

From: Sustainability Task Force, Nathan Amador Rowley, chair
Re: Proposed Ohio Wesleyan University Sustainability Plan
Friday March 31, 2017

The proposed Ohio Wesleyan University Sustainability Plan is the product of a two-year collaborative effort by students, staff and faculty, overseen by the Sustainability Task Force (STF) as necessitated by the lack of a campus sustainability coordinator. Despite the lack of a coordinator, stakeholders and individuals across campus have lent their ideas and expertise to the creation of viable sustainability goals for the institution. The proposed plan is not intended as an unfunded mandate nor is it an attempt to work around the typical channels of decision making on campus. Our goal with the proposed plan is aspirational and, hopefully, inspirational.

The Sustainability Task Force (created in 2009) proposes that the Sustainability Plan be adopted by the University as a set of goals to guide the institution to a more sustainable future. The plan is composed of four broad goals. Within each broad goal are specific means to those goals: some require administrative and faculty engagement, others are at a scale where smaller groups and individuals can make a significant contribution. Funding details (budget; return on investment) have in some instances been sketched out, but details will be solidified if and when the University decides the goals are worth pursuing. As indicated on the proposed plan, we envision that support of the plan entails the following:

We endorse the general aims and goals of the Plan, and the spirit with which it is intended. By endorsing this document, we are not committing to support all the sustainability efforts the Plan details, nor are we committing to spend funds to meet the Plan's goals. Implementation of sustainability efforts will, in every case, move through a typical administrative process. Endorsement of the Plan serves to raise awareness of sustainability in our community. We endorse making sustainability and sustainable options part of the conversation and process of growth and evolution of the Ohio Wesleyan campus and its community.

The proposed plan has been vetted by those individuals and groups that helped create the plan as well as groups representing the broader community at OWU, including students, faculty, and staff. Groups which support and endorse the general aims and goals of the plan will be listed within the plan. A more detailed outline of the process is listed below.

The proposed OWU Sustainability Plan has come about in a manner that is different than most policies on campus: it is grassroots in origin, collaborative in content, and put forth as aspirational, rather than impositional. That said, we appreciate guidance and advice as we attempt to move the Plan forward for the University.

Nathan Amador Rowley, chair, Sustainability Task Force

OWU Sustainability Plan: Background

Individuals, organizations, and governments have become increasingly concerned about negative human impacts on the environment. Numerous efforts across the globe have been implemented to alleviate and change some of those detrimental impacts. Sustainability has become part of everyday conversation between people across all walks of life. Environmental degradation has become a hot-button issue in the 21st century. Social changes often start with education. Higher education institutions are known to be problem solvers. Many higher education institutions have answered the call for solutions to the environmental crisis by developing and promoting the knowledge, tools, and technologies needed to transition to a sustainable society. It is expected that institutions of higher learning will be environmentally responsible.

Ohio Wesleyan University first established an Environmental Studies program in 1979 – the first university in Ohio to offer a degree of this kind. In its nearly 40-year existence, the program has produced hundreds of majors that have gone on to successful careers. In 2009, the Sustainability Task force was created to evaluate the President's Climate Commitment (PCC), which students overwhelmingly voted to support. Despite the lack of any negative consequences for not meeting the PCC goals, the then head of Buildings and Grounds and the administration were reluctant to sign onto the PCC. In 2011, a grant funded a 2-year Sustainability Coordinator position. The university hired Sean Kinghorn for the position and his efforts generated significant rebate funds for the university, as well as energy saving efforts and dozens of sustainability projects (many led by students). In 2013 Kinghorn's position ended, after the failure to acquire additional external funds for the position. A student protest later that year demonstrated student commitment to the sustainability coordinator position. Despite the loss of the sustainability coordinator, efforts by students, staff and faculty have continued the sustainability effort on campus. New and renovated buildings on campus are now routinely upgraded for energy efficiency. Student involvement continues to grow, particularly among students associated with the Environment and Wildlife Club, the Treehouse SLU, and WCSA. Student initiated projects have been established to promote sustainability on campus including May Move Out, reusable food containers, hydration stations, and our annual Green Week.

With the decision not to sign the President's Climate Commitment and the lack of funds to continue the sustainability coordinator position, the Sustainability Task Force set out on a grass-roots effort to create a campus sustainability plan. The Task Force is not a campus committee; it is voluntary and open to all students, staff and faculty. The efforts to create a plan were carried forth by students in Geography 499: Sustainability Practicum as overseen by the STF. One key lesson learned from the President's Climate Commitment was that external, generic sustainability goals were simply not appropriate for our particular campus. Goal one in creating the Plan was to make sure that all goals were appropriate for our institution, internally initiated rather than externally imposed. Goal two in creating the Plan was to see if a grassroots group of students, staff and faculty could create a Plan, typically the work of a professional sustainability coordinator. We believe that we have achieved both of these goals. The Plan is fine-tuned to our institution. The Plan built on the foundation and efforts of our former sustainability coordinator, incorporated guidance from off campus (alumni, visiting faculty speakers, etc.) as well as a significant amount of work (and time) by the OWU community.

In 2015, a group of students in the Sustainability Practicum researched examples campus sustainability plans and gathered extensive information of past, current, and possible future sustainability projects on

campus. They presented their findings, a 40-page document, to the Sustainability Task Force at the end of the spring semester of 2015. During the spring of 2016 the Practicum students generated a much shorter sustainability plan, narrowing the focus to four goals and subsequent means to those goals, in coordination with the STF, faculty, and staff. Many revisions were worked into the Plan, customizing the goals to align with the capabilities and values of the university. The STF discussed the avenue for adoption of the plan since there was not an established path for such a grassroots proposal. During the spring of 2017 Emily Howald (as part of her independent study) has been reaching out for input and support from groups representing students, faculty and staff. The groups approached include Environmental and Wildlife Club, Treehouse, House of Peace and Justice, Veg Club, Staff Council, Faculty Governance Committee, Department Chairs, and the faculty as a whole. The administration will then be presented the final product with all endorsements.

With the rise in environmental awareness, higher education institutions are expected to take steps towards sustainability. The partner schools in the Ohio 5 consortium have all made progress in this realm. With green funds, solar arrays, renewable energy purchases, LEED buildings, and sustainability coordinators, they each have demonstrated their commitment to an environmentally conscious future. Institutions within the GLCA follow a similar pattern. Despite our partnership with these colleges and universities, we compete with them for student enrollment. Sustainability is key to keeping pace with higher education trends. Studies have shown that though students do not usually choose a school based on their green performance, it can be a way to decide between similar schools. Environmental Studies has also become a popular area of study. IPEDS data shows that many of our competitor schools in Ohio (with stronger commitments to sustainability and stronger ES programs) have many more Environmental Studies graduates. A more visible commitment to sustainability could have a strong positive influence on enrollment. Current students also share a desire of a university commitment to sustainability as exhibited with the protests in 2013, the annual Green Week, and the many students who adopt sustainability into their lifestyles. A stronger commitment by the university could enhance student life by providing students with means to better influence their environmental impacts. Sustainability is also of interest among OWU alumni, and may be a means of attracting donor funds for sustainability efforts on campus (among alumni who have not otherwise donated funds to campus).

Environmental Studies and sustainability is an excellent area to promote the values of the university. The interdisciplinary approach necessary emphasizes the university's liberal arts values. The field also has numerous opportunities for theory-into-practice experiences. In fact, the proposed Sustainability Plan is itself an exercise in theory-into-practice among OWU students and faculty. Experience with sustainability prepares students to investigate, debate, and solve some of the most important problems facing society in the 21st century. It is the role of higher education institutions to not just imbue students with job skills but to train them to live responsibly as local, national, and global citizens so they can make a difference in the world.

In addition to preparing responsible citizens through education, universities have a moral obligation as role models to their students and to the world. Higher education institutions hold power to change the world and should lead the world into a sustainable future. It is necessary for universities to commit to sustainable practices in this role. Their commitment will not only lead the world but will have great impacts on the well-being of the region and community. It is the responsibility of Ohio Wesleyan University to take some action to help alleviate environmental degradation.

Not only can sustainable efforts increase enrollment, retention, and donor support but certain projects also have the potential for large budget savings. Energy efficiency projects have guaranteed return on investment from energy savings. In fact, these investments have a higher return than most other investments the university could utilize.

Adopting a sustainability plan with goals such as those set forth by the Sustainability Task Force will have numerous benefits to the university. This is a natural progression for the university based on trends in higher education as well as the concerns and interests of many individuals within and beyond the institution.

The Sustainability Task Force would like to present this Sustainability Plan to be reviewed by President Rock Jones and his Senior Leadership Team to continue the conversation with the ultimate goal of campus adoption of the plan.