadian national Sustainable Campus Conferences held at University of Ottawa (1999) and University of Victoria and the Royal Roads University jointly (2000). SYC-Dal is hosting the 2001 national Sustainable Campus Conference at Dalhousie University in October 2001.
2. Some of our members serve as student representatives on the Dalhousie Senate Committee on the Environment and have worked with the committee to develop an updated environmental policy. Our sustainable campus coordinator is now chairing a multi-stakeholder sub-committee to write an implementation plan for the policy.
3. We completed a campus-wide waste audit in Winter 2000 and SYC worked with a third-year class to conduct a survey and issue a report on residence waste in fall 2001. Currently, we are working with the Facilities Management and Housing Services to ensure effective waste management, are attempting to provide more compost education, develop composting programs in residences, and to get a "no waste" clause included in the new food services tender. If we are successful, the next call for food companies will ensure a clause that states that "only compostable cups, no individual ketchup, jam, and cream wrappings,

only wooden stir sticks (or reusable spoons)...” may be used. This will further reduce the amount of waste the University sends to the landfill.

4. In spring 2000, a paper audit was conducted, which found that 90% of the 41 million sheets of Dalhousie paper are bleached with no recycled content. We are now exploring the option, along with the University's Purchasing Department, of purchasing paper with 20-30% post-consumer recycled content.
5. In spring 2000, a SYC-Dal member did an audit and survey of the cleaning products for health and environmental concerns as an internship for her degree. She recommended alternative products. Currently Facilities Management is piloting alternatives.
6. We are encouraging the Student Union to make their investments in sustainable development funds. So far they have committed to 10% in sustainable investments.
7. Through a coalition with other Halifax environmental groups, we are attempting to implement a Universal Bus Pass (U-PASS) system for the 4 Universities, 1 college, and 2 community colleges in Halifax. Right now we have the interest of Metro Transit, and are surveying the Dalhousie students on their bus ridership. There will be a referendum to pilot this project in Halifax's institutions of higher education during the winter of 2002.
8. We are involved in a study that would examine the feasibility of hiring an environmental coordinator at Dalhousie University. The office of the President funds this study.
9. SYC-Dal set up a Sustainable Campus library to help students conduct research on relevant topics. There are currently four Masters projects on campus ecology topics. These are on Environmental Management Systems in Higher Education, Full-Cost Accounting in University Paper and Office Product Purchasing, U-Pass and Sustainable Transportation at Dalhousie, and another on Transportation.
10. We also participated in an ongoing project to create a native species natural pond and wetland on campus.

Strategies and Steps Taken

U-Pass - We decided to approach other environmental groups to form a U-Pass Halifax Coalition. From here we determined our joint strategy for raising awareness, increasing interest, and surveying attitudes. Once this was done, we lobbied Student Unions to get involved. Now they are taking over in official negotiations with Metro Transit, doing their own survey of student interest, and the campaign towards the referendum.

Environmental Management - We work with the University Senate Environment Committee (SEC) to develop the updated environmental policy and implementation plan. The Committee and Sub-Committee of the SEC used a great deal of consultation methods to develop the draft documents.

Sustainable Investment - It took one student who knew his stuff to continually approach the Student Union. Another environmental group on Campus brought in an excellent speaker, whom we arranged to meet the Student Union treasurer. Also, the PIRG on campus did a summer research project on the "unethical investments".

Environmental Cleaners, Waste and Paper - We do the research and audits and present our recommendations to Facilities Management and Purchasing. They slowly pilot our suggestions with a lot of encouragement and reminders from us. As often as possible the SYC-Dal members try to take on Sustainable Campus research projects as part of class assignments or independent courses.

Environmental Office - The University hired a consultant to do this study. SYC-Dal has helped provide research for the report.

Challenges and Responses

Our major challenge is student turn-over and the eight month school year. If we could be more consistent the University management would take our suggestions and audits very seriously. As it is now, they know they can wait us out.

Another challenge is the timing of projects. Student activists hope for immediate change, while multi-stakeholder committees can take years to draft a plan (let alone implement it). Since we shifted our Sustainable Campus strategy from "encouraging the system to change itself" to "researching solutions, taking action ourselves and monitoring implementation," we seem to be generating more success. At the very least, we are helping speed up the process.

Role of Campus Ecology

There has been no involvement with Campus Ecology so far. The Campus Ecology resources were recently purchased for our library and we hope you will come to the SYC Sustainable Campus Conference. It would be great if you would extend your fellowships to Canada.

Funding Sources

Funds were from mostly in-kind sources. We raised some money through Sierra Club of Canada calendar sales, from our Rural Youth Education Project workshops, through a pub night, through a movie night, and from our Student Union. SYC-Dal has had an excellent treasurer, Laura Scott, who arranged numerous fundraising activities and events for group members to participate in. We also received money from Environment Canada's Community Animation Program (CAP) to attend the SYC Sustainable Campus Conference last year. At one stage we applied to Environment Canada's EcoAction fund for a two year project (in Partnership with the Student Union and Facilities Management) on energy and paper reduction at Dalhousie University. The funds would have been used to set up a Student Environmental Office and coordinator as part of the ambitious initiative to involve students and classes in audits and conservation education campaigns. Our request was denied, which meant the project was never completed. Currently we have a funding proposal into Canada Trust's Friends of the Environment Fund for money to host the national SYC Sustainable Campus Conference.

Publicity and Media

The U-Pass has received attention by print, radio and TV media. We write articles for our student paper every week, give interviews, issue press releases, hold press events (conferences, parades, rallies, etc), poster the campus, use the website and post things on list serve. Generally we are very good at outreach. If we plan a media event, we always identify a spokesperson and ensure a "photo opportunity" through interesting visuals (placards, costumes, banners, etc).

Documentation

SYC-Dal website: <http://is2.dal.ca/~syc/>

U-Pass Halifax website: <http://www3.ns.sympatico.ca/k.ross/upasshalifax/upasshome.htm>

SYC-Sustainable Campus web site (Dal paper audit is posted there):

<http://www.sierrayouthcoalition.org/eng/SusCamp/Campus.htm>

Dalhousie Declarations and Policy: <http://admwww1.ucis.dal.ca/transfer/senate/policies.cfm>

Draft Updated Environmental Policy and Implementation Plan - contact Tarah Wright - <tswright@ualberta.ca>

Key Groups/Allies Involved

Sierra Youth Coalition - phone 613-241-1615 or 1-888-790-7393 (in Canada) or call sierrayc@web.net or check out the website www.sierrayouthcoalition.org (go to the Sustainable Campus section)

Mike Murphy - Waste Management at Dalhousie University

Chris Duggan - Purchasing at Dalhousie University

Dr. Ray Cote - Chair of the Senate Environment Committee

Senate Environment Committee

Dalhousie Student Union

Bill Louch - Health and Safety Officer at Dalhousie University

Bill Lord - Head of Facilities Management

Dr. Martin Willison - naturalization of pond area on campus

Prof. Tarah Wright - new Faculty at Dalhousie and Implementation Plan Sub-Committee

Carolyn Green - Dalhousie Architecture and Implementation Plan Sub-Committee

Dr. Chris Elson - French Department and Implementation Plan Sub-Committee

Numerous students

Cyndi Gilbert - Sierra Club of Canada- Atlantic Canada Chapter staff (who looks after our library and is helping host the SYC national Sustainable Campus conference in October 2001) – 902-422-5091,

cyndigilbert@hotmail.com

Rebecca O'Brian at Ecology Action Centre's TRAX program and U-Pass Halifax Coalition

Colleen McNeil - EMS Coordinator at Environment Canada's Atlantic Office

Rochelle Owen - CAP Funding Coordinator at Environment Canada's Atlantic Office

Next Year's Plans

1. Hosting of National SYC Sustainable Campus Conference - October 11-14, 2001
2. U-Pass referendum at 3 Universities in Halifax
3. More waste, composting, paper reduction, and general environmental education and action
4. Pass the updated Environmental Policy and Implementation Plan in Senate, and start the implementation with the Senate Environment Committee
5. Work with the Canadian Youth Summit Team on their preparation for Rio +10
6. Promote the Bet. See www.sierrayouthcoalition.org for more information on the Bet and the Climate Change Caravan.
7. Develop an ad-hoc consortium of Atlantic Canada Universities to discuss Sustainable Campus efforts. This may be hosted in the winter of 2002 at Mount Allison University with 6-8 participants (administration, purchasing, facilities management, students and faculty) from each participating University. One of the first efforts of this group will be to increase the post-consumer content in our paper purchasing, as we all buy paper together.
8. Other things that the new group of students choose.

Quote or Helpful Hint

For students from a student: Generally it is the students that inspire and begin the drive for campus environmental change. The staff, faculty and administrators depend on students for initiative, even if it appears like the same staff, faculty and administrators are trying to block progress. They work in a decentralized hierarchy, which can leave them just as frustrated as us. Professionalism and persistence are all you need to push your project through, though it will probably take four times as long as you think it should. ☺

Contacts

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aclarke4@is2.dal.ca or amelia@sierrayouthcoalition.org

Katherine Ross - SYC Atlantic Canada Regional Coordinator and U-Pass Halifax contact - kmross@is2.dal.ca

Mike Dingwall - SYC-Dal Chair - dingwall@is2.dal.ca

Andrew Angus - SYC-Dal contact on Sustainable Campus - aangus@ns.sympatico.ca

Cyndi Gilbert - Sustainable Campus Conference Coordinator - cyndigilbert@hotmail.com

Karen Gorecki - SYC National Coordinator - sierrayc@web.net