A Qualitative Assessment and Framework for a Sustainability Strategic Plan

Oakland University Practices, Policies and Management Structures for a Sustainable Future

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Advised by Dr. Charlotte Clark

Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Environmental Management degree in the Nicholas School of the Environment of Duke University.
The author of the study, a Duke University Master of Environmental Management student and 2010 Oakland University (OU) graduate, partnered with the OU Office of the President to address OU sustainability strategic planning.

Two primary sections constitute the report. Part I: A Qualitative Assessment depicts the current status of OU environmental sustainability initiatives through a web-based Catalog of OU Environmental Initiatives, partial STARS Report, and Sustainability Needs Assessment. Part II: A Sustainability Strategic Plan Framework describes how the University might work toward building a culture-specific sustainability strategic plan at OU.

The framework I have devised offers ten core action steps, which are grouped into four phases: Administrative Action, Strategic Planning, Implementation, and Percolation. Highly participatory, the framework is a marriage of bottom-up and top-down planning, coordination and implementation. The plan that emerges from it will draw its strength and working knowledge from the involvement of all campus sustainability leaders. This framework should help OU expand its ongoing energy, grassroots, and operations and infrastructural sustainability projects to include administrative policies, additional curriculum and research, and student and community outreach.
I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the following individuals, whose support, expertise, and guidance have been instrumental in the development of my Masters Project:

**Dr. Charlotte Clark**, Duke University Masters Project Advisor

**Dr. Gary Russi**, Oakland University President

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**Dr. Linda Schweitzer**, OU Associate Professor and Masters Project Liaison

**Karen Kukuk**, OU Executive Assistant to the President

I would especially like to thank the many Oakland University administrators, staff, faculty and students who have so graciously shared their time, experiences and insight in providing the information that has contributed to this report.
# Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................. 1

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................................................................. 2

TABLE OF CONTENTS .................................................................................................................. 3

TABLE OF FIGURES ..................................................................................................................... 5

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ............................................................................................................... 6

SUSTAINABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION ..................................................................................... 8

GENERAL NATURE OF UNIVERSITY SUSTAINABILITY ACTIONS AND COMMITMENTS ........ 11

3.1 Higher Education Sustainability and Environmental Planning ............................................... 11
   Primary Sustainability Planning Documents ............................................................................. 11

3.2 Formal Commitments ............................................................................................................. 12
   ACUPCC ................................................................................................................................... 12
   Talloires Declaration ................................................................................................................ 12
   Advantages and Disadvantages ............................................................................................... 13

3.3 Rating Systems ....................................................................................................................... 13
   AASHE STARS ....................................................................................................................... 14
   Green Report Cards ................................................................................................................ 14

OVERVIEW OF OAKLAND UNIVERSITY ....................................................................................... 15

4.1 Study Origins .......................................................................................................................... 15

4.2 Data Collection Methods ....................................................................................................... 15
   The Catalog of Environmental Initiatives ................................................................................ 17

4.3 Oakland University Introduction ............................................................................................ 17

4.4 University Culture .................................................................................................................. 18

4.5 Historical environmental involvement and progress toward sustainability ......................... 20
   Operational Efficiency (Including Energy Efficiency) ............................................................. 20
   Clean Energy ........................................................................................................................... 21
   Grassroots Efforts ................................................................................................................... 22

5.1 Current Actions ....................................................................................................................... 23
   Ongoing Sustainability Highlights ......................................................................................... 23

5.2 Oakland University Sustainability S.W.O.T. ......................................................................... 26

DISCUSSION .................................................................................................................................. 28

6.1 OU’s S.W.O.T. Results .......................................................................................................... 28
   Strengths ................................................................................................................................. 28
   Weaknesses ........................................................................................................................... 28
   Opportunities ........................................................................................................................ 33
   Threats ..................................................................................................................................... 36

6.2 Oakland University’s Sustainability in Context ....................................................................... 39
With Peer Institutions ................................................................. 39
With State and Nationwide Trends ................................................ 43
Conclusions ............................................................................. 43

BUILDING OAKLAND UNIVERSITY’S SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIC PLAN ........................................... 45
1.1 Sustainability Strategic Plan Overview ........................................... 45
1.2 Best Practices ........................................................................ 46
1.3 Methods and Design ................................................................ 46
1.4 OU Sustainability Strategic Planning Framework ......................... 48
   The Framework ....................................................................... 48

SUMMARY OF ACTION PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS ................................................................. 50

PHASE I: ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION ........................................................................... 51
2.1 Designate a Sustainability Strategic Planning Coordinator .............. 51
   Management Details .................................................................. 52
2.2 Develop a Baseline ..................................................................... 56
   Compiling the Baseline Assessment .............................................. 57

PHASE II: SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIC PLANNING ........................................................................ 59
2.3 Adopt a Common Language and Vision ........................................... 59
   Developing a Working Definition of Sustainability ......................... 60
   Developing a Sustainability Mission and Vision .............................. 61
   Identifying Strategic Priorities ..................................................... 63
2.4 Build Teams As Well As Champions .............................................. 65
   Sustainability Strategic Planning Task Force .................................. 65
2.5 Set Clear Goals, Objectives and Milestones .................................... 67
2.6 Define Metrics of Success .......................................................... 68

PHASE III: IMPLEMENTATION ........................................................................... 68
2.7 Identify Necessary Implementation and Accountability Structures and Devices .... 68
   Campus Sustainability Officers ..................................................... 69
   Campus Sustainability Committees .............................................. 70
   Sustainability Departments and Offices ........................................ 70
   Structural Collaboration .............................................................. 71
2.8 Provide The Resources To Support the University’s Strategic Objectives .... 71

PHASE IV: PERCOLATION ........................................................................... 73
2.9 Create a Central Source of Sustainability Information Sharing ................ 73
2.10 Let Systems Thinking Permeate the Process .................................. 74

SUMMARY ....................................................................................... 74

APPENDIX I: OU CATALOG OF SUSTAINABLE INITIATIVES (VIEW WEBSITE) ......................... 75

APPENDIX II: (PARTIAL) STARS REPORT (VIEW WEBPAGE) .................................................. 75
TABLE OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: THE THREE SPHERES OF SUSTAINABILITY ......................................................... 10
FIGURE 2: ACUPCC INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE ........................................... 13
TABLE 1: GUIDE TO OU PERSONNEL CORRESPONDENCE AND INTERVIEWS ...................... 16
FIGURE 3: OAKLAND UNIVERSITY SUSTAINABILITY S.W.O.T. ANALYSIS .......................... 27
FIGURE 5: OAKLAND UNIVERSITY RECYCLING ORGANIZATION ..................................... 30
FIGURE 6: THE SUSTAINABILITY MANAGEMENT DEVICES USED AT OU’S PEER INSTITUTIONS ................................. 40
FIGURE 7: THE PRIMARY SUSTAINABILITY FOCAL AREAS AT OU’S PEER INSTITUTIONS .................. 41
TABLE 2: A COMPARISON OF SUSTAINABILITY OVERSIGHT AT OU’S PEER INSTITUTIONS ............... 42
FIGURE 8: OAKLAND UNIVERSITY FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIC PLAN ......................... 48
FIGURE 9: POSITION STATUS OF 432 CAMPUS SUSTAINABILITY OFFICER SURVEY RESPONDENTS .................... 54
FIGURE 10: EDUCATION LEVEL OF 433 CAMPUS SUSTAINABILITY OFFICER SURVEY RESPONDENT ......................... 55
TABLE 3: SALARY OF SUSTAINABILITY PROFESSIONALS WITH ADVANCED DEGREES ......................... 55
TABLE 4: SALARY OF SUSTAINABILITY PROFESSIONALS WITHOUT ADVANCED DEGREES ....................... 55
TABLE 5: DRAFTING THE PLAN: WHAT AREAS SHOULD BE ADDRESSED? ............................................. 65
FIGURE 11: EXAMPLE STRUCTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIC PLANNING TEAM ......................... 67
PART I:

A Qualitative Sustainability Needs Assessment

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April 27, 2012
Many academic institutions are acknowledging their responsibility in preparing the world's young minds to address the imminent challenge - and opportunity - of creating an environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable society. Hundreds of universities across the country (and, indeed, around the world) have begun to develop guiding documents and structures to address the plethora of environmentally related issues that we as a global human community face.

In early 2011, the author of the study, a Duke University Master of Environmental Management student and 2010 Oakland University (OU) graduate, partnered with the OU Office of the President to address Oakland University sustainability strategic planning in her Duke University Masters Project. An institutionalized sustainability program could attract new students, facilitate innovation for interdisciplinary societal challenges, encourage additional partnerships and funding, and elevate - to a greater extent - the University’s reputation within the regional community.

The most effective sustainability strategic plans are often collaborative endeavors with broad stakeholder participation, compiled on site at the focus institution over several months. As such, this remotely-conducted report is intended to serve as a framework to guide OU as it develops a comprehensive, culture-specific sustainability strategic plan, rather than the strategic plan itself.

This framework should help OU expand its current energy and grassroots sustainability projects to include administrative policies; additional curriculum and research; student and community outreach; and cross-campus operations and infrastructure, transportation practices, and solid waste management.

Two primary sections constitute the report, within which I have provided a number of deliverables on behalf of an emergent sustainability structure at Oakland University.

**Part I: A Qualitative Assessment** depicts the current status of OU environmental sustainability initiatives. The assessment consists of the following:

- **Online Catalog of Oakland University Environmental Initiatives**, an online database that compiles existing information regarding OU’s current sustainability projects. ([https://sites.google.com/site/ouenvironmentalcatalog/](https://sites.google.com/site/ouenvironmentalcatalog/))
- **Partial STARS Report**, accessible on the Catalog of Environmental Initiatives, a popular higher education sustainability assessment and tracking framework that demonstrates what sustainability reporting at OU would entail.
- **Sustainability Needs Assessment**, which discusses the role that sustainability can play in higher education, provides a S.W.O.T. (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis of sustainability at OU, and describes how OU’s sustainability initiatives contrast with the University’s peer institutions and higher education institutions regionally.

**Part II: A Sustainability Strategic Plan Framework** describes how the University might work toward building a culture-specific sustainability strategic plan at OU.

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In light of OU’s specific university mission, goals, opportunities, and challenges, I have identified several strategies to help the university prioritize its sustainability strategic planning interventions while considering its constraints on financial and staffing resources. These strategies, based upon needs perceived in OU’s preliminary assessment, are meant to give guidance for a university-wide strategic planning process.

In some cases, these strategies indicate areas in which current sustainability initiatives can grow, and identify potential opportunities for future collaboration between and partnerships with departments, operations, and the local community.

Throughout the report, I describe lessons learned from comparable exemplar institutions of higher education that can also inform future sustainability strategic planning at OU.

**Sustainability in Higher Education**

As the human population reaches its seven-billionth addition, it faces dwindling planetary resources to support that number in a healthful and vibrant way and the uncertainties surrounding the threat of climate change.

While some scientists may differ in their opinion on the ultimate source of climate change, virtually all atmospheric scientists agree that the global climate is indeed changing, and quickly.\(^2\) Compounded with increasing scarcity in many areas of the globe of such fundamental resources as food and water, these phenomena will almost certainly threaten human health, wellbeing, and security.

The Intergovernmental Panel and Climate Change (IPCC)\(^3\) and United States Global Change Research Program\(^4\) anticipate that the foremost environmental challenges of the near future — and now, in some locations — will include:

- Sea level rise
- Distributions and availability of freshwater resources
- Increased extreme weather events
- Ocean acidification
- Ecosystem disturbance and fragmentation
- Spread of invasive and exotic species and diseases
- Increased geographical range for climate-sensitive infectious diseases
- Increased health and mortality rate of vulnerable populations

In response, many academic institutions are acknowledging their responsibility in preparing the world’s young minds to address the

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imminent challenge - and opportunity - of creating an environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable society.

Higher education institutions are virtual microcosms of society. They manage resources, generate waste, utilize energy, and facilitate the development of a diverse swatch of humanity as much as, if not more than, other centers of human population. As a result, colleges and universities are ideally positioned to:

- Experience societal challenges within the culture of the university community;
- Anticipate and understand the global implications of institutional actions in relation to these challenges; and
- Through research, experiential learning, external relationships and internal operations, develop innovative solutions to address these challenges.

What’s more, communities look to – and often expect - the academic institutions they support to take an active leadership role in examining those issues and needs most pressing to society.5

As we will see in 3.2 Formal Commitments, universities and colleges have publically responded to this challenge. By early 2012:

- 674 higher education institutions had signed the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment (ACUPCC) to become climate neutral.
- 350 university presidents from over 40 countries had signed the Talloires Declaration, pledging to incorporate a culture of sustainability into university life, policies and operations.
- Over 885 institutions are members of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), which provides extensive resources to support the creation of sustainable campus communities.

The text of the ACUPCC signatory agreement expresses that these actions have reciprocal benefits. Centers of learning that take steps to become climate change leaders will:

- “Stabilize and reduce their long-term energy costs;
- “Attract excellent students and faculty;
- “Attract new sources of funding;
- “Increase the support of alumni and local communities.”6

“Universities have a very large role to play promoting sustainability for all of society.

“In Western culture, universities educate and develop the leaders of tomorrow in government, law, business, medicine, clergy, science and other professions.

“From this perspective, universities have an incumbent moral responsibility to educate their graduates with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to be able to effectively develop a thriving, secure and civil society.

“Higher education must be focusing efforts on ensuring that graduates develop the skills, talents and attitudes necessary to become effective agents of social change.

“If universities wish to develop responsible stewards of our collective future, a commitment to sustainability must be demonstrated as well as lectured.

“Higher education must ‘walk the talk.’”

– Concordia University Campus Sustainability Assessment (2006

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6 American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment text. (2007) <http://acupcc.org/about/commitment>
Similarly, more young adults are recognizing the need to incorporate sustainable development theory into their higher education experience. Many prospective students have begun to consider college sustainability practices when choosing their undergraduate institution. Some seek an academic center that will align with their personal sustainability convictions; others place value on an institution that will provide them with the instruction or environment to develop marketable sustainability skills and expertise.

A 2011 *Princeton Review* survey of 8,200 students revealed that 69% percent say having information about a university’s sustainability practices would contribute to their decision to apply or attend, a number that has continued to grow in recent years.

Students and administrators alike have also noted an expanding need for graduates who have an understanding of and experience with sustainable systems thinking - no matter their primary field of study.

As Western Michigan University’s President’s Universitywide Sustainability Committee succinctly described in their Strategic Sustainability Initiatives Report, “Modeling our sustainability commitments with increasing vigor and efficacy... will go a long way towards preparing our students to be innovative leaders in their own chosen fields of expertise while building a sustainable future for all.”

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3.1 Higher Education Sustainability and Environmental Planning

Hundreds of higher education institutions across the country (and, indeed, around the world) have begun to develop guiding documents and structures to address the plethora of environmentally related issues that we as a global human community face. Some institutions draft Climate Action Plans under the stipulations of the ACUPCC; others develop such plans independently or with the aid of resources from sustainability knowledge-dissemination organizations like AASHE. As of January 2012:

- 434 colleges and universities have submitted ACUPCC Climate Action Plans to become carbon neutral
- 15 have created sustainable energy plans
- 50 include sustainability in their campus master plans
- 28 have created sustainability plans
- 479 have created comprehensive campus sustainability websites

In addition to these numbers, many more institutions have developed or are developing plans and resources they have not formally submitted to AASHE or the ACUPCC.

Primary Sustainability Planning Documents

In general, two primary types of higher education sustainability planning documents exist: Climate Action Plans and Sustainability Action Plans.

Climate Action Plans (CAPs)

CAPs chart a course toward a climate neutral campus, meaning the ultimate goal of universities that draft such a plan is creating a net zero emission campus and operations. These plans focus largely on energy emissions mitigation strategies, efficiency, research, and operations, with a subfocus on student education about wise energy usage and sustainable practices.

Sustainability Action Plans (SAPs)

SAPs attempt to foster a holistic sense of sustainability in the campus community with or without an absolute commitment to or focus on becoming carbon neutral. These plans tend to be more flexible in aims and goals and concentrate on what is most important to the university developing them.

As sustainability awareness grows amongst the higher education community, a number of “trademarked” sustainability implementation frameworks have also been developed, including Academic Impressions’ Sustainability Road Map. This program offers six strategic planning core components, integrated from the

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12 Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) website. (2011a) <www.aashe.org>
13 Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. Resources on Campus Sustainability Coordination and Planning. 2011b. <www.aashe.org/resources/resources-sustainability-coordination-planning>
increasingly popular AASHE Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS) and other sustainability benchmarks, to assist in creating a university-wide sustainability initiative.\(^{15}\)

The context surrounding sustainable development at institutions of higher education varies widely. For example, every institution has different priorities, resources, cultural openness and awareness, administrative buy-in, and community involvement. As a result, no sustainability assessment or strategic plan is the same. Each plan, whether it be a Climate Action Plan or Sustainability Action Plan, must carefully consider the particular culture, circumstances, limitations, and interests of the institution it represents;\(^{16}\) each is a dynamic contract that outlines the specific targets, strategies, actions, and metrics its respective university will use to reach its sustainability goals.

To decide upon a particular sustainability strategic planning process, an institution must determine which option fits best with its unique institutional culture, needs, ambitions, and abilities.

### 3.2 Formal Commitments

In some cases, colleges and universities choose to formally and publically make an institutional commitment to sustainability. The two most widely recognized, externally administered sustainability agreements are the Talloires Declaration, developed in 1990, and the ACUPCC, developed in 2007. In signing either agreement, an institution visibly pledges that it will integrate sustainable systems and thinking within its campus operations and culture, though each agreement offers a different path toward accomplishing this goal.

**ACUPCC**

With 674 signatories and counting, the most popular institutional sustainability commitment is the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment. The agreement specifically targets the role of the university in addressing climate change. Those institutions that adopt it commit to working toward institutional climate neutrality—reducing their campus net greenhouse gas emissions to zero. The agreement additionally stipulates the promotion of research toward and education about climate change.

Though the commitment is non-binding, signatory universities are expected to create an emissions inventory, set interim milestones for becoming climate neutral, and take immediate steps to do so that incorporate short-term actions,\(^{17}\) as outlined in Figure 2.

**Talloires Declaration**

The Talloires Declaration focuses on broader environmental issues than climate change and carbon neutrality, offering higher education institutions a 10-step plan to incorporate environmental awareness and sustainability.\(^{18}\)

“Universities have a major role in the education, research, policy formation, and information exchange necessary to make [equitable and sustainable future for all humankind in harmony with nature] possible,” the Declaration’s preamble states.\(^{19}\)

The Declaration proposes a broad range of actions, including fostering ubiquitous environmental literacy and establishing partnerships with local primary and secondary schools to developing institutional ecology and maintaining that movement over time.


\(^{17}\) American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment text. (2007) <http://acupcc.org/about/commitment>


\(^{19}\) Id.
signatories follow through on promised actions.

As a result, formal commitment skeptics argue that these visible agreements are simply “feel good” documents: While certainly a boon for an institution’s public relations, they provide little guidance about how to achieve their ambitious, long-term goals (or even ensure that proper milestones to reach those goals are set realistically). 21

The text of both agreements can be found in Appendix IV: Commitment Texts of ACUPCC and Talloires Declaration.

Many higher education institutions choose to sign either commitment only after they have made significant progress in building their own sustainability programs; others have wholly succeeded in creating a sustainable community without signing either commitment.

Three such examples are Vanderbilt University, Yale University, and Harvard College, which all possess exemplary university sustainability programs. As of January 2012, none of these institutions had signed the ACUPCC or Talloires Declaration.

3.3 Rating Systems

A number of sustainability rating systems have been created that allow higher education institutions to track and comprehensively catalog their sustainability efforts based upon a predesigned evaluation system. Universities voluntarily submit their information to the system they would like to utilize. Each

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21 Id.
rating system is useful for different reasons, but all serve the ultimate purpose of providing a long-term metric system to monitor or improve upon sustainability initiatives.

**AASHE STARS**

Some rating systems, like the [AASHE Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS)](https://stars.aashe.org/pages/about/2010-stars-annual-review.html), are more helpful internally, providing a practical and effective framework for a university to thoroughly catalog its own operations and understand where it can most improve – as well as which improvements and efforts will have the greatest impact on the campus at large. (See Part II: 2.2 Develop a Baseline for additional information.)

AASHE STARS is perhaps the most rapidly growing national higher education sustainability assessment program. The STARS 2010 Annual Review reported that in that year, 37 institutions submitted comprehensive STARS reports; since that time, over 200 higher education institutions have formally participated in the program, with any number of others informally using the framework to track their own efforts.22

STARS systematically documents and analyzes a university’s comprehensive sustainability initiatives to minutia detail within three broad categories: (1) education and research, (2) operations, and (3) planning, administration and engagement. At a large university, a STARS assessment can take months to complete, but the finished product provides an excellent baseline to inform future sustainability strategic planning.

**Green Report Cards**

Other rating systems are more useful as reporting tools, and provide the institutions that use them with a platform to submit the details of their sustainability program for public comment and comparison.

*The College Sustainability Report Card*

The [College Sustainability Report Card](http://www.greenreportcard.org/) has collected sustainability data from over 300 colleges. The Report Card assigns each school a “grade” based upon the information submitted, publically reports the data online, and allows website users to compare how well different universities scored in 10 different evaluation brackets that range from stakeholder engagement to investment priorities.23

*The Princeton Review*

The Princeton Review is known for its annual higher education evaluative tomes that high school students actively use to compare colleges and universities of interest. Every year, The Princeton Review publishes Green Ratings in their widely utilized *The Best Colleges* text. It also recently began to produce a comprehensive *Guide to Green Colleges* - available free to download online - that includes a “Green Honor Roll” listing the nation’s greenest schools.

In 2011, The Princeton Review stated that a record 768 schools had submitted information to be scored for their Review’s annual green report.24 This number is significant. That so many institutions voluntarily participated in the evaluation system is indicative of a growing awareness amongst university leadership that (1) students are interested in learning about the role sustainability has at their higher education institutions of choice and (2) this knowledge could influence prospective students’ attendance decisions.

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22 Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. 2010 STARS Annual Review. 2011d.
Overview of Oakland University

4.1 Study Origins

In early 2011, the author of the study, a Duke University Master of Environmental Management student and 2010 Oakland University (OU) graduate, partnered with the OU Office of the President to address Oakland University sustainability strategic planning in her Duke University Masters Project. While I was a student at OU, many individuals across the university had expressed to me the need for developing such an overarching program or structure.

The most successful sustainability strategic plans are collaborative endeavors with broad stakeholder participation, compiled on site at the focus institution over several months.\textsuperscript{25} As such, I intend for this remotely-conducted report to serve as a framework to guide OU as it develops a comprehensive, culture-specific sustainability strategic plan, rather than the strategic plan itself.

Based upon my background and training in qualitative analysis, environmental sustainability, and strategic planning, I focused my research on three questions on behalf of an emergent sustainability structure at OU:

1. What is the current status of OU environmental sustainability initiatives?
2. What can be learned from comparable exemplar institutions of higher education to inform sustainability strategic planning at OU?
3. What might be an efficient process for comprehensive sustainability strategic planning at OU, and how might the University approach that process?

It is my hope that the resulting framework will assist OU in expanding its current energy and grassroots sustainability projects to include administrative policies; additional curriculum and research; student and community outreach; and cross-campus operations and infrastructure, transportation practices, and solid waste management.

4.2 Data Collection Methods

To determine the current status of environmental sustainability at OU, I gathered qualitative information regarding ongoing University environmental and sustainability projects to establish a baseline for future strategic comparison and reference.

I obtained this data from a number of sources, including:

- Online University records, files, and public information
- Academic curricula
- Student organization information
- Campus operations reports
- Purchasing polices

In addition to accumulating material culture, I corresponded with University administrators, faculty, staff, and students in departments and organizations across campus to discuss their involvement with or knowledge of environmental projects at OU. Table 1 provides a list of the 26 individuals whose feedback I have actively utilized in the assessment.

My interactions ranged from formal meetings and interviews with pre-provided questions to informal phone conversations and email interviews. I conducted eight formal interviews that lasted roughly an hour each, held 12+ meetings that ranged from 30 minutes to two hours, and continued to interact via email.

with these 26 individuals and more. I recorded each interview, and subsequently produced verbatim transcripts. *Appendix III: Sample Interview Guide* includes sample questions from my formal interviews.

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*Table 1: Guide to OU Personnel Correspondence and Interviews.*
The Catalog of Environmental Initiatives

As I indicated in the Executive Summary, I aggregated the data I collected into one central online database, the OU Catalog of Environmental Initiatives. The Catalog provides a detailed snapshot of the current status of OU environmental and sustainability initiatives through a comprehensive listing of the University's activities in these sectors. It is not meant to present new data, but rather to compile already existing but scattered information into one central location. The web address for the site is (https://sites.google.com/site/ouenvironmentalcatalog/).

The information included in the Catalog was collected and, in many cases, directly transferred from the OU website, written materials, and interviews. Whenever possible, I linked the information directly to its original online source.

The content is organized based on the subsections of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education's Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System (STARS). This website or format may be a useful platform upon which to build a fully functional sustainability website and assessment before the University begins a Sustainability Strategic Plan.

4.3 Oakland University Introduction

Oakland University (OU) is a public university located on 1500 acres between the cities of Rochester Hills and Auburn Hills in Oakland County, Michigan. With 19,379 students, over 800 faculty members, and steadily growing, OU prides itself in providing an affordable yet first-class education for an increasingly national population. The University places particular emphasis on the medical and health sciences, engineering, business administration, and education. The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education categorizes OU as a “Doctoral/Research University,” highlighting its commitment to graduate as well as undergraduate academic experiences.26

In the early 20th Century, Oakland University’s grounds were originally a state-of-the-art agricultural estate. The property was owned by Matilda Dodge Wilson, the widow of the automobile tycoon of the same surname, and her second husband, Alfred Wilson.27 In 1957, Wilson donated the estate to Michigan State University, which developed the complex as its Oakland County satellite.

Since that time, the University has maintained an ambitious agenda. In 1963, it was renamed Oakland University; by 1970 it was an independent academic institution. Under the leadership of Dr. Gary Russi, appointed University President in 1996, OU has dramatically expanded its size, academic repertoire, program reputation, fundraising, community relations, partnerships, and alliances.28

Today, the University offers 132 baccalaureate degrees and 126 graduate and certificate programs, provides a low student-to-faculty ratio, and encompasses 48 major buildings, five residence halls, and

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26 Oakland University self-promotion material. 2010. Rochester, MI.
27 “Meadow Brook History.” Meadow Brook Hall website. 2012. <www.meadowbrookhall.org/explore/history/meadowbrookhall>
28 “OU History.” Oakland University website. 2012. <www.oakland.edu>
six student apartments. In 2011, it welcomed the OU William Beaumont School of Allopathic Medicine’s 50-member inaugural class, and plans to expand each subsequent cohort by 25 students.

“Oakland University continues to establish itself as a center of learning that is positioned well for the future,” proclaimed a 2009 article in the Oakland Press.

In 2011, OU identified two key institutional priorities:

1. Create productive student and faculty experiences through focusing on education quality and support services; program quality, delivery and instruction; faculty recognition and support; and increasing its brand and visibility.

2. Engage OU and community resources for public good, leveraging its connection with the community to enhance faculty-student experiences through research and experiential learning, while at the same time engaging the university community in activities that address public needs.

More information about OU can be found at the University’s website.

4.4 University Culture

Understanding an institution’s culture is especially important for sustainability strategic planning at that institution, as I will explain in detail in Part II: 1.2 Best Practices. Four OU cultural trends, in particular, could influence the University’s future sustainability planning or potential program creation.

A Commuter University

While OU is a growing Doctoral/Research University, the University has a distinctly commuter culture, while approximately 91% of its students driving to campus each day. Active student involvement and engagement in campus life and activities, therefore, has been and continues to be a considerable challenge for the University, as many students attend classes and simply leave campus almost immediately afterward.

OU’s commuter culture has also posed a distinct challenge for OU’s most active sustainability education and outreach program, Sustaining Our Planet Earth. The program is based in the Department of Housing, so it only actively reaches the 9% of students living in on-campus residence halls and student apartments.

Notes S.O.P.E. student leadership, the majority of the student body presently has not shown an overwhelming degree of interest in sustainability or environmental concerns. One student, however, presented a potential solution to this observation:

“When I talk to some students about the environment, they say, “Who cares?”, or “How does it affect me or my career?” If every class that is offered at college institutions had an incorporation of the environment tied into the overall thought of the class, more students would be interested and involved. Students who think that the environment does not matter would not go to an Eco-Conference or an Earth Day event.

“If the teaching of the subject at hand were altered, not to generate a bias but to introduce the idea, a higher peak of interest would be found in the environment/sustainability with the addition of each career field.” – OU Student

31 Strategic Plan, Oakland University. President’s Executive Council. Approved March 22, 2011.
Overview of Oakland University

A Lean University

OU's primary resource drivers include tuition, state and federal funding, philanthropy, funded research, alumni, and auxiliaries. While OU has committed itself to maintaining an affordable tuition rate with no additional fees, the University consistently receives one of the lowest higher education appropriations per student out of any public university in the State of Michigan.

As state funding continues to dwindle, the University has begun to rely more heavily on student tuition, as well as significant philanthropic outreach and capital campaigns, to support itself. To this end, OU highly values its relationships with surrounding communities and former students, leveraging a good reputation and alumni advocates to establish new partnerships and draw volunteers.\(^{32}\)

To address these resource challenges internally, OU has employed lean operating principles to increase overall university efficiency and cut costs. It is financially cautious and considers itself a "lean university": though it is one of fifteen public universities and one of seven major research universities in Michigan, it has one of the lowest operating costs per student in the state.\(^{33}\)

A Forward-Thinking University

OU has an active culture of planning.\(^{34}\) The University consistently revises and reviews its institutional strategic plan, and has currently finished its sixth plan. It is also committed to achieving and surpassing those strategic goals whenever possible, as it did with its 2005 - 2010 $110 million Capital Campaign, which it exceeded by $1.8 million.\(^{35}\)

Perhaps due to its significant fiscal efficiency, the University Board of Trustees and senior leadership also actively practice stepwise, strategic decision-making. Rather than enacting abrupt, sweeping changes that engulf the entire university community, the University tends to instate new initiatives that:

- Have been carefully planned to align with the University’s overall mission and strategic objectives;
- Begin small and produce early and tangible gains; and
- Contingent upon demonstrated successes, grow over time.

Sustainability strategic planning at OU should embody a similar approach.

A Unionized University

The University’s faculty and staff are unionized (American Association of University Professors; Campus Maintenance and Trades Union; Professional Support Association), which exerts some influence on the perception and execution of administrative policies and procedures.\(^{36}\)

While OU does actively plan its key strategic interventions and programs, “the norm” at the University is often a top-down approach to enforce them.\(^{37}\) Active employee labor unions, combined with a history of independent and grassroots project development, have in part contributed to a community that can be suspicious of or resist top-down enforcement – at least of those policies and practices that have not first received considerable bottom-up consultation and support.\(^{38}\)

\(^{32}\) Id.
\(^{34}\) Admin.6.
\(^{35}\) The Oakland Press. "OU on an impressive march into the future." 28 April 2009. <www.theoaklandpress.com>
\(^{37}\) Faculty2, Faculty3, Admin.3, Admin.11
\(^{38}\) Faculty2, Admin.11
4.5 Historical environmental involvement and progress toward sustainability

In recent years, OU has begun to develop a number of sustainability and environmental projects. Some of these initiatives, like the Clean Energy Research Center, have been strategic. Others, like the Urban Garden, have been the result of the independent or collaborative efforts of students, staff and faculty.

Despite the wide breadth and depth of these projects, they display three consistent themes. Below, I have described the historical progression of and list key initiatives within each theme. 5.1 Current Actions presents a number of these initiatives in greater depth.

Operational Efficiency (Including Energy Efficiency)

As early as 1998, OU was involved with energy reduction strategies, largely for operational and financial efficiency, and in 2005 exercised a utility-saving performance contract. The University has since then commenced a variety of energy conservation projects.

In 2008, OU began a building recommissioning program in which it has “updated and optimized building HVAC and lighting systems for improved indoor air quality, comfort, and energy savings.” Pawley Hall and the Recreation and Athletics Center have been entirely recommissioned; work on O’Dowd Hall has begun this year.

But the 2010 – 2012 construction of the Gold or Platinum LEED-certified Human Health Building (HHB) has arguably become the public face of the University’s energy-saving projects. A $2.75 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy and $75,000 grant from the Kresge Foundation helped to bring the potential achievement of the U.S. Green Building Council’s highest LEED rating within grasp. The two grants supported the installation of a cutting-edge geothermal heating system and other green building design and technology, additions that could help to tip the building’s rating to Platinum.

Financial savings and increased grant opportunities are only two benefits of these and other sustainability projects within campus operations; with them have come non-fiscal benefits as well. The HHB’s ultra-green design has generated a buzz of positive press, elevating OU’s profile locally and regionally. And during the HHB’s Groundbreaking Ceremony, students in the health-related fields who will use the building upon its completion expressed excitement that their learning environment would include a healthfully designed complex.

Recognizing the value of sustainable design, the OU administration is targeting a LEED Gold certification for the University’s next construction project, the recently approved OU Engineering Center.

39 Oakland University Facilities Management. <www.oakland.edu/facilities>
40 Id
41 “OU marks $2.7M Human Health Building grant as groundbreaking nears.” OU News, 7 April 2010.
46 Personal observation, 12 April 2010.
47 Admin.4
Department of Facilities Management, meanwhile, has expressed a commitment to implementing sustainable best practices.48

“The Facilities Management Office is playing a responsible role to implement sustainable best practices through various projects that the department manages, from design to construction and after construction. Every day, these practices are being utilized during operation and maintenance of the campus. These practices save energy, improve occupant comfort and environment, and reduce OU’s carbon footprint, resulting in a more sustainable environment and a greener campus.

“Facilities Management is constantly examining their activities and services in order to continually improve environmental performance, with economic viability and a sense of sustainability.”

Notable OU Operational Efficiency Initiatives (including energy efficiency)

- Campus electric substation (2003)
- Utility saving performance contracts (2005)
- Stormwater Management Program/Stormwater Retention Ponds (ongoing EPA regulatory requirement)
- Oakland Center and Residence Halls energy-saving technology installations (ongoing)
- Facilities Management Building recommissioning Program (2008 - present)
- OU-DTE Outdoor Lighting Pilot Program (2011)
- Vandenburg Hall and Hamlin Hall: Replacement of windows with energy efficiency windows (2010 and 2011)
- Hannah Hall of Science (HHS) lab exhaust system improvement (2011)
- Utilities sub-metering for campus buildings (2011)
- Facilities Management energy-deferred plant renewal projects (ongoing)

Clean Energy

In addition to operational efficiency and internal expertise, external relations have contributed to OU’s alternative energy agenda. As I elaborated upon in 4.4 University Culture, the University shares a close relationship with the surrounding community. Subsequently, it is careful to include the insight of community leadership in its strategic planning.

In 2011, the University hosted a “Creating the Future” summit. The conference drew over 400 prominent alumni and community and business leaders, engaging them to generate short- and long-term strategies for OU to continue to assert itself as an academic leader and valuable community asset. On multiple occasions, the crowd described “Energy,” as well as “Innovation,” as burgeoning community needs – and prospective niches that OU could fill.49

Taking its cue from these and other external partners, OU has leveraged its internal strengths in engineering, business, alternative energy research, and organizational and operational efficiency to build

49 Personal observation, 1 April 2011.
an impressive energy portfolio. These efforts have culminated in the 2011 addition of a professional Energy Management Certificate Program and Clean Energy Research Center, a subsector of OU’s SmartZone Business Incubator. 50

**Notable OU Clean Energy Initiatives**

- Photovoltaic solar electric roof (University Student Apartments Community Building) (2003)
- Energy Management website and alternative energy proposals (ongoing)
- Human Health Building (HHB) clean energy and energy efficiency technology (2010)
- Clean Energy Research Center (2011)
- CERC Biomass Boiler (2012)
- Engineering Center Microturbine (2014)
- Clean Energy Initiatives (ongoing)

**Grassroots Efforts**

Administrators, students, faculty and staff involved with grassroots efforts, meanwhile, have worked independently and collaboratively to integrate sustainability and environmental conscience into OU’s campus culture. These individuals have been creative, passionate, and persistent, building most of the University’s major sustainability projects from the ground up – through rallying student or staff support, identifying independent sources of funding, experimenting with new technology, and collaborating with other interested advocates across campus.

According to one faculty member, organized students have managed, more than any other advocates, to advance sustainability on campus, “whereas faculty requests [to the administration] had long fallen on deaf ears.” Through the work of the OU Environmental Coalition (OUEC), founded in 2007, the University recycling program was greatly expanded in every building on campus, from the residence halls to the Recreation Center.

Two years later, the co-founder of the OUEC, Avery Neale, partnered with Department of Housing Maintenance Manager Frank Moss to begin the Sustaining Our Planet Earth (S.O.P.E.) student employment program. Since its inception, S.O.P.E. has substantially increased sustainability and recycling education within the residence halls, where little knowledge of the topic had previously existed or been disseminated, and facilitated the creation of an environmentally focused Living and Learning Community in Vandenburg Hall.

A number of faculty members, too, have enacted courses to forward campus sustainability from the bottom up. In addition to those classes regularly offered within the College of Arts and Science’s Environmental Science program, a handful of courses hosted across the disciplines over the past decade have focused on sustainability topics. These include:

- Environmental Philosophy (PHL 300)
- The Ecology of Urban Systems (HC 208)

“[S.O.P.E.] had an Earth Day event last year - Earth Day at OU. Those were two pretty successful programs, and we had them in the OC. A lot of people stopped by.

“We had the Environmental Society and the Student Organic Farmers there - they were still pretty small then. They’ve been coming to a lot of our events, just to try to work with us, so people see that there’s multiple groups.”

~ OU Student


51 Faculty1.
Overview of Oakland University

- Sustainability Science (HC 208)
- Permaculture (BIO 481)
- Integrating Beekeeping Across the Curriculum (EST 643)
- Imaging a Shattering World: Art, Public Health, and the Environmental Debate (HC 201)

The latter Honors College course was held concurrently with the College of Arts and Science’s 2005-06 liberal arts theme, Environmental Explorations. Throughout the year, the College fostered “an awareness of the biological, social, and cultural conditions that influence our world and shape our environment.”

The year included a prominent Environmental Quality Forum featuring leading environmental philosophy scholars. It culminated in an environmental photography exhibit at the Meadow Brook Art Gallery entitled, Imaging a Shattering Earth: Contemporary Photography and the Environmental Debate. The exhibit featured 56 testimonies from well-known photographers.

Within the past four years, grassroots efforts have additionally resulted in an increasingly popular and highly visible Bike Share program, campus urban garden, biodegradable materials in cafeterias, a sustainability-driven Oakland Center, and a “Bear Bus” shuttle system.

**Notable OU Grassroots Initiatives**

- OU Environmental Coalition (2007)
- Expanded Campus Recycling Program (2007 – present)
- Sustaining Our Planet Earth (2008)
- Bike Share Program (2008)
- Eco Interest Floor (2009)
- Bear Bus Shuttle System (2009)
- Urban Garden (2010)

**Needs Assessment Results**

5.1 Current Actions

**Ongoing Sustainability Highlights**

**Academic Programs**

The Environmental Science Program is administered by the College of Arts and Sciences. The program offers a Bachelor of Science major, minor, and concentration in Environmental Science, with further specializations available in Occupational Health and Safety, Public Health, Environmental and Resource Management, and Toxic Substance Control.

The Energy Management Certificate Program is administered jointly by the School of Computer Science and Engineering and School of Business Administration. It provides engineering and business professionals with coursework focused on reducing energy costs, boosting bottom line performance,

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53 OU Environmental Science Program website. <www2.oakland.edu/esp/>
commercializing new technology, and conducting industrial energy audits. The curriculum integrates business and engineering concepts, which differentiates the certificate from other energy management programs that tend to focus on either management or engineering, but not both.54

**Bike Share Program and Bear Bus Shuttle System**

The OU Bike Share Program and Bear Bus shuttle system promote clean and healthy transportation.

The Bike Share Program was formed through a cross-departmental oversight council. It is currently managed by the Recreation Center and supervised by student employees. It provides 200 university-owned bikes for student use around campus, contingent upon an honor code.

The Bear Bus shuttle system, managed by the Department of Housing and Oakland University Student Congress, provides a free shuttle service to students to both on- and off-campus locations.

**Clean Energy Research Center (CERC)**

The OU Clean Energy Research Center combines administrative, faculty, student, and community resources and partnerships to forward alternative energy technology and product development. Through leveraging the resources of the Schools of Business and Engineering and Computer Sciences, CERC has additionally positioned itself to provide students with experiential learning opportunities and encourage innovation within the OU and surrounding communities. Major technology developments to date include:55

- A biomass boiler installation
- Biomass combustion
- Liquid biofuel, ethanol, and biodiesel production

**Human Health Building**

The Platinum or Gold LEED-certified Human Health Building should be completed by Fall 2012. It will incorporate a host of infrastructural and operational sustainable and clean energy technology, including a full geothermal heat pump system. This ultra-green technology, funded in part by a Department of Energy grant, serves as the figurative cherry on top of a variety of other sustainable features that should collectively help the construction become the first U.S. Green Building Council LEED Platinum-certified academic building in Michigan.56

**The Oakland Center**

The Oakland Center applies sustainable systems thought to its daily operational decision-making process, and considers the sustainability of each facilities project it undertakes. As a result, it has acquired a reputation for its innovative environmental efficiency and conservation projects. Over the past decade, it has implemented many initiatives, including:

- Increasing its own infrastructural and energy efficiency;
- Testing new sustainable products and technology like a cardboardailer and InterFace glue-free carpet tiles;
- Utilizing green cleaning products;
- Expanding the Oakland Center recycling program.

Its popular Hydration Station water bottle refill technology has spread to other buildings on campus, including North Foundation Hall and the Recreation Center.

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54"OU INC: Accelerating Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Talent." Butler, Amy. Powerpoint Presentation given at the Oakland County Green Summit on 10-16-11

55 Id.

56 See the [Catalog of Environmental Initiatives](#) for a more comprehensive listing of the Human Health Building’s sustainable projects.
Operational Efficiency and Energy Conservation Effects

As I discussed in 4.5 *Historical environmental involvement and progress toward sustainability*, OU administration and Facilities Management have focused on energy efficiency and clean energy. OU’s Facilities Management teams consistently work to increase operational resource conservation and efficiency within current infrastructural boundaries and limitations, having expressed that the administration allows them to pursue small energy projects on their own to the extent that they have the funding to do so.57

Facilities Management’s energy conservation efforts are not limited to their departmental operations. According to one professor, faculty members “have also been encouraged to leave classrooms locked, with lights out, when they are done, not least for equipment security reasons, but also to save energy.”58

Pawley Lean Institute

The Pawley Lean Institute promotes a philosophy of institutional economic and manufacturing efficiency to streamline production and eliminate waste. To this end, it oversees educational and organizational efficiency instruction programs, and provides endowed professorships, internships, and fellowships.

Sustaining Our Planet Earth (S.O.P.E.) and Eco-Interest Floor

S.O.P.E. wields student and housing resources to cultivate sustainability awareness and education in OU’s residence halls and student apartments. It originally placed S.O.P.E. representatives in the Recreation Center and Oakland Center, but has since scaled down its efforts to target their most receptive audience. Major successes include creating an Eco-Interest Floor on 2 West Vandenburg, hosting a now-annual sustainability conference, and refining the residence hall recycling program.

Urban Garden

The Urban Garden is located at the corner of Adam and Butler Road. A primarily student-driven initiative, the Garden’s faculty advisor is Dr. Fay Hansen. In its two-year existence, the garden has sprouted:

- A student club, Student Organic Farmers
- A campus farm stand
- Community partnerships
- Such associated academic courses as the Biology of Food, Fundamentals of Organic Farming in the Urban Setting, and Permaculture.

The farm was recently awarded a $25,000 STEM (Science, Technology Engineering, and Mathematics) service-learning grant through the Midwest Compact Consortium and National Science Foundation. The grant supported the development of service-learning opportunities and facilitated external academic and nonprofit partnerships with:

- Lawrence Technological University architectural students to design, renovate, and preserve garden structures.
- the Michigan Young Farmers Association, and
- the Baldwin Center, to outreach to the Pontiac School District.

Some individuals involved with the garden area have dubbed it, “The Sustainability and Creativity Zone.”

*See Appendix I* for a complete list of OU’s ongoing sustainability projects and links to their online sources.
5.2 Oakland University Sustainability S.W.O.T.

I conducted a S.W.O.T. (Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats, and Opportunities) analysis to provide a calculated perspective on sustainability at OU. The analysis is based upon:

- Oakland University culture
- Current sustainability projects and emerging foci
- Local, state, and national sustainability trends
- Information gathered from interviews and additional correspondence
- The University’s historical sustainability involvement

As a growing university in a prosperous location, OU possesses a variety of strengths that it can, and in some cases has, leveraged to expand its sustainability practices and projects.

As I will next describe in detail, the University’s sustainability strengths include its operational and financial efficiency, clean energy research, education, and funding; relationships with surrounding communities; grassroots efforts of a committed few; and a largely untapped campus sustainability culture that should allow it to make small but meaningful gains quickly.

Capitalizing on these strengths—in addition to addressing internal structural, coordination and communication issues—will substantially improve OU’s long-term chances of successfully creating a useful and dynamic culture of sustainability that augments both the caliber and pertinence of the university’s efforts to this end.

Figure 3, on the following page, shows OU’s full sustainability S.W.O.T. results.
**Figure 3: Oakland University Sustainability S.W.O.T. Analysis.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Facilities Management energy savings projects and initiatives.</td>
<td>- Leadership turnover of the committed few – no permanent sustainability framework in place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Clean energy research, education, partnerships and funding.</td>
<td>- Scattered sustainability efforts and lack of coordination.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Internal “lean operations,” including energy efficiency.</td>
<td>- Poor horizontal and vertical communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- OU’s relationships (partnerships and alliances) with the local community.</td>
<td>- Dearth of resources available to support non-energy related green projects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Potential LEED minimum standard for all new buildings.</td>
<td>- Lack of decision-making inclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Impassioned grassroots efforts of limited but committed students, staff, faculty and administration.</td>
<td>- Dispersed sustainability efforts and lack of coordination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Online and satellite courses expansion to eliminate unnecessary transportation.</td>
<td>- Lack of learning opportunities and training for involved or interested students, staff, faculty and administrators.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Operational cost savings through expanded sustainability and energy conservation efforts and behavioral change education.</td>
<td>- Lack of transparency and inclusion, and some administrative resistance to ideas presented from university community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sustainability as an ideal vehicle to facilitate innovation and expand high-quality experiential learning opportunities.</td>
<td>- The strength of institutional sustainability at hundreds of higher education institutions that have already developed sustainability programs and plans can outshadow OU.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Increased opportunities to engage the private sector.</td>
<td>- Designing a sustainability structure with too narrow a focus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Low-hanging fruit can result in quick gains.</td>
<td>- Lack of prioritization by current university donors, external stakeholders, trustees, and others who provide external leadership and funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A community open to learning more.</td>
<td>- Global environmental changes and challenges may happen quickly, and universities sometimes move at a glacial pace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Increase positive university marketing and reputation.</td>
<td>- New sources of funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Growing “green” student market in higher education can attract prospective students interested in sustainability.</td>
<td>- Growing “green” student market in higher education can attract prospective students interested in sustainability.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Discussion

6.1 OU's S.W.O.T. Results

In the subsequent sections, I have explained in greater detail only those strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that were not already addressed in Sections 4.5 and 5.1.

Strengths

USGBC membership and potential LEED minimum standard for all new buildings:

Since 2011, the University has been a member of the U.S. Green Building Council. An impending USGBC LEED Platinum rating on its soon-to-be-completed Human Health Building has additionally raised the bar for on-campus construction and design, and, according to one administrator, has set a precedent for a minimum LEED rating for all future university building projects. Architectural plans for the University's new Engineering Center have the building set at LEED Gold.

Expanding online course offerings and satellite branches could eliminate unnecessary transportation emissions and decrease other resource use:

With over 15,000 commuting students, in addition to faculty and staff, OU’s collective carbon footprint due to transportation alone is large. Through expanding its online course offerings and opening a satellite in Macomb Country to serve these students, OU has lessened its resource usage.

Weaknesses

Dispersed sustainability efforts and lack of coordination:

OU currently has no central structure, individual, or governing body to direct campus-wide sustainability efforts. Instead, specific campus sustainability projects are directed by and through different individuals across a number of departments and management levels. In contrast, the entirety of these projects would be centralized beneath the umbrella of a single organizing entity at institutions with sustainability management structures.

Everyone, from the university’s uppermost leadership to lower-level staff, described sustainability at OU as “disconnected” and “scattered.” To help visualize this lack of coordination, I created a chart of the individuals managing some of OU’s operational sustainability projects. Rather than having a clear reporting hierarchy, Figure 4 shows six very distinct managers of sustainability projects, including similar projects.

For example, four of OU’s six primary recycling coordinators fall within this chart (Jeff Boeberitz, Constance Jones, Jeff VanBuskirk, and Frank Moss/Sustaining Our Planet Earth), but only two of them are in direct communication and collaboration (Constance Jones and Jeff Boeberitz).

Because those sustainability initiatives that do exist are often scattered and lack institutional focus, OU has missed a number of opportunities for:

- Cross-sectoral collaboration;
- Program enhancement;
- Additional learning opportunities that would come through a

Spotlight On: Coordination Challenges

The campus’s only University-run environmental sustainability organization, Sustaining Our Planet Earth, is based out of the Department of Housing’s Maintenance Office, consists of 4 - 5 undergraduate students, and is supervised by another undergraduate working half-time for $8 per hour (2010 salary).

S.O.P.E.’s original student creator had hoped that this sustainability peer outreach program would be able to serve the entire campus; this small operation has since had to scale down its efforts to focus on the nine percent of University students who live in the residence halls.
more clearly defined and publicized sustainability program;
- Reduced operational costs through streamlining ongoing cross-campus projects like recycling;
- Encouraging students to further innovative ideas for campus sustainability projects through creating a clear structure or manager with whom they can communicate directly.

**Figure 4: A snapshot of OU operational sustainability organization.**
Says a student sustainability leader,

“I think the hardest part for us is that there’s no one place to go when we have these ideas; there’s not this approval committee. It’s like, you have to do a little here, a little here - it’s all scattered.” — OU Student

**Spotlight On: Recycling at OU – From Managerial Multi-Stream to Single Stream**

One case that well illustrates the fragmented nature of similar sustainability projects at OU – as well as how it can be overcome - is the University’s *campus-wide recycling program*, the management of which I have depicted in Figure 5.

Though united by a common single-stream recycling contract, **six individuals separately oversee** and manage unconnected staffs involved in recycling efforts across campus. Historically, little conversation or collaboration has occurred between these individuals, and discussions and decisions about future recycling practices and contracts have not always included all six primary stakeholders.

In this case, however, chaos inspired collaboration. Acknowledging the splintered nature of the program, **Constance Jones**, Manager of Custodial and Grounds, **convened a Recycling Committee** in Fall 2011 to unify efforts and augment communication. The Committee, which includes these six individuals and several interested others, is hopeful it will be able to not only exchange ideas about recycling, but discuss on-campus sustainability as well.

![Figure 5: Oakland University Recycling Organization](image)

*Figure 5: Oakland University Recycling Organization*: Key management individuals, associated staff members involved with recycling container pick-up and redistribution, and percentage of the comprehensive University recycling program each individual oversees.
**Poor horizontal and vertical communication and collaboration:**

Sustainability is a broadly interdisciplinary topic that often requires much collaboration vertically and horizontally: across departments, fields, staff levels, and student year and focus. A marked lack of communication and collaboration between different campus sustainability champions and innovators exists on several levels:

**Vertically**

This category primarily concerns communication between those individuals directly involved with sustainability projects and the individuals who manage them, as well as communication with upper level management in different departments. Though some collaboration between and across the different levels of the managerial hierarchy has taken place, a line of consistent communication between grassroots student, faculty and staff project managers and upper-level administration, sustainability gatekeepers, and other decision-makers is often limited and can be unproductive (See “Threats.”).

**Within the Community**

Grassroots/institutional sustainability programs are only minimally communicated to the broader campus community, whether in the form of a central sustainability website, simple advertising or marketing.

For example, as I was collecting my research, I spoke with a staff member who works within the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, which is responsible for developing OU’s list of official academic peers. The staff member had stumbled across several sustainability ranking indexes and had noticed OU was not ranked. Only aware that the Human Health Building would be eco-friendly, the staff member was curious if other sustainability projects were ongoing, and asked, “Is OU doing more than that?”

As the OU Catalog of Environmental Initiatives shows, OU certainly is! But if OU’s own institutional experts aren’t aware of these projects, it’s infinitely less likely that other members of the OU and external community can easily find this information as well.

**No permanent sustainability framework and leadership turnover:**

Transforming an institution from one that does not prioritize overall sustainability to one that has integrated it into campus culture can be a long process. Student, faculty, administration and staff sustainability “champions” will eventually be replaced, graduate, or move on. When they do, they may or may not have rising champions to replace them.

According to one administrator, students come and go, but a central person or position is needed who can consistently hold accountability to different projects, therefore maintaining momentum over time. Said another administrator,

> “It’s a haphazard commitment from the point of view of the students, and it all depends on who is at the core and who is in the leadership position in the student body, as well as in the administrative positions at Oakland. So, over the years, I’ve seen a very uneven approach to [campus sustainability].” —OU Administrator

Leadership turnover has often translated to a loss of momentum and programs that has marked the end of many originally powerful sustainability initiatives.

For example, the Oakland University Environmental Coalition was a strong student environmental
organization that, during its brief two-year existence, catalyzed widespread recycling growth across campus. Once its passionate and efficient founding members graduated, however, it lingered for only one more year before disbanding entirely.

Even those organizations that do have temporary leadership structures in place, like Sustaining Our Planet Earth, often experience regular program transformation that could lead to an “uneven approach” to sustainability. In S.O.P.E., a supervisory change, which occurs annually or biennially, often coupled with quite substantial organizational changes based upon the new supervisor’s stylistic preferences and personal sustainability interests.

Institutionalizing permanent policies, programs, and practices can help to protect against the inevitable turnover of leaders and leadership.

**Lack of Learning Opportunities and Training:**

The University does not facilitate interdisciplinary, campus-wide sustainability education, particularly for those students and staff who are not very knowledgeable on the topic. OU’s on-campus operating partners, its auxiliaries, would like to see more university-hosted education so they can be empowered to make sustainable operational improvements within their own facilities.

Said an administrator within one auxiliary,

> “The one thing I’d like to learn more about is the LEED program for existing buildings. I don’t know enough about that. I think something like that would need to be directed by [OU’s] Facilities Department. If there was a program whereby they could educate us, and the auxiliaries could understand what might be out there - things that we could slowly contribute toward to try to get that [Existing Buildings LEED] certification - I think it would be a wonderful thing to try to be able to do.

> “What we really need is Facilities [Management] to embrace all of this. If they start to roll out a program, then I think a lot of the auxiliaries would get on board.”

> – OU Administrator

**Scope 3 Emissions:**

Scope 3 greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are indirect emissions, including those released from vehicles and other forms of transportation that the institution does not directly own or operate. As a result, Scope 3 emissions are particularly problematic for commuter schools, particularly one with OU’s considerable population. According to the ACUPCC reporting system, which has aggregated GHG emissions information from over 1500 higher education institutions:

- At Doctorate-granting universities, commuting accounts for approximately 12.9% of average net GHG emissions.
- At Associate’s and Tribal colleges, which tend to have a larger commuter base, Scope 3 emissions account for 53.8% of average institutional net GHG emissions.

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Though OU does not yet possess a GHG emissions inventory, I expect the University’s carbon footprint from these emissions will be much greater than that from primarily residential institutions. As a personal anecdote, a plethora of parking spaces to accommodate a massive commuter base can also result in many students who choose to drive, rather than walk, across campus to get to class.

### Opportunities

OU has many opportunities to expand, develop, and incorporate sustainability into University practices. These opportunities are important to note because many correspond with the University’s key institutional priorities and needs.

**Sustainability as an ideal vehicle to facilitate innovation and expand high-quality experiential learning opportunities:**

By its popular three-pronged (environmental, social, and economic) definition alone, sustainability is an inherently interdisciplinary topic with real-world applicability. The complex, real-world problems that surround sustainable resource management and societal function are vast and often case specific. Due to the interconnectedness of the sustainability challenges, these challenges additionally require holistic, systems thinking to address them.

For example, to create a more sustainable dining program, one must consider:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How the food was grown...</th>
<th>Agricultural practices and fertilizer use; free-range protein sources versus those from Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where it was grown...</td>
<td>Locally, regionally, nationally, or internationally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How it was transported...</td>
<td>The energy involved with transporting the food across the country versus delivering it from a nearby farm or growing it on site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who grew it...</td>
<td>Small-scale, local farmers versus larger agricultural corporations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to compensate those individuals fairly...</td>
<td>Possible Fair Trade - certified purchases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But still maintain an affordable dining experience for the average consumer.</td>
<td>Vegan and vegetarian options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What will become of any leftover food and packaging...</td>
<td>Composting, donating, recycling, and overall waste management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to convey that information to consumers...</td>
<td>To inform their eating choices and habits, and to decrease overall waste.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This systemic thought process can be extrapolated to virtually any career field. Sustainability, then, presents an ideal vehicle to increase the quality and practical applicability of the OU student experience. Integrating sustainability principles into the curriculum can foster additional opportunities for critical thinking within the student body.

Building sustainability into the curriculum can also open opportunities for experiential and service learning through client projects with community and on-campus partners. These projects both benefit society and

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foster service-oriented students who will appreciate the opportunity to augment the caliber of their pre-graduate professional experiences and résumés.

*Increased opportunities to engage the private and public sectors:*  
As evidenced by April 2011’s *Creating the Future II*, the private and public sectors in Southeastern Michigan and nationally are showing clear interest in clean energy, sustainable technology and innovation.  

Through the OU Incubator, CERC stands poised – and has already begun - to outreach to an innovative and growing adjacent sustainable business community. These partnerships can increase opportunities for developing cutting-edge green technology at OU, cultivate student learning experiences and internships, and foster fiscal support and in-kind donations.

Additionally, Amy Butler, the Center’s Director, has actively participated in the Tri-City Sustainability Planning effort, chairing a green buildings, waste, and energy workgroup; VP for Government Relations Rochelle Black has hosted a workgroup on economy and education. OU INC and CERC continue to investigate community collaboration opportunities, which will only grow over time as the need for sustainable development increases.

CERC is not the only entity within OU that is positioned to directly engage the sustainable business community; OU’s Purchasing Department and Facilities Management teams generally consider innovative companies, products and technology when identifying, for example, environmentally-friendly cleaning products to incorporate into daily campus operations.

*Boosted positive University press, marketing and reputation:*  
Whether through social equity, environmental integrity, or economic efficiency, sustainability efforts are becoming more prominent in progressive society. Institutions that display they are taking “green” measures are often labeled as “innovative,” “environmentally conscious,” and in general looked on more favorably. By capitalizing on and publicizing its own sustainability projects, OU can only boost its marketing and institutional image as a responsible global citizen.

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**Leveraging OU’s Academic Strengths**

In the *Pawley Lean Learning Institute* and *Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives*, OU has already created excellent education facilities for economic and social sustainability. The University now has a large opportunity to extend these threads of thought to environmental sustainability as well.

*School of Engineering* students, for example, can partner with *Facilities Management* and the *Clean Energy Research Center* to develop or learn about energy conservation projects and retrofits within current university buildings.

*School of Medicine* students can study the growing connection between environmental sustainability and public health.

The University can capitalize on the community associations the current *Office of Academic Service Learning* has already created to add an emphasis on sustainability outreach and service.

Also present is the unique opportunity to develop the curriculum of OU’s *School of Education and Human Services* to prepare tomorrow’s elementary and secondary education teachers to educate the community’s youth about sustainability.

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63 Personal observation, 1 April 2011.  
A community open to learning more.

General sustainability efforts are presently limited the efforts of sustainability crusaders forming only a small of the overall community. However, many students, faculty, staff and administration who do not have a high environmental literacy rate are open to learning about it, should proper outreach and education vehicles be put in place.

One student sustainability leader noted,

“I don’t think it’s necessarily that students aren’t interested, it’s just that they don’t hear about it or really think there’s anything to do. People still care. Most student who stop by or come to the [SOPE] programs say, ‘Oh, this is cool - I can reuse things.’

“If there were more programs or awareness - educational programs about it - people might start getting more interested in it, or students might start realizing that you can change. Maybe students might be for more sustainable efforts on campus, but they might not know it’s possible.” – OU Student

An administrator agreed, saying,

“I think people, when they would understand what it’s about, would absolutely embrace it, because you see it happening all around us. I think it’s more of communication, education, and then ultimately leadership commitment.”

– OU Administrator

New Sources of Funding:

Institutionalizing and augmenting campus sustainability can open entirely new financial opportunities and resources to which the University would not have access without doing so. These funding sources range
from federal and private grants that support sustainability programs and projects to alumni who were involved with sustainability projects as students and other donors with a strong sustainability ethic (See Part II: 2.8 Provide The Resources To Support the University’s Strategic Objectives).

These grants and donations will undoubtedly play a major role in building OU’s sustainability structure and educational programs, and securing products that will enhance the quality and efficiency of the University and its operations. Indeed, they may be a primary funding source for the prioritized projects OU identifies during future sustainability strategic planning.

**Low-hanging fruit will result in quick gains:**

An institution that strategically begins a campus-wide sustainability program with projects that pick “low-hanging fruit” will be able to see the fruits of its labor quite quickly.

At OU, this means that even low-cost improvements in any number of sectors can translate to noticeable results: Installing more automatic lighting, improved temperature controls, and additional resource-saving technology, for example, or adding behavioral-change energy education programs and resource reduction competitions. Many of these projects generally encompass daily practices at OU Operations, but more opportunities could be investigated.

**Threats**

**No formal institutional buy-in:**

Historically, OU trustees and administration have shown little interest in developing an overarching sustainability program or strategies. This lack of commitment to sustainable practices and policies from the top has translated to a variety of issues on the ground (discussed in Weaknesses).

Says a student sustainability leader,

> “We can do little things, little changes. But the hardest thing about us growing is that at a certain point, we need something wider and far reaching. We can’t really make changes happen on our own. We need the support of faculty and staff.

> “A lot of schools have a green office or an environmental sustainability committee that’s in charge of making these. At Oakland, all the departments are sort of isolated - there isn’t a cohesive body that says, ‘Okay, let’s meet and talk about this.’”

A university administrator shared a similar frustration:

> “If we had somebody on board at the University in which a part of their position was to organize some of these initiatives and roll them out campus-wide, I think it would have the greatest impact.” – OU Administrator

From my interactions and research, it is clear that most if not all OU administrators are aware, at varying levels of recognition, of the value of sustainability. A recent Facilities Management presentation on sustainability presents many ways in which “OU leadership and management encourage environmental stewardship and sustainability at all OU’s campuses.”

Yet, despite assorted and occasionally extensive University projects conducted over the past decade that

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have promoted sustainability, an entire academic year within the College of Arts and Sciences dedicated to the liberal arts theme *Environmental Explorations*, and increasing student interest and support, no major institutional commitment to sustainability has been made.

This may stem from a skewed perspective that sufficient sustainability coordination and oversight is already occurring, which, as was seen in Figure 4, is simply not the case.

**Spotlight on: Student Support - Is It Enough?**

“Oakland University's *transition to green energy* would *signal to the community* that OU is at the forefront of clean energy technology. It would *set OU apart* from other public universities in Michigan as a leader in green energy and green initiatives, thus *attracting students* and *enhancing the OU degree*. This would also provide a *key academic tool* for our engineering department’s expansion and our current and prospective students seeking employment in the growing clean energy field. [...] *It is important to the Student Body* that the University invests in green energy products for the future sustainability of the university and region.”

- *Oakland University Student Congress* letter of support toward (unsuccessful) *Wind Turbine Proposal*, 13 June 2011

**Signatories:** Student Body President and Vice President, Student Services Director, Sustaining Our Planet Earth Supervisor, Residence Halls Association President, and (2) Student Liaisons to the Board of Trustees

**Lack of transparency and inclusion, and some administrative resistance to ideas presented from the University community:**

Those individuals who do attempt to propose new campus sustainability projects have sometimes met “idea blocking” administrative challenges. When students raised money for and presented a plan to install “Eco Islands” in Bear Lake that would utilize algae to improve the lake’s water system health, Facilities Management dismissed the idea without much explanation to them of why.

Regardless of whether the installation of Eco Islands was a feasible project, this type of response to idea propagation can discourage overall community creativity and innovation, and can foster feelings of exclusion and isolation, rather than collaboration.

A community member told me,

> “Certain people’s opinions here are sometimes not appreciated, not wanted, because of their rank. Everybody has good ideas. And even if it’s a bad idea, at least give them a chance to express it. You have to know as many strategies to support your idea as possible.”

The campus community also expressed concern about a lack of transparency and sufficient record keeping. In another example, Facilities Management could provide the Department of Housing with records of residence hall monthly energy consumption for a dormitory energy reduction competition.

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68 Student3
With a baseline, the competition - and the potential for significant costs and energy savings, not to mention student education about the importance of resource conservation – could be achieved.

**The Strength of Competitive Programs:**

Hundreds of higher education institutions have already developed institutionalized sustainability programs and plans. In the growing market of “green” college shopping, the power, reach, and stability of these well-established sustainability programs, which only comes with time, experimentation, institutional commitment, and practice, can pose a challenge to and outshadow OU’s fledging efforts. This threat, however, can also be an opportunity: OU can build on the experiences of its peers and gain insight from the lessons these institutions have learned through direct experience.

**Designing a sustainability structure with too narrow a focus:**

OU currently focuses the majority of its sustainability efforts on alternative energy, energy savings initiatives and projects, and overall efficiency. While this sector may certainly be an institutional niche, those institutions that have most often successfully cultivated a long-term culture of sustainability possess a wider breadth of policies, operations and programs that focus on a broad, holistic view of sustainability.69

OU should not lose sight of this concept when it considers the type, location, and focus of the sustainability management structure it would like to create. Materials and energy efficiency alone does not necessarily imply a comprehensive sustainability program; governance and administration, community service and outreach, curriculum, and research also contribute significantly toward institutional sustainability.

**Global Environmental Changes and Challenges:**

Climate change, population growth, and resource depletion and degradation are real and will present with them a host of challenges for the University community in future decades. Though I have indicated these changes will be “global,” they will and in many cases already have manifested themselves at local and regional scales. In Southeastern Michigan, this could mean:70,71

- A greater or lesser amount of precipitation
- A more temperate climate
- Increased runoff from growing urban centers
- Lake and groundwater pollution and elevated algal abundance
- Rising food, energy and transportation costs
- Dependence on automobile industry that may have to significantly shift manufacturing practices to address the rising cost of fuel.
- Displacement of native species with invasive species

This list is not all-inclusive, and available science cannot indicate with certainty whether these changes will happen gradually or quickly. Should the latter occur, universities that tend to move and adapt more slowly may have difficulty keeping pace.

Given this, it would benefit OU to have plans in place to meet these environmental threats. Through facilitating dialog amongst its employees and students about and developing ideas for environmental

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69 Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) website. <www.aashe.org>
70 Climate Change Database. United State Environmental Protection Agency. <www.epa.gov/climatechange/>
change adaptation and mitigation, OU can also build its own internal capacity for change.

6.2 Oakland University’s Sustainability in Context

To provide comparative perspective, I have juxtaposed OU’s sustainability efforts with its seven official peer institutions (See Table 2 for a complete list) and with the other public Michigan universities. University leadership has indicated a comparison of OU to its peer institutions would be helpful. While OU is in the process of updating its official peer institution list, its historical peers share similar external circumstances, internal characteristics, and program elements.

With Peer Institutions

Oakland University does not show the same level of institutionalized commitment to sustainability as the majority of its peer institutions.

The graph in Figure 6 shows the primary sustainability management devices that OU’s peer institutions have utilized; OU does not indicate it has implemented any of the tactics listed. In comparing sustainability structures and implementation devices between these universities, it is useful to note that:

- 100% (7/7) possess an institutional sustainability website.
- 86% (6/7) have developed institution-wide sustainability management structures: Four have councils; 2 have sustainability officer positions. The one university not included (University of Missouri: St. Louis) has implemented a general campus sustainability initiative with unclear organized leadership.
- These organizational structures have been placed in a variety of institutional locations ranging from the Office of the President (3/7) to the College of Engineering (1/7).
- Only 43% (3/7) have signed a formal sustainability commitment (ACUPCC – 2; Talloires Declaration – 1). These institutions have also instated the most rigorous and pervasive sustainability oversight structures and are the only three institutions with governing bodies that report directly to the president.
- Of the institutions that are not signatories to formal agreements, 25% (3/4) have still developed guiding documents (mission and vision statements, core values, or strategic plans) and assessments that incorporate and review campus sustainability.

Though none of its peers have yet completed a sustainability action plan, the University of Nevada – Las Vegas has indicated that its STARS Assessment, which it completed in 2011, will act as a roadmap for developing a comprehensive University Sustainability Action Plan. UNLV received a Silver STARS rating.

The graph in Figure 7 shows the primary sustainability concentration areas of OU’s peer institutions. I have highlighted those subjects that, given OU’s past institutional activities and prioritization, may be emergent focal areas at the University.

In comparing sustainability focus areas between OU’s peer institutions, it is useful to note that energy, recycling, resource use and conservation, and academics and experiential learning are the most popular trends between universities, with 86% (6/7) indicating each is a key sustainable development priority. As can be seen in Figure 7, OU has, given its past and ongoing actions, unofficially prioritized the first three of these four trends.

OU’s Facilities Management, in particular, has focused on Energy, Recycling, Parking and Transportation, Facilities and Maintenance, Built Environment, Waste Management, and other areas.

**Figure 6**: The sustainability management devices used at OU’s peer institutions. *Denotes in development.
Figure 7: The primary sustainability focal areas at OU’s peer institutions. OU’s potential focal areas based on historical and current activities are highlighted in dark brown.

In 2009, Wright State University established an engineering Masters degree in Renewable and Clean Energy; it was the first institution in the State of Ohio to offer this specific degree. The University has seen steady interest in the degree since its installment. Given OU’s involvement with and internal expertise in clean energy and engineering, this may be an interesting academic expansion to consider.

Table 2 provides a more detailed look at each peer institution’s sustainability program.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer Institution</th>
<th>Guiding Documents</th>
<th>Institutional Sustainability Organization?</th>
<th>Institutional Location</th>
<th>Governing Body?</th>
<th>Public Commitment</th>
<th>Central Sustainability Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wright State University</td>
<td>Sustainability is in core values; University Strategic Plan; Strategic Energy Efficiency Plan</td>
<td>Office of Sustainability</td>
<td>Office of the President</td>
<td>Director/ Associate Director</td>
<td>Talloires Declaration</td>
<td><a href="#">Wright State Sustainability</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wichita State University</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Industrial Sustainability Initiative</td>
<td>College of Engineering</td>
<td>Board of Sustainability</td>
<td>No</td>
<td><a href="#">Industrial Sustainability Initiative website</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Nevada: Las Vegas</td>
<td>Sustainability and Energy Efficiency Policy; CAP; LEED Policy</td>
<td>Urban Sustainability Initiative</td>
<td>Council reports to Office of the President; Coordinator to Division of Finance and Business</td>
<td>Sustainability Council; Campus Sustainability Coordinator</td>
<td>ACUPCC</td>
<td><a href="#">Sustainability Policy</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Akron</td>
<td>“Blue, Gold and Green” Initiative</td>
<td>“Blue, Gold and Green” Initiative</td>
<td>Facilities Management (Director of Capital Planning)</td>
<td>University-wide Committee</td>
<td>No</td>
<td><a href="#">Akron’s Blue, Gold and Green Initiative</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland State University</td>
<td>Mission and Vision statements; Energy Master Plan; Campus Master Plan; LEED Policy</td>
<td>Campus Sustainability Coalition</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>8 members with no obvious chair; 5 working groups with chairs and co-chairs</td>
<td>No</td>
<td><a href="#">CSU Sustainability Website</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana State University</td>
<td>Climate Action Plan</td>
<td>President’s Council on Sustainability; supported by 6 working groups to support CAP formation.</td>
<td>Reports to President</td>
<td>Council includes the President, Provost, Vice President for Enrollment Management, Marketing and Communications, and Vice President for Business Affairs and Finance.</td>
<td>ACUPCC</td>
<td><a href="#">Indiana State Sustainability website</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Missouri: St. Louis</td>
<td>Campus Master Plan; GHG emissions review and Environmental Impact Assessment</td>
<td>“Green Campus Initiative”</td>
<td>Environmental Health and Safety Department</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td><a href="#">UMSL Green Campus Initiative website</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakland University</td>
<td>Energy Efficiency Policies</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: A comparison of sustainability oversight at OU’s peer institutions.
With State and Nationwide Trends

As I discussed in Sustainability in Higher Education, many prospective students have begun to incorporate college sustainability practices into their decision when choosing their undergraduate institution. Nearly every major public university in Michigan has committed to and developed comprehensive environmental action policies, campus sustainability offices, or full-time campus environmental leadership.

OU’s divergence may be due simply to differing priorities; since its 1959 inception, OU has been committed to the health sciences, engineering, business administration, and education, not environmental sustainability research. But as such rival higher education facilities as the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Wayne State University, and Central Michigan University have institutionally acknowledged the threat of global environmental change and the crucial role that their college campuses can play in sustainable leadership, OU’s uncoordinated sustainability efforts risk leaving it high and dry.

Developing a stronger culture of sustainability at OU will unquestionably increase the University’s competitive advantage within the State amongst neighboring higher education institutions that have identified environmental leadership as an institutional priority.

Conclusions

With its many current lean/efficient practices in hand, Oakland University has the considerable potential to capitalize upon its strengths and improve upon its weaknesses to expand and/or unite its sustainability leadership across campus and within the community.

A lack of coordination, common vision, institutional buy-in, communications, and resources, however, keep OU’s sustainability projects from accruing the full benefits of a fully functioning campus sustainability program.

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75 University of Michigan Sustainability website. (2011) <www.sustainability.umich.edu>

76 Michigan State University Sustainability website (2010). <sustainability.msu.edu>


78 Sustainability at CMU website. Central Michigan University. <www.purchasing.cmich.edu/CampusSustainability/Overview.htm>
PART II:

Framework for a Sustainability Strategic Plan

Tawnee Milko
Duke University
Nicholas School of the Environment

April 27, 2012
Within Part II, I provide a framework that Oakland University can reference should it choose to develop a comprehensive, culture-specific sustainability strategic plan. In light of OU’s specific University mission, goals, opportunities, and challenges, I have identified several strategies to help the University prioritize its strategic planning interventions while considering financial and staffing resource constraints.

These strategies, based upon needs perceived in my qualitative sustainability assessment, are meant to give guidance for the University’s sustainability strategic planning process. In some cases, they indicate areas in which current sustainability initiatives can grow, and identify potential opportunities for future collaboration between and partnerships with departments, operations, and the local community.

I have tailored these suggestions to the specific culture of the OU community - those options that most strongly align with OU’s institutional strengths, mission and priorities, participatory culture, large commuter population, and budgetary constraints.

I have also provided useful examples of environmentally responsible options implemented by best practice institutions and universities comparable to OU in terms of size, culture, and financial means using resources provided by AASHE, ACUPCC, and university sustainability officers and websites.

### Building Oakland University’s Sustainability Strategic Plan

“*The first thing is to mobilize people about the topic and form a development of a strategic plan. Within the context of that plan is to prioritize some movement. And to do that, you prioritize it in a way that can be achieved quickly, and there can be some quick successes. Now, if those are all done, the next step is easy: to institutionalize it.*” – OU Administrator

#### 1.1 Sustainability Strategic Plan Overview

Higher education institutions that value sustainability must, as with all institutional priorities and goals, both strategically envision and actively plan for the role sustainability will play in all facets of University operations and life.

As OU’s Peer Institutions have demonstrated, higher education centers approach the envisioning and planning process differently. Some utilize sustainability strategic plans, sustainability action plans, climate action plans, or Energy Master Plans, while others simply incorporate sustainable principles into the Campus Master Plan or University Strategic Plan.79

Whatever the name and however the delivery, the end result is the same: a guiding document that indicates an institution’s sustainability priorities and the steps necessary to realistically achieve those priorities. Such a plan should be a living document: dynamic, flexible, and constantly changing and evolving as the institution’s needs and situation changes and evolves - and as the field of sustainability itself progresses.

As I indicated in 3.1 Higher Education Sustainability and Environmental Planning, hundreds of higher education institutions, as well as six of OU’s peer institutions, have created such sustainability guiding documents. To maintain a competitive advantage amongst its peers and to capitalize on

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79 Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. Resources on Campus Sustainability Coordination and Planning. 2011b. <http://www.aashe.org/resources/resources-sustainability-coordination-planning>
the opportunities and advantages – to both the institution and to society – that accompany a well-functioning sustainability program, OU would benefit from developing a sustainability guiding document as well.

Per my conversations with Oakland University leadership, I will henceforth refer to this plan as a “sustainability strategic plan.”

1.2 Best Practices

When building sustainability structures, policies, and practices, the most successful higher education institutions have generally shared five common actions:

1. **Customize:** Have carefully considered institutional culture when developing their sustainability strategic plans. If a final plan doesn’t fit the specific needs, context and modus operandi of its respective institution, its likelihood of acceptance by the university community and, as a result, its ultimate success as a comprehensive organization transformation tool is quite low.80, 81

2. **Engage:** Have incorporated feedback from all interested and key stakeholders,82, 83 The rationalization here is that integrating sustainability into all aspects of a university’s campus can only truly be accomplished if the entire campus community has been involved in sustainability planning and education.

3. **Strategize:** Have adopted concrete strategies for methodically addressing sustainability within their institution, and have fostered a “campus culture of sustainability” through policies and plans that describe in detail how their sustainability goals will be achieved.

4. **Implement:** Have provided the resources to implement these plans and show clear administrative support.

5. **Monitor:** Have measured their baselines, set targets, identified benchmarks, and monitor and update these regularly, while facilitating continual opportunities for sustainability-related cross-campus collaboration, communication and information-sharing.84

1.3 Methods and Design

I first considered these principles in designing OU’s sustainability strategic planning framework. I then considered OU’s particular cultural needs.

Six of the eight individuals I formally interviewed specifically stated that they believed OU constituents would prefer to cultivate a culture of sustainability from the bottom up, as opposed to having it inscribed upon them from the top down.

Simultaneously, however, sixteen of the eighteen individuals to whom I posed the question, “Do you think an Office of Sustainability, Sustainability Committee or Sustainability Coordinator would be a helpful resource for OU?”, unequivocally stated the need for a management structure to coordinate campus sustainability.

While a purely top-down approach may not be appropriate for OU’s particular culture, within which

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81 (See Part I: Section 4.4 for a discussion of OU’s institutional culture.)
widespread initiatives often need support from the ground up in order to be well received, a point has plainly been reached where some institutional commitment and structure will go far in ensuring the long-term success of a program that can provide significant value to both the University community and to relevant societal challenges.

In addition to the data I collected in *Part I: A Qualitative Assessment*, I have designed this framework using the following resources:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online AASHE support materials:</th>
<th>Sustainability and climate action planning advising documents, best practice surveys and reports of nationwide higher education sustainability programs, AASHE’s higher education sustainability programs self-documenting system, AASHE STARS, Sustainability Coordinator forums and discussion threads.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability In Higher Education Literature Review:</td>
<td><em>Higher Education and the Challenge of Sustainability; New Directions In Higher Education; and Planet U: Sustaining the World, Reinventing the University.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Practice and Peer Institution Sustainability Strategic Plans:</td>
<td>Over 20 sustainability plans, including those from Yale University, the University of California system, Indiana State University, University of Nevada - Las Vegas, Harvard University, Wayne State University, Indiana University Bloomington, Western Michigan University.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six Insights Into Organizational Change for Sustainability:</td>
<td>Recommendations from a twelve-month research project conducted by the Australian Research Institute in Education for Sustainability describing participatory techniques as a tool for sustainability organizational change (Hunting and Tilbury 2006).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The resulting framework is a marriage of bottom-up and top-down planning, coordination and implementation. It is highly participatory. The plan that emerges from it will draw its strength and working knowledge from the involvement of all campus sustainability leaders.

I have designed this stakeholder-based approach for several reasons:

1. **Sustainability, by its very nature, requires broad, interdisciplinary involvement and engagement.**

2. **OU prefers to see significant stakeholder support for any grassroots projects it takes steps to institutionalize.**

3. **The OU community tends to be hesitant of top-down enforcement and open to those initiatives in which they have the most say.**

4. **OU’s campus culture, in general, does not know a great deal about sustainability.**

5. **The University possesses a number of semi-independent auxiliary communities (including the Oakland Center, Recreation and Athletics Centers, Golf Course, Alumni Relations, Meadow Brook Hall, and Chartwells) that will nonetheless play a large and important role in the direction of future campus-wide sustainability planning and implementation.**

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“*I would suggest that there’s no question that a strategic plan in sustainability would be a welcome event, and to work it from the ground up. You know, get some of the really core leaders to sign off on it as it’s being developed. Then it naturally emerges from the bottom to the top, as opposed to it being dictated.*”

“I don’t think, at Oakland, a dictate would really work.”

– OU Administrator

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85 Faculty2
collective internal expertise, input, ambitions and support will be valuable.

While this process will take more time and energy than appointing a handful of individuals to independently draft a strategic plan, it will ultimately prove to be more effective in institutionalizing sustainability over the long term. Engaging the OU population in such a way would not only serve to educate the greater campus community about what sustainability is and how they can become involved, it could begin a lasting cultural transformation.  

1.4 OU Sustainability Strategic Planning Framework

The framework I have devised recommends ten core action steps with numerous supplemental suggestions. As Figure 8 outlines, I have grouped the ten actions into four phases, of which I will provide a brief overview before moving to a comprehensive description of each action.

**The Framework**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Action Phase</td>
<td>• Designate a Sustainability Strategic Planning Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop a quantitative baseline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Planning Phase</td>
<td>• Adopt a Common Language and Vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Build Teams As Well As Champions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Set Clear Goals, Objectives, and Milestones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Define Metrics of Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation Phase</td>
<td>• Identify Necessary Implementation Structures...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ...and Provide the Resources to Create Them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percolation Phase</td>
<td>• Create a Central Source of Information Sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Let Systems Thinking Permeate the Process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 8: Oakland University Framework for Sustainability Strategic Plan.*

**Phase I: Administrative Action:**

The first phase emerges from the top of the university, and depends upon the appointment of a Sustainability Strategic Planning Coordinator. The Strategic Coordinator will need to manage the development of a baseline greenhouse gas inventory or other quantitative sustainability assessment, and consult with Facilities Management and other sustainability stakeholders to determine feasible areas of operational sustainability interests and priorities.

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Phase II: Sustainability Strategic Planning:

Top-down buy-in can facilitate bottom up engagement. Once an administrative charge has been given, support demonstrated, and a baseline developed, strategic planning can begin. The second phase engenders campus-wide input and support to devise the plan. During the Strategic Planning Phase, the Coordinator’s role will in part be to educate various members of the campus community, and allow a plan to be built from the ground up.

Phase III: Implementation:

Upon the completion of the sustainability strategic plan, OU will need to institutionalize a sustainability structure with the authority to see the strategic plan’s long-term goals to completion, as well as consider viable financial strategies to support the plan’s implementation over time.

Phase IV: Percolation:

The Percolation Phase is meant to infuse the entirety of the sustainability strategic planning process, rather than be considered as ending footnotes. These suggestions speak to the interdisciplinary, systems approach that most institutions adopt when addressing and solving issues of sustainability.
Summary of Action Plan Recommendations

2.1 Designate a Sustainability Strategic Planning Coordinator who will manage, full-time, the development of a sustainability strategic plan.

2.1.1 Identify an individual who can establish rapport and collaborate with diverse stakeholder groups, provide innovative guidance, and effectively produce and maintain a dynamic plan addressing all aspects of OU economic, environmental, and social sustainability.

2.1.2 Base this position in a relatively neutral location and give the Strategic Coordinator the charge he or she needs to mobilize university-wide stakeholder involvement.

2.2 Complete a STARS or other baseline assessment in conjunction with the commencement of the sustainability strategic planning process.

2.2.1 Coordinate internal expertise to expedite the data collection process and to facilitate expanded stakeholder involvement.

2.3 Hold joint or separate sustainability strategic planning focus groups with key campus stakeholders.

2.3.1 Develop a working definition of sustainability that incorporates (and fosters) the campus community's understanding of the term, and emphasizes what will be most important to OU while developing the strategic plan.

2.3.2 Draft and adopt a separate sustainability mission and/or vision statement.

2.3.3 Propose, build consensus for, and confirm 5 - 15 strategic priority areas in which OU should focus the bulk of its sustainability strategic planning and implementation efforts.

2.4 Build a team of stakeholders to draft the sustainability strategic plan.

2.5 Set one (at maximum two) obtainable but high-impact goals per strategic priority area to be accomplished in a tangible amount of time.

2.6 Define a clear set of metrics to track the progress and assess the success of the strategic plan as a whole, and be adaptable to making changes should certain strategies prove ineffective.

2.7 Designate a permanent leadership position or assemblage with the authority to see the Strategic Plan's long-term goals to completion.

2.8 Develop viable financial strategies to support the sustainability strategic priorities.

2.9 Design an institutional sustainability website as soon as possible.

2.10 Encourage and facilitate transdisciplinary collaboration in the development of the sustainability strategic plan and throughout the ensuing implementation period.
Phase I: Administrative Action

2.1 Designate a Sustainability Strategic Planning Coordinator

To begin, OU will need to designate a person to coordinate the sustainability strategic planning process. Only by appointing and supporting, at the upper administrative level, such a manager or management structure can the University effectively and efficiently address the sustainability communication and structural challenges it has faced in the past.

Higher education institutions have implemented a variety of different coordinating individuals and structures to manage sustainability plan drafting, including:

- A single draft coordinator
- A large planning council of sustainability stakeholders from across the institution
- A team of student interns
- An external sustainability planning consultant

I analyzed stakeholder input from individuals across the University community to determine which of these management structures could most effectively develop OU’s sustainability strategic plan.

Several stakeholders explicitly expressed that creating a permanent Sustainability Committee to commence the strategic planning process might not be the best fit for OU’s culture. Specifically, three of the four individuals were concerned that initially having too many people at the decision-making table could paralyze what would actually be accomplished.

Conversely, developing a sustainability plan without convening broad stakeholder input in the form of a council or focus groups could also be problematic. Beyond neglecting what would undoubtedly be valuable stakeholder ideas and expertise, the University would substantially increase the risk that the plan, upon its completion, would not be met with as much community support as one that was developed collaboratively.

Given these considerations, I recommend that the OU administration charge one individual – henceforth referred to as the “Strategic Coordinator” - with the full-time management of developing a

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88 Davidson College
89 University of California-Merced
90 Supplemented Strategic Planning Process at Yale University
91 Colorado College
92 Admin.2, Admin.11, Faculty2, Staff.4
sustainability strategic plan.

To surmount the threat of administrative resistance, I suggest that President Russi designate and approve the hire, though the individual would not necessarily need to report to the Office of the President (See Position Location).

Management Details

Position Description

OU’s current sustainability projects within academia and research, student life, Facilities Management and operations, and diversity and economic efficiency necessitate the development of a sustainability strategic plan that will need to include each of these elements to be truly comprehensive.

Consequently, I suggest the Strategic Coordinator establish rapport and collaborate with these diverse stakeholder groups, provide innovative guidance, and effectively produce and maintain a dynamic plan addressing all aspects of OU economic, environmental, and social sustainability.

To give some idea of the scope of the responsibilities of the Strategic Coordinator position, I have provided the position description of Emory University’s Director of Sustainability Initiatives.94 This individual was largely responsible for building Emory’s institutional sustainability program.

“The Director will:

- Function as a visionary leader and organizational strategist to help Emory become a national model for sustainability in higher education.
- Create the strategy to integrate sustainability into both the operational and academic functions of the University, network with and facilitate internal and external resources to accomplish that goal, and evaluate the needs of the University community.
- Develop programs and new initiatives to enhance Emory’s stature and create detailed implementation plans for those initiatives.
- Create and implement communication strategies to promote broad awareness of initiatives
- Develop a University-wide process and organizational structure to support sustainability inquiry, change, and assessment.
- Build effective partnerships and relationships with surrounding communities and key Atlanta institutions and establish effective linkages with units across campus that may have sustainability initiatives in process or as part of their overall strategy.
- Coordinate, support, and expand opportunities for faculty, staff, students and administrators to learn about sustainability issues throughout the academic and operational dimensions of University life.”

Given this range of duties and the time needed to execute them, the University should expect to maintain the Strategic Coordinator for two semesters to two fiscal years.95,96 To develop the strategic plan most

95 North Carolina State University Sustainability Strategic Plan 2011
efficiently, I also suggest that the position be full time, as well as part of the designated individual’s contractual and compensated duties rather than as an add-on request.

**Position Location**

The Strategic Coordinator will essentially be a preliminary Campus Sustainability Officer, a permanent sustainability management structure in which one individual coordinates an institution’s sustainability initiatives and acts as the official representative of the institution’s sustainability projects.

A CSO can be placed in a number of institutional locations depending on the institution’s approach to sustainability and primary sustainability foci:

- Institutions focusing on operations and infrastructure often place their CSO within the Office of the Vice President for Operations and Administration or Facilities Management.
- Institutions taking a highly integrative approach often place the CSO beneath the auspices of the Office of the President.
- Institutions possessing a strong research and educational component may have their CSO report to the Provost or Chief Academic Officer.

Because OU has not yet determined its sustainability focal areas, and, by extension, the best placement for its sustainability program, I recommend the Strategic Coordinator be based in a relatively neutral location that will nonetheless give the Strategic Coordinator the charge he or she needs to mobilize university-wide stakeholder involvement.

Such a location could be within the Office of the President, or one that reports to multiple offices, such as those of the Vice Presidents for Student Affairs, Administration and Operations, and Academic Affairs. This will allow the Strategic Coordinator the flexibility to float between various departments while maintaining the ability and authority to convene and organize other on-campus experts.

For example, Emory University’s Director for Sustainability Initiatives reports jointly to the Offices of the Executive Vice President for Finance and Administration and the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs (Provost).  

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96 Former Sustainability Fellow, Davidson College. Personal correspondence.
97 Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. Higher Education Sustainability Staffing Survey. 2010e. [https://stars.aashe.org/pages/about/2010-stars-annual-review.html](https://stars.aashe.org/pages/about/2010-stars-annual-review.html)
**Spotlight On: Innovation Enablers**

*In Planet U: Sustaining The World; Reinventing the University, M’Gonigle and Starke discuss the concept of “innovation blockers” and “innovation enablers” (2006). In a typical bureaucratic structure, innovation blockers often occur in bureaucratic governance structures in which mid-level management can veto innovative ideas that may be perceived as “outside the box.” These blockers often provide significant pushback to making meaningful strides, especially in the early phases of sustainability planning.*

This is why many universities with the most progressive sustainability programs (*Harvard College, Duke University, Yale University, the University of California system, and others*) have placed their sustainability management structures directly within the *Offices of the President, Executive Vice President, or between two or more Vice Presidential Offices.*

*In considering the management location and oversight of its Sustainability Strategic Coordinator, OU should strive to make the position an innovation enabler, which would require a large degree of both autonomy and authority.*

**Salary and Qualifications**

In 2010, AASHE released its most recent report on nationwide Campus Sustainability Officers using data collected directly from higher education sustainability offices and management across the United States. In Figures 9 and 10, I have provided the graphical depictions from this report that show the managerial nature of the CSO position and the general education level of those who hold it.

*Figure 9: Position status of 432 Campus Sustainability Officer survey respondents.*

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99 Higher Education Sustainability Staffing Survey. 2010. Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. <www.aashe.org/resources/resources-campus-sustainability-officers>

100 Id.
I have additionally included tables developed by the Education for Sustainability Western Network that show the typical pay range for CSOs at U.S. colleges and universities based on level of experience.\(^1\)

**Table 3: Salary of sustainability professionals with advanced degrees.**\(^2\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th># Individuals</th>
<th>Average Salary</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$41,500</td>
<td>$8,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$51,500</td>
<td>$10,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>$81,800</td>
<td>$26,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$52,000</td>
<td>$13,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4: Salary of sustainability professionals without advanced degrees.**\(^3\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th># Individuals</th>
<th>Average Salary</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>$34,000</td>
<td>$6,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>$48,700</td>
<td>$3,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11+</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$52,000</td>
<td>$12,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{1}\) Id.


\(^{3}\) Id.

\(^{4}\) Id.
**Student Sustainability Fellowship**

At OU, funding a Strategic Coordinator or reallocating a current human resource to manage the sustainability strategic plan may be financially difficult. In the face of this challenge, one cost-effective alternative some institutions have utilized is designating an exceptional graduating student as a two-year post-graduate Sustainability Fellow to manage the strategic planning process. Upon term’s end, the institution appoints another graduating student as the next Sustainability Fellow.

North Carolina’s Davidson College successfully employed such a system to oversee the both the development of the College’s Climate Action Plan and the creation of an institutional sustainability program.\(^{105}\)

A Student Fellowship management design does not come without disadvantages. Should the position eventually be permanently institutionalized, leadership turnover would occur every two years, resulting in the possibility of vast differences in leadership style and focus, as well as potentially disrupting transition periods. This approach, however, does give OU the option to maintain a Strategic Coordinator at a lower cost than a professional sustainability coordinator might require.

**2.2 Develop a Baseline**

Effective sustainability strategic plans are built upon a thorough knowledge of the sustainability platform on which their respective Institutions presently stand. Without accurate, easily accessible baseline data, an institution will find it nearly impossible to constructively evaluate the success of the sustainability strategies it implements.\(^{106}\)

Those institutions developing a Climate Action Plan, for example, should complete a greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions inventory before they can commence upon any real/effective mitigation strategizing and decision-making. Institutions that have not chosen to complete a CAP can still complete a GHG inventory or comprehensively assess present sustainability operations, policies and practices.

The OU Catalog of Environmental Initiatives included with this report is meant to provide a primarily qualitative and mainly environmental snapshot of OU’s current sustainability practices, policies, and actions: it is as complete a picture as I could provide remotely. Based on the information I have obtained for this report, I have also begun to compile data for a University STARS report ([Appendix II]), but additional information regarding operational, social and economic activities is required to complete this traditional sustainability assessment.

Upon their designation, the Strategic Coordinator should coordinate such a baseline assessment. The data he or she collects should be both quantitative and qualitative in nature.

For example, when gathering baseline information on the effectiveness of the current OU recycling program, regularly the amount of materials recycled or percent of students participating can clearly demonstrate program improvement or stagnancy. But so too can qualitative measurement of the OU community’s attitude toward and knowledge of recycling, taken in the form of surveys or interviews before and after sustainability strategic planning began.

At a minimum, I recommend that the University complete a STARS or other baseline assessment in conjunction with the commencement of its sustainability strategic planning process.

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\(^{105}\) Devoy, Kealy. Former Davidson College Sustainability Fellow. Personal communication.

This assessment will provide the University with the background data necessary to identify action-improvement steps, benchmarks and metrics of success.

**Compiling the Baseline Assessment**

To compile the assessment, I suggest the Strategic Coordinator collaborate with Facilities Management to gather additional operational data, including information from campus and residence hall energy audits, and water usage and waste flow records. One of several assessment frameworks can provide expert guidance in this process.

**Assessment Framework**

As I discussed in 3.3 Rating Systems, a number of sustainability assessment “reporting tools” exist, and different reporting tools better address either external communication or internal operations.

One popular internal sustainability assessment framework is AASHE’s Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS). Over 190 higher education institutions are using the STARS framework to track their internal sustainability baseline and progress, including these best practice, in-state, and peer institutions:

- University of Nevada – Las Vegas*
- Duke University
- University of Michigan
- University of Michigan - Dearborn
- Grand Valley State University
- Princeton University

*Denotes peer institution.

Should OU choose to use an externally developed reporting tool to structure its baseline assessment, I recommend STARS because:¹⁰⁷,¹⁰⁸

- It represents the combined knowledge of higher education sustainability experts nationwide. AASHE, a recognized leader in higher education sustainability program management and research, collaborated with over 100 sustainability strategic and technical experts to create the framework, and has updated it regularly as new information emerges.

- Its 135 sustainability indicators are applicable to both entry-level institutions as well as longtime sustainability practitioners. Consequently, as OU’s sustainability program matures (and the University itself grows), the University can continue to use the same reporting system to measure its progress over time.

- It provides an intuitive self-documentation system that would allow OU to not only see how well its sustainability strategies have performed but to learn from and compare these strategies with other universities that have also submitted STARS reports. Institutions also have the option to utilize the assessment framework without reporting their final scores.

Through its straightforward reporting process, STARS facilitates the development of an exhaustive record of campus environmental, social, and economic sustainability indicators. As a result, the Strategic Coordinator, in being directly stationed at the University, can most easily contact the numerous individuals and access the extensive resources needed to gather the data.

¹⁰⁷ Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. 2010 STARS Annual Review. 2011d. <stars.aashe.org/pages/about/2010-stars-annual-review.html>

¹⁰⁸ “Governance.” AASHE STARS website. 2012. < stars.aashe.org/pages/about/governance/>
The website attached to Appendix II includes a chart of all 135 STARS assessment indicators. AASHE’s website provides additional environmental assessment tools, resources and options.109

Another well-known sustainability assessment that has been used prominently in Canada and abroad is the Sierra Youth Coalition’s Campus Sustainability Assessment Framework (CSAF). Co-developed by 15 campus sustainability experts and over 130 others, CSAF outlines 170 sustainability indicators, from social and environmental to political and cultural, and short term and long term goals for each. The highly regarded Concordia University Sustainability Assessment was developed within this framework.


Assessment Collaboration

The assessment may take the Strategic Coordinator or another full-time employee two to three months to compile, in addition to other position duties.110 Additionally, the University may choose to commence upon the accumulation of their baseline assessment before they have recruited a Strategic Coordinator.

Should either scenario be the case, I recommend that the Strategic Coordinator or other Baseline Assessment Manager collaborate with internal expertise to expedite the data collection process and to facilitate expanded stakeholder involvement.

OU possesses a number of internal experts with topical knowledge, familiarity with the University, and/or the desire to accumulate additional professional experiences. The Strategic Coordinator, specifically, should consider collaborating closely with:

- The Office of Facilities Management, Department of Housing Maintenance Management, and auxiliary units maintenance teams to ensure the completeness of the operational data collected and to construct the ultimate recommendations that flow from the completed assessment.

- Siraj Khan, Director of Engineering, Facilities Management

- Rafi Bayrakdarian, Energy Manager, Facilities Management

- Jim Leidel, Director of Clean Energy Systems, who was OU’s Energy Manager for several years.

- Amy Butler, Clean Energy Research Center Director, who has been involved with numerous collaborative environmental and energy assessments and projects.111

- OU’s Schools of Business and Engineering and Computer Science, the Environmental Science Program and Energy Management Certificate Program to develop an experiential

109 “Resources on Campus Sustainability Assessment Tools, Report and Indicators.” Association for the Advancement of Sustainability In Higher Education. < www.aashe.org/resources/assessment-tools-reports-indicators >
111 OU INCubator. Oakland University website (2012). <www.oakland.edu>
learning course, student intern team, or CERC research project to support the assessment. This would provide a quality learning experience for students and staff, as well as build new internal expertise.

Should a Strategic Coordinator be appointed and the knowledge of University staff, faculty and students be harnessed, OU’s Sustainability Baseline Assessment could be completed during the Fall 2012 semester, providing the University with the information it needs to move to Phase II: Strategic Planning before the close of 2012.

The University should have completed or very nearly completed its Sustainability Baseline Assessment before it transitions to the Strategic Planning Phase.

**Spotlight On: Experiential and Service Learning Opportunities**

Institutions with a more limited budget have commissioned current staff or student interns to complete the assessment. *Brandeis University*, for example, used their environmental assessment as an opportunity for student experiential learning. Brandeis designed a practicum class entitled “Assessing the Triple Bottom Line,” in which a group of students helped to complete the research for an institutional STARS Report (Brandeis Campus Sustainability Initiative 2011).

*The University of Indiana - Bloomington*, meanwhile, supplemented administrative leadership with the work of 20 undergraduate and graduate student interns to develop its Campus Sustainability Report.

**Phase II: Sustainability Strategic Planning**

“What needs to be thought about is, where do we want all of this to go, and what do we need to do that would make the greatest impact?” – OU Administrator

2.3 Adopt a Common Language and Vision

The second phase engenders campus-wide input and support to devise the strategic plan. During the Strategic Planning Phase, the Strategic Coordinator’s role will in part be to educate various members of the campus community, and allow a plan to emerge from the ground up. Critical thinking, education and information sharing is crucial so all members of the community can understand and engage with the shared visioning process.112

To begin the planning process, I recommend that OU’s designated Strategic Coordinator hold joint or separate focus groups with key campus stakeholders.

These stakeholders would include:

- Students
- Faculty
- Administrators
- Staff

• Facilities Management
• Current sustainability champions and project managers
• Local community and business leaders

Collectively, these stakeholder meetings should accomplish five actions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Define</th>
<th>...a working definition of sustainability in context with what is most important to the OU campus community.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideate</td>
<td>...a clear, shared vision for sustainability at OU that can inspire and motivate the community to take action and maintain momentum over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop</td>
<td>...a sustainability mission statement to guide all campus sustainability projects, policies, practices, partnerships and principles that builds upon OU’s current institutional mission, vision, goals and passion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify</td>
<td>...5 – 15 key areas for OU to focus its sustainability planning and efforts in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicit</td>
<td>...attendents’ interest in additional sustainability planning, or their recommendations of other campus experts not in attendance who can potentially serve as resources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because community involvement can be a challenge at OU, the University may need to circulate student, staff, and faculty surveys and questionnaires to reach the broader University base, as well as those who cannot attend the meetings. Depending upon the meeting audience, the Strategic Coordinator may also need to provide additional sustainability education to maximize stakeholder understanding of the task at hand.

Below, I have briefly elaborated on each of meeting objectives. Through this approach, the University can build a truly campus-specific sustainability plan, and empower and inspire the OU community to participate in and support the resulting strategies as they are implemented.¹¹³

**Developing a Working Definition of Sustainability**

“Sustainability” and “sustainable development” are terms that are simultaneously recognizable and ambiguous.¹¹⁴ Despite widespread familiarity with each concept, finding one ubiquitous definition of them is virtually impossible. The United Nations 2005 World Summit Outcome Document proposed one interpretation that has gained somewhat widespread appeal. “Sustainability,” the document states, not only encircles environmental sustainability, but also economic and social sustainability.¹¹⁵ This conceptualization of sustainability is sometimes referred to as the “triple bottom line.”

In reality, however, everyone has (often very) different conceptualizations of what “sustainability” is, and what role it should have in society and in daily life.¹¹⁶¹¹⁷ Hundreds of unofficial definitions of

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¹¹³ University of California-Merced Sustainability Strategic Plan. Chancellor’s Advisory Committee on Sustainability. Spring 2010.
¹¹⁶ Faculty3
“sustainability” exist. Some higher education sustainability researchers argue that this subjectivity makes it very difficult to implement standardized higher education sustainability programs, requirements, guidelines, and operational regulations nationwide.\(^{118,119}\)

To overcome this challenge, I recommend that OU first develop a working definition of sustainability. The purpose of this process is to (1) incorporate (and foster) the campus community’s understanding of the term, and (2) emphasize (or reveal) what will be most important to OU while developing the strategic plan.

For example, the University of California - Berkeley Chancellor’s Advisory Committee on Sustainability developed this campus-specific definition of sustainability: “The ability to meet the needs of the present while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems and without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”\(^{120}\)

Meanwhile, the University of California-Merced Chancellor’s Advisory Committee on Sustainability defined the term as, “Social, economic and environmental systems that preserve the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”\(^{121}\)

In facilitating the exercise, OU should consider:

- Will economic sustainability - the financial bottom line - take priority, or will environmental sustainability carry similar weight? And what does “environmental sustainability” constitute – energy independence and technology development, resource conservation, behavioral change education, all three, or more or none of these?

- Will diversity and social sustainability also hold equal importance, or will it not be considered as heavily?

- Can OU achieve a balance of all three aspects of sustainability?

- What function should the agreed-upon definition of sustainability have not only in OU’s operations, but also in the daily lives of its staff, students, faculty, administration, and community partners?

Answering questions like these will serve to focus OU’s sustainability prioritizations and implementation efforts, facilitate planning ease, and help the OU community and the surrounding populace to understand the basis for the University’s future sustainability strategies and decisions. The analysis will also help to constructively inform ensuing stakeholder meeting discussions.

**Developing a Sustainability Mission and Vision**

Higher education sustainability programs that demonstrate exemplary university-wide focus have typically founded their endeavors upon an institution-specific mission or vision that explicitly defines the role that sustainability will play institutional operations and culture.\(^{122,123}\) Without such a guiding statement, 

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\(^{120}\) UC-Berkeley Campus Sustainability Report. (2011) University of California-Berkeley’s Chancellor’s Advisory Committee on Sustainability.

\(^{121}\) University of California-Merced Sustainability Strategic Plan. Chancellor’s Advisory Committee on Sustainability. Spring 2010

\(^{122}\) Newman, Julie. “The Onset of Creating a Model Sustainable Institution: A Case Study Analysis of Yale University, *Proceedings: *
institutions may find it difficult to concentrate their efforts or leverage institutional strengths and goals to have the greatest impact.

Centers of learning have generally used one or more of the following pathways to create a sustainability mission or vision:

**Integrate With Institution’s Mission or Vision**

Some choose to explicitly address or integrate the principle of sustainability into the institution’s primary mission or vision. Western Michigan University, for example, mentions sustainability in its institutional vision statement, stating, 124

> “We are a community of learners committed to human dignity, sustainability, social responsibility, and justice.”

**Acknowledge As Core Value**

Other universities, like OU’s peer institution Wright State University, recognize sustainability as an institutional core value. On its website, Wright State presents as one of its five core values: 125

> “Sustainability – The necessity of preserving our planet compels us to weigh the impact of our decisions, both short-term and long-term. Additionally, prudent financial management supports the sustainability of our operations. Furthermore, the pursuit of knowledge is sustainable, and our programs will maintain their relevance, only if we continually invest in the infrastructure to support research and creative endeavors.”

**Adopt Formal Declaration’s Mission**

Yet other institutions sign the ACUPCC or Talloires Declaration (as described in 3.2 Formal Commitments), adopting the primary sustainability mission, vision and values that these agreements advocate.

**Create a Separate Guiding Statement**

Finally, many centers of higher education institutionalize a sustainability mission and/or vision statement that is separate from the institution’s primary statements but is used to guide all university sustainability efforts.

For example, Indiana University-Bloomington’s Sustainability Mission states, 126

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Which of these four alternatives an institution utilizes depends on its particular level of commitment to sustainability and the resources it has available to integrate that commitment into culture and practice.

OU is already poised to indirectly address sustainability within the bounds of its current institutional purpose:

- OU’s Passion includes “transforming society.”
- Its Mission addresses offering high quality and relevant instruction through educational leadership and public service, and developing students to be informed decision makers and productive citizens.
- Its values advocate integrity and stewardship for the public good.127

Environmental, economic, and social sustainability can be tied to each of these statements. However, to create the clearest guidance for any campuswide sustainability structure that may emerge from OU’s sustainability strategic planning process, I recommend that OU also draft and adopt separate sustainability mission and/or vision statements.

**Identifying Strategic Priorities**

Lastly, I suggest that the stakeholder meetings be used to propose, build consensus for, and confirm key areas in which the University should focus the bulk of its sustainability strategic planning and implementation efforts.

The Sustainability Strategic Plans I reviewed generally prioritized 5 – 15 institutional sustainability strategic priorities.

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127 Strategic Plan, Oakland University. President’s Executive Council. Approved March 22, 2011. <www.oakland.edu/upload/docs/President/Communications/11-03-22_Strategic_Planning.pdf>
In designating these focal areas, OU should consider:

1. **Institutional strengths.**
   - Energy; Resource Use and Conservation; Recycling; Facilities and Maintenance

2. **Areas poised to become institutional strengths or those sectors in which OU sees itself growing as an institution in the future.**
   - Sustainability and Human Health; Built Environment

3. **Institutional weakness that likewise present the opportunity for great improvement and perhaps quick returns with even small upgrades.**
   - Transportation

4. **Areas that may encompass local and regional needs in the coming decades.**
   - Clean Energy; Academics and Curriculum

To provide some idea of potential strategic priorities, I have included a table that shows the primary aspects of sustainability that are included within the Sustainability Strategic Plans of eleven institutions. I chose a range of best practice, in state, and peer institutions for comparison. The topics described also often constituted the institutions' sustainability working groups, which is a concept I discuss in my next action step.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Sustainability Working Groups / Strategic Planning Subsections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indiana University Bloomington</td>
<td>Education, Outreach, and Student Engagement; Resource Use and Recycling; Energy; Built Environment; Environmental Quality; Transportation; Food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina State University</td>
<td>Academics and Research; Buildings; Community and Culture; Energy and Water; Land Use; Materials and Purchasing; Transportation; Waste Reduction and Recycling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of California - Berkeley</td>
<td>Energy and Climate; Water, Built Environment; Waste; Purchasing; Transportation; Food and Dining; Land Use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concordia University</td>
<td>Community, Health and Well-Being; Governance: Policy and Implementation; Research and Curriculum; Income and Investments; Purchasing and Materials; Waste Management, Energy, Transportation, Space and Planning; Water; Indoor Environment and Air Quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McMaster University</td>
<td>Education; Energy; Green Space; Health and Wellness; Transportation; Waste; Water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana State University*</td>
<td>Academics, Curriculum and Research; Built Environment; Energy and Transportation; Food; Resource Use, Recycling and Procurement; Community Outreach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Nevada – Las Vegas*</td>
<td>Resources (Campus Facilities, Maintenance, Purchasing, Disposal, and Resource Management); Livability (Faculty, Staff, and Student Life); Academics (Research and Education); Connections (Campus-Community Relations).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 5: Drafting the Plan: What areas should be addressed? *Denotes peer institutions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Sustainability Working Groups / Strategic Planning Subsections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wayne State University</td>
<td>Energy Conservation; Recycling; Sustainability (Education and Curriculum; Administration and Facilities Management; Student Involvement; Community Engagement); Transportation; Waste Stream and Mass Balance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland State University*</td>
<td>Energy, Water, and Material Conservation; Green Space, Buildings, Stormwater Management; Dining, Housing, Parking and Transportation; Student Life and Engaged Learning; Communications and Marketing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Michigan University</td>
<td>Governance and Administration; Operations and In-reach; Community Service and Outreach; Curriculum; Research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yale University</td>
<td>Campus Systems (Campus Planning, Building Design and Construction; Waste Management; Transportation; Food and Dining; Environmental Health and Safety); Administrative Systems (Finance and Business Operations; Procurement; Cleaning and Maintenance); Earth Systems (Energy and Greenhouse Gas Emissions; Water Use; Land Management); Education and Engagement (Educating and Engaging the Yale Community).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2.4 Build Teams As Well As Champions

The Sustainability Strategic Coordinator should not be perceived as the University’s “champion”; to do so would imply that the Coordinator’s role is quite different than what I have designed it to be.

Sustainability champions often “lead the charge” for sustainable change through heroic - and usually isolated, or non-institutionalized – advocacy. But for the strategic plan to have the highest likelihood of successful implementation and for a culture of sustainability to take root at an institution, colleges and universities have begun to notice that more than simply one or a handful of champions are needed. Instead, through a process of inclusion, many people must be brought together “who will slowly [but permanently] alter the fabric of the university.”

Therefore, the Strategic Coordinator, as this position’s namesake implies, is truly meant to “coordinate” cross-campus planning, foster collaboration, and facilitate the best thinking of everyone involved - e.g., of the community at large.

**Sustainability Strategic Planning Task Force**

I recommend that OU’s Strategic Coordinator build a team of stakeholders to draft the actual sustainability strategic plan.

To begin, I suggest that the Strategic Coordinator develop a Sustainability Strategic Planning Task Force. Many universities (Indiana State University, Davidson College, University of California –Merced and Berkeley, and others) have successfully utilized this approach to draft plans that were more comprehensive than if they had been written individually.

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Phase II: Sustainability Strategic Planning

This process usually looks something like this:

1. Through the stakeholder meetings, the Strategic Coordinator matches one or two qualified leaders from the campus community to each of the sustainability strategic priorities identified in the stakeholder meetings. Together, these individuals comprise the Task Force.

2. These individuals each oversee a working group connected to their respective strategic priority.

3. Together, the Strategic Priority Chair and Working Group members are responsible for developing strategies, goals, and metrics of success related to their topic.

4. The Strategic Working Groups have a specific amount of time to draft their section of the strategic plan.

5. Each subsection of the plan is returned to the Strategic Coordinator for compilation and editing.

6. The compiled plan is disseminated to the Strategic Planning Task Force for final peer review before submitting for institutional approval.

7. Upon plan approval and implementation, the Strategic Coordinator works with the Strategic Priority Working Group Chairs to actively ensure that each strategic priority’s specific objectives, actions, and milestones are being met.

*Depending upon the institution’s resources and culture, Task Force members/Working Group Chairs are often administrators in employees of or experts in their designated sustainability focal areas. They are either charged with this responsibility or volunteer their services. The Task Force should be inclusive rather than exclusive, however; collective Working Group membership should represent a mix of innovation, experience, passion, and time to give to the strategic planning process.

The Strategic Coordinator should provide coordination for and support to each of the Working Groups throughout this process. During the composition period, he or she may need to assist with managing the development of the draft depending on the additional work obligations of the Task Force Chairs.

To engage the student community, it may be worthwhile to create Strategic Planning Task Force Fellows positions (either paid or unpaid), like Yale University, which recruited seven students to assist with specific Strategic Planning tasks. This way, particularly engaged students can benefit from categorizing their involvement as a professional development experience.

Figure 11 illustrates, on a reduced scale, what this organizational structure might look like. With “food” as an example strategic priority, an individual from Chartwells management might serve as the chair of the Food working group. Membership within the working group might include interested and/or expert student, staff, or faculty representatives from the Urban Farm, Vandenburg Dining Hall, and residence halls.
Collectively drafting a strategic plan through working group collaboration can also spark dialogue about potential cross-campus initiatives and partnerships that may not have previously been considered, simply because a communication mechanism to link spatially or organizationally distant sustainability experts had not been in place.

2.5 Set Clear Goals, Objectives and Milestones

I suggest that each Working Group set one (at maximum two) obtainable but high-impact goal to be accomplished in a tangible amount of time.

To ensure the highest probability of success, these primary goals should preferably be realistically achievable within an already existing or easily altered infrastructure.  

Beginning with small steps that can demonstrate large gains in a relatively short span of time fits best to OU’s culture. Sustainability strategic priority areas will need to show clear and immediate success or improvement in order to receive continued support from University leadership. A targeted and deliberate approach that shows continuous progress will ensure that the program maintains momentum over time. The Strategic Plan can be revised and expanded in the future contingent upon early-stage successes.

For example, if Energy Conservation were a strategic priority, the Energy Conservation Working Group could work with Facilities Management to determine which projects could provide the highest rate of return the most quickly.

The working groups should also set:

- Two to three high-priority objectives to attain the goal.
- Specific semester-by-semester milestones for at least two years that will need to be met to achieve the objectives.

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131 University of California-Merced Sustainability Strategic Plan. Chancellor’s Advisory Committee on Sustainability. Spring 2010.
2.6 Define Metrics of Success

Goals, strategies and actions help to direct an institution’s planning efforts, but they are most effective when combined with measurements of successful achievement.

In addition to the metrics of success set for each sustainability strategic priority, I suggest the Strategic Coordinator and Task Force define a clear set of metrics to track the progress and assess the success of the strategic plan as a whole, and be adaptable to making changes should certain strategies prove ineffective.

University of California – Merced: Sustainability Strategic Goal Setting Case Study

The University of California-Merced’s Sustainability Strategic Plan provides an exemplary sustainability planning template. Here is the process the University used the design a three-year action plan for one of its twelve strategic priorities.

**Strategic priority:** Green building.

**Goal:** “Use LEED certification to drive comprehensive, continuous improvement in the sustainability of site development, building construction and operation.”

**Objectives:** Sustainable construction, sustainable operations, and green building innovations.

**Actions:** UC-Merced crossed its three objectives with the three divisions of sustainability – environmental integrity, economic prosperity, and social equity. The resulting matrix described six specific action-objectives that would support the realization of the goal. Two, for example, are:

- “Build all new buildings to meet LEED gold certification” (Sustainable Construction and Environmental Sustainability)
- “Educate university and community on the importance of green buildings.” (Green Building Innovations and Social Sustainability)

Finally, the University set specific tasks and measures they would need to take within these action-objectives in each semester over the following three years. For the objective of **Sustainable Construction**, one such task was to: “Submit to the U.S. Green Building Council a Quality Control plan for certifying buildings.”

Phase III: Implementation

Upon the completion of the Strategic Planning Phase, OU leadership should (2.7) institutionalize a management structure and (2.8) arrange financial and educational resources that will support the fulfillment of its strategic priorities, strategies and objectives.

2.7 Identify Necessary Implementation and Accountability Structures and Devices

Until this point, the role of the Sustainability Strategic Planning Coordinator and Task Force has been to coordinate and assemble the Sustainability Strategic Plan.

132 Id.
At this point in the development process, I recommend the Strategic Coordinator and Task Force designate a permanent leadership position or assemblage with the authority to see the Sustainability Strategic Plan’s long-term goals to completion.

The responsibilities of this individual or committee should include:

- Collaborating with Strategic Priority Working Group chairs to ensure that progress on Strategic Plan objectives is being made.
- Consistently monitoring progress on Sustainability Strategic Plan objectives.
- Advocating for the institution’s sustainable development interests and providing accountability.
- Coordinate and monitor campuswide sustainability projects.

AASHE provides an online database of full sustainability officer job descriptions from over 60 higher education institutions.  

At OU, the permanent structure may resemble or even mirror the organization of the short-term strategic planning team. I have specifically not indicated the particular form the leadership position or conglomeration should take. By this stage, stakeholder feedback given throughout the strategic planning process should more clearly inform:

- The department to which this individual or committee should report.
- The type of permanent management structure – coordinator or committee, department or office - that can operate most effectively within OU’s culture and institutional management structure.
- The particular areas of expertise those within the leadership structure will need. (For example, the knowledge and skill set needed to manage a Strategic Plan focusing more heavily on Operations and Efficiency will be different than one that focuses more on Academics and Outreach.)

Higher education sustainability oversight structures differ widely. The most common are an interdepartmental committee, a single coordinator position, or an entire department. Any of these structures, if applied correctly, can successfully manage an institution’s sustainability program. Below is a brief description of each.

**Campus Sustainability Officers**

This individual coordinates and manages an institution’s sustainability initiatives and is the institution’s official sustainability representative. The position is similar to that of the Strategic Coordinator. **Section 2.2: Develop a Baseline** provides a Campus Sustainability Officer (CSO) job description, potential position locations, and salary range. Institutional practices within this broad categorization vary:

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**Be Flexible Given New Insights and Information**

The University of California-Merced’s Chancellor’s Advisory Committee on Sustainability “redefined” its organizational structure in the middle of its sustainability strategic planning process. The structure eventually took on a completely different form than most traditional campus sustainability committees, as stakeholders involved in the undertaking decided what type of organization would most effectively achieve campus objectives and goals.

Flexibility and reflection throughout the planning process can conceive new opportunities and innovation.

- James Pitman, “A Whole Systems Design Approach to Organizational Change.”

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• Davidson College has successfully utilized a post-graduate fellowship position in place of hiring a professional CSO.
• Michigan State University maintains a team of CSOs, with a Chief Sustainability Officer, Assistant Directing Officer, and Sustainability Project Coordinators.

Additional resources for hiring a Campus Sustainability Officer, including *A Practical Guide to Hiring a Sustainability Professional for Universities and Colleges* (2006),\(^{135}\) can be found on the website of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education.\(^{136}\)

**Campus Sustainability Committees**

Higher education institutions frequently tap stakeholders from different departments and capacities across the institution to form a sustainability council or committee. The committee oversees, coordinates, and, in many cases, regulates campus sustainability.

Campus sustainability committees (CSCs) frequently report to one or two specific individuals— for example, the Vice President of Administration and Operations, the Provost, or the University President. Like its CSO counterpart, a CSC’s institutional location stems from the institution’s sustainability priorities.

CSC representation and structure is diverse and depends entirely on institutional preference; many structural designs have been successful. The University President, Provost, or Vice President for Operations and Facilities may sit on or chair the CSC. Some committees have included students as voting members; others have simply included them on working groups, of which the Committee members were chairs.\(^{137}\)

Common representatives on CSCs include individuals from:

• Facilities Management
• Student Affairs
• Academic Affairs
• Research
• Campus Dining
• Deans and professors of related academic divisions
• Housing
• Purchasing
• Capital Planning
• Public Affairs
• Energy Management
• Finance

**Sustainability Departments and Offices**

Institutions with the institutional level of commitment to sustainability and the resources to do so may create a university-wide Department or Office of Sustainability. These offices employ a Director of Sustainability and often an Associate Director, Sustainability Program or Outreach Coordinator, and, if funding exists, many student interns.\(^ {138, 139}\)


\(^{136}\) “Resources for Campus Sustainability Officers.” AASHE 2012. <www.aashe.org/resources/resources-campus-sustainability-officers>

\(^{137}\) Cumulative observations from 20 Sustainability Strategic Plans I reviewed.

\(^{138}\) Michigan State University Office of Campus Sustainability website. 2012. <www.ecofoot.msu.edu/>
At this exploratory stage in OU’s campus sustainability program management, and considering the University’s resource limitations, I suggest that Office of Sustainability creation be a long-term goal, rather than a short-term reality.

**Structural Collaboration**

CSOs, CSCs, and Sustainability Offices need not be mutually exclusive. Often institutions that have a CSC also have a CSO that either reports to or chairs the CSC. The two may also act largely independent of each other, with the CSO acting as project manager to the CSC’s direction of the institution’s overall sustainability program.

Three such examples of this structural collaboration from OU’s peer institutions and in-state peers are the University of Nevada: Las Vegas, Michigan State University, and Northern Michigan University; Wayne State University, meanwhile, has a President’s Standing Committee on Environmental Initiatives that reports directly to the Office of the President, and an Office of Sustainability nested within the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering.\(^{140}\)

**2.8 Provide The Resources To Support the University’s Strategic Objectives**

Sustainability initiatives at most higher education institutions often face funding challenges, especially in their start-up phase.\(^{141}\) Colleges and universities have devised innovative solutions to overcome this obstacle.

In addition to instating permanent leadership, **I recommend OU develop clear, viable financial strategies to support each of its strategic interventions.**

At OU, current sustainability initiatives, projects and research are supported through external grants, student group funding, and administrative allocations, matching funds, and general funds from a number of offices across campus - including the Office of the President, Department of Housing, Student Affairs and Facilities Management.

I suggest that additional funding strategies be identified that can be directly applied to sustainability management and projects.\(^{142}\) These alternatives should consider resources from:

1. Resource conservation projects.
2. External sustainability-focused grants.
3. Reallocation of funds within University operations.
4. Fundraising events and alumni/donor relations.

In addition, I suggest that sources and availability of institutional funding – as well as any lack thereof - be clearly described to Strategic Priority working group chairs, staff, faculty, and students, perhaps on a centralized sustainability information portal or website (See *2.9 Create a Central Source of Sustainability Information Sharing*). Strategic Priority Working Group chairs may need to identify and secure their own sources of funding to supplement limited financial support from a central institutional source.

Below are four potential sustainability funding mechanisms that other higher education institutions have implemented.

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\(^{139}\) Harvard Office for Sustainability website. 2012. &lt;www.green.harvard.edu/&gt;

\(^{140}\) Wayne State University online resources, 2012. &lt;wayne.edu&gt;

\(^{141}\) Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. Higher Education Sustainability Staffing Survey. 2010e. &lt;www.aashe.org/files/2010_staffing_survey_final.pdf&gt;

\(^{142}\) Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. Resources on Sustainable Investment and Financing. (2012) &lt;www.aashe.org/resources/resources-sustainable-investment-and-financing&gt;
**Green Fees**

Some institutions have implemented a “green fee” that students lobbied to have added to the cost of attendance. Within this basic framework, much creatively has been exercised:

- Fees have been mandatory or optional.
- Some have only paid for on- or off-campus clean energy investments.
- Others have supported sustainable campus initiatives, projects, seed grants, and sustainability staff.

Within the many schools that have institutionalized this practice, institutional leadership has only acted upon grassroots-gathered, demonstrative student support.

OU maintains a strict no-fee policy. However, in the past year, OU student sustainability leaders have expressed some interest in instating a green fee that would allocate $2 - $5 from tuition each semester toward green projects.

These students would have raise awareness about this approach throughout the student body to establish if overwhelming interest in such a sustainability funding strategy does in fact exist. Should student interest be clearly established, students would need to work with University leaders to see if a creative solution could exist that would align with OU policies.

**Payback Funds**

Retrofits and energy efficiency programs and projects eventually generate payback or savings that institutions either channel into funding more sustainability initiatives or to partially support a sustainability position. For example, Furman University has successfully implemented a revolving loans program called the Student Climate Action Revolving Fund to finance sustainability and conservation projects that will create revenue or savings, which then pay back the initial loan.

**Donor Fund**

Some institutions embark on sustainability-specific fundraising campaigns, and solicit those local businesses, representatives and alumni who have a particular interest in supporting sustainable development. According to AASHE, 16 such schools have created specific funds for this purpose, while many others have integrated sustainability into more general fundraising campaigns. While these gifts can be extensive, they are often earmarked based on the preferences of each donor, limiting their general use.

**Grants**

Many private and federal funding programs exist that support higher education sustainability program expansion. Some federal grants include:

- Department of Energy’s Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy grants
- National Science Foundation’s Sustainability Research Networks Competition
- U.S. Global Change Research Program’s Climate Change Education Partnership Program
- Environmental Protection Agency’s Environmental Education grants

As with donor gifts, these resources can often only be applied toward specified projects or needs.

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143 Id.
144 Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. “Student Fees for Sustainability.” (2012)
145 Student5
146 “Student Climate Action Revolving Fund (SCARF).” David E. Shi Center for Sustainability website, Furman University. (2012)
147 Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. Resources on Sustainable Investment and Financing. 2011f. <www.aashe.org/resources/resources-sustainable-investment-and-financing>
Phase IV: Percolation

The Percolation Phase is meant to infuse the entirety of the sustainability strategic planning process, rather than be considered as ending footnotes. These two suggestions speak to the interdisciplinary, systems approach that most institutions adopt when addressing and solving issues of sustainability.

Actively facilitating systems thought, sustainability learning opportunities and information sharing in the form of a website throughout the strategic planning process will help to train every department about what an institutional sustainability program would mean for them and how they could contribute.148 This, in turn, could draw out additional creative ideas from the University community, as well as build OU’s capacity for implementing broad institutional change.

2.9 Create a Central Source of Sustainability Information Sharing

Similar to the OU President’s Office Information and News Terminal (the POINT), a central sustainability information portal can serve as a comprehensive resource on campus sustainability, as well as provide links to external sustainability resources.

As I mentioned within S.W.O.T. Opportunities, maintaining such an online informational portal is a powerful way for OU to:

- Build campus awareness and education of the University’s many ongoing sustainable development projects.
- Encourage community dialogue and participation in those projects.
- Maintain full control of the University’s public sustainability image.
- Build positive public and press relations through explaining the societal importance of sustainability and then demonstrating the University’s efforts to address that need.
- Join its 7 peer institutions that have already created centralized sustainability websites.
- Recruit a new base of environmentally conscious students and engender new community partnerships.

In light of these substantial benefits, I recommend that the Strategic Coordinator work with University Communications and Marketing to design an institutional sustainability website as soon as possible.

The Strategic Coordinator can use the information I have assimilated on the OU Catalog of Environmental Initiatives as a starting point for present publically-available information on OU’s many sustainability projects. He or she should additionally be responsible for broadening communications of OU’s sustainability efforts through other traditional and new media outlets, and increasing public outreach.

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2.10 Let Systems Thinking Permeate the Process

No matter how an institution defines sustainability, it will find that effective implementation of the term’s concept will permeate across disciplines, systems, and thought. As a result, thinking systemically is particularly important for sustainable development, and the most comprehensive higher education sustainability plans take a holistic, systems approach that acknowledges the complexity and interconnectedness of sustainability initiatives.

According to the Center for Ecoliteracy, a leader in the green schooling movement, systems thinking requires several shifts in perception: 149

- From parts to the whole
- From objects to relationships
- From objective knowledge to contextual knowledge
- From quantity to quality
- From structure to process
- From contents to patterns

I recommend OU encourage and facilitate transdisciplinary collaboration in the development of its sustainability strategic plan and throughout the ensuing implementation period.

Higher education institutions that cultivate an understanding of the full complexity of sustainability and promote conversations to this end across the disciplines can often develop more innovative and complete solutions.

Summary

In recognizing sustainability as a valuable institutional learning opportunity, OU can join hundreds of other higher education institutions seeking to address, as college and university communities, global environmental change and the host of complex challenges that accompany it.

By considering the strategic planning framework and management support structures I have suggested, OU can capitalize on its significant strengths and opportunities while minimizing challenges and threats to enrich its institutional culture; improve internal operations; foster a sense of civic and moral responsibility among students, alumni and employees; and contribute to a growing global imperative to build more sustainable societies.

149 “Systems Thinking.” Center for Ecoliteracy. <www.ecoliteracy.org/nature-our-teacher/systems-thinking>
Appendix I: OU Catalog of Sustainable Initiatives (View Website)

Appendix II: (partial) STARS Report (View Webpage)

Appendix III: Sample Interview Guide

As part of my data collection, I interviewed several Oakland University personnel. This general interview guide served as the framework upon which I built more specific questions for each person I interviewed, based upon that individual’s experiences with sustainability and role in the OU community.

What is your understanding of the concept of sustainability? Are you familiar with higher education sustainability initiatives? What kind of value, if any, do you think these initiatives have for college and university communities?

Have you been involved with any environmental or sustainability initiatives at OU? What did the initiative/s entail? Did you work with anyone else? Who?

Who organized the initiative/s? Did it need approval? From whom did that come?

Did the initiative/s need funding? From where did that funding come? What other resources did you need/use? Were they readily available?

Is the project currently ongoing? If not, how and why did it conclude?

Was the project successful? How could the project have been improved? Did you notice any ways the project could have been expanded?

How do you envision the future of sustainability at OU? Do you think the university is maintaining a satisfactory trajectory toward this future, or do you think it could and/or should do more?

How do you think OU is doing in terms of promoting and educating sustainable behavior in its faculty, staff, and students? Do you think there is a need for additional education?

Do you have any suggestions or have you noticed any opportunities for OU to expand its sustainability practices?

In developing an exemplary sustainable campus community, do you think the leadership for creating successful, lasting change should come from the "bottom up" (for example, a grassroots movement and initiatives from within the larger university community), from the "top down" (administrative policies, guidance, and directives), or from both? Which approach, if any, do you think would be most appropriate for OU at this time?

Do you think a sustainability management structure like a Sustainability Coordinator, Committee or Office of Sustainability would be a helpful resource for OU?

Do you know anyone else at OU involved in such initiatives? Who would you recommend I speak with?

Is there anything about sustainability initiatives at OU we have not mentioned that you think is important to address?
Appendix IV: Commitment Texts of ACUPCC and Talloires Declaration

I. American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment:

“We, the undersigned presidents and chancellors of colleges and universities, are deeply concerned about the unprecedented scale and speed of global warming and its potential for large-scale, adverse health, social, economic and ecological effects. We recognize the scientific consensus that global warming is real and is largely being caused by humans. We further recognize the need to reduce the global emission of greenhouse gases by 80% by mid-century at the latest, in order to avert the worst impacts of global warming and to reestablish the more stable climatic conditions that have made human progress over the last 10,000 years possible.

“While we understand that there might be short-term challenges associated with this effort, we believe that there will be great short-, medium-, and long-term economic, health, social and environmental benefits, including achieving energy independence for the U.S. as quickly as possible.

“We believe colleges and universities must exercise leadership in their communities and throughout society by modeling ways to minimize global warming emissions, and by providing the knowledge and the educated graduates to achieve climate neutrality. Campuses that address the climate challenge by reducing global warming emissions and by integrating sustainability into their curriculum will better serve their students and meet their social mandate to help create a thriving, ethical and civil society. These colleges and universities will be providing students with the knowledge and skills needed to address the critical, systemic challenges faced by the world in this new century and enable them to benefit from the economic opportunities that will arise as a result of solutions they develop.

“We further believe that colleges and universities that exert leadership in addressing climate change will stabilize and reduce their long-term energy costs, attract excellent students and faculty, attract new sources of funding, and increase the support of alumni and local communities. Accordingly, we commit our institutions to taking the following steps in pursuit of climate neutrality.

1. Initiate the development of a comprehensive plan to achieve climate neutrality as soon as possible
   a. Within two months of signing this document, create institutional structures to guide the development and implementation of the plan.
   b. Within one year of signing this document, complete a comprehensive inventory of all greenhouse gas emissions (including emissions from electricity, heating, commuting, and air travel) and update the inventory every other year thereafter.
   c. Within two years of signing this document, develop an institutional action plan for becoming climate neutral, which will include:
      i. A target date for achieving climate neutrality as soon as possible.
      ii. Interim targets for goals and actions that will lead to climate neutrality.
      iii. Actions to make climate neutrality and sustainability a part of the curriculum and other educational experience for all students.
      iv. Actions to expand research or other efforts necessary to achieve climate neutrality.
      v. Mechanisms for tracking progress on goals and actions.

2. Initiate two or more of the following tangible actions to reduce greenhouse gases while the more comprehensive plan is being developed.
   a. Establish a policy that all new campus construction will be built to at least the U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED Silver standard or equivalent.
   b. Adopt an energy-efficient appliance purchasing policy requiring purchase of ENERGY STAR certified products in all areas for which such ratings exist.
   c. Establish a policy of offsetting all greenhouse gas emissions generated by air travel paid for by our institution.
Appendix IV: Commitment Texts of ACUPCC and Talloires Declaration

d. Encourage use of and provide access to public transportation for all faculty, staff, students and visitors at our institution.

e. Within one year of signing this document, begin purchasing or producing at least 15% of our institution’s electricity consumption from renewable sources.

f. Establish a policy or a committee that supports climate and sustainability shareholder proposals at companies where our institution’s endowment is invested.

g. Participate in the Waste Minimization component of the national RecycleMania competition, and adopt 3 or more associated measures to reduce waste.

3. Make the action plan, inventory, and periodic progress reports publicly available by submitting them to the ACUPCC Reporting System for posting and dissemination.

“In recognition of the need to build support for this effort among college and university administrations across America, we will encourage other presidents to join this effort and become signatories to this commitment.

“Signed,

“The Signatories of the American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment”

II. Talloires Declaration:

“We, the presidents, rectors, and vice chancellors of universities from all regions of the world are deeply concerned about the unprecedented scale and speed of environmental pollution and degradation, and the depletion of natural resources.

“Local, regional, and global air and water pollution; accumulation and distribution of toxic wastes; destruction and depletion of forests, soil, and water; depletion of the ozone layer and emission of “green house” gases threaten the survival of humans and thousands of other living species, the integrity of the earth and its biodiversity, the security of nations, and the heritage of future generations. These environmental changes are caused by inequitable and unsustainable production and consumption patterns that aggravate poverty in many regions of the world.

“We believe that urgent actions are needed to address these fundamental problems and reverse the trends. Stabilization of human population, adoption of environmentally sound industrial and agricultural technologies, reforestation, and ecological restoration are crucial elements in creating an equitable and sustainable future for all humankind in harmony with nature.

“Universities have a major role in the education, research, policy formation, and information exchange necessary to make these goals possible. Thus, university leaders must initiate and support mobilization of internal and external resources so that their institutions respond to this urgent challenge.

“We, therefore, agree to take the following actions:

1. Increase Awareness of Environmentally Sustainable Development

Use every opportunity to raise public, government, industry, foundation, and university awareness by openly addressing the urgent need to move toward an environmentally sustainable future.

2. Create an Institutional Culture of Sustainability

Encourage all universities to engage in education, research, policy formation, and information exchange on population, environment, and development to move toward global sustainability.

American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment Text(2007). ACUPCC website. <www.presidentsclimatecommitment.org/about/commitment>
3. Educate for Environmentally Responsible Citizenship

Establish programs to produce expertise in environmental management, sustainable economic development, population, and related fields to ensure that all university graduates are environmentally literate and have the awareness and understanding to be ecologically responsible citizens.

4. Foster Environmental Literacy For All

Create programs to develop the capability of university faculty to teach environmental literacy to all undergraduate, graduate, and professional students.

5. Practice Institutional Ecology

Set an example of environmental responsibility by establishing institutional ecology policies and practices of resource conservation, recycling, waste reduction, and environmentally sound operations.

6. Involve All Stakeholders

Encourage involvement of government, foundations, and industry in supporting interdisciplinary research, education, policy formation, and information exchange in environmentally sustainable development. Expand work with community and nongovernmental organizations to assist in finding solutions to environmental problems.

7. Collaborate for Interdisciplinary Approaches

Convene university faculty and administrators with environmental practitioners to develop interdisciplinary approaches to curricula, research initiatives, operations, and outreach activities that support an environmentally sustainable future.

8. Enhance Capacity of Primary and Secondary Schools

Establish partnerships with primary and secondary schools to help develop the capacity for interdisciplinary teaching about population, environment, and sustainable development.

9. Broaden Service and Outreach Nationally and Internationally

Work with national and international organizations to promote a worldwide university effort toward a sustainable future.

10. Maintain the Movement

Establish a Secretariat and a steering committee to continue this momentum, and to inform and support each other’s efforts in carrying out this declaration.

Appendix V: Sustainability in Higher Education Resources

AASHE STARS
ACUPCC Reporting System
American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment
Association for the Advancement of Sustainability In Higher Education
Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future
Clean Air Cool Planet Campus Carbon Calculator
Concordia University Campus Sustainability Assessments
ENERGY STAR
Global Footprint Network: Calculate Your Ecological Footprint
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
National Geographic’s Green Guide to Sustainable Everyday Living
Recyclemania
Second Nature: Education for Sustainability
Sierra Youth Coalition’s Campus Sustainability Assessment Framework and Toolkit Guide
TerraPass Car Emissions Calculator
The College Sustainability Report Card
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. EPA’s Centralized Climate Change website
U.S. Global Change Research Program
U.S. Green Building Council
University of California –Merced Sustainability Strategic Plan
Yale University Sustainability Strategic Plan