Institutionalizing Sustainability

Viewpoints on Sustainability from Second Nature

Cliff's Cottage at Furman University

Creating a healthy, just, and sustainable society must be central to the core purpose of any organization in the 21st century. In the case of colleges and universities that means educating students and creating new knowledge through research, as well as modeling sustainability in operations and promoting sustainability through community engagement.

Through this series of briefing papers — *Viewpoints on Sustainability* — Second Nature will highlight ways to make sustainability a foundation of all of an organization's activities, so it becomes embedded "in the walls." Future issues will focus on key topics such as financing, curriculum, engaging the campus community, and climate adaptation strategies — and highlight strategies and resources for making a sustainability perspective second nature at a college or university.

> "Leadership from the president assures the campus that sustainability is indeed a priority for the university as a whole. At PSU, that has elicited valuable participation and unique perspectives from less likely suspects, such as social work and the humanities."
>
> - Wim Wiewel, President, Portland State University

Organizations that effectively institutionalize sustainability typically demonstrate the following characteristics:

Top-level commitment: A clear, public commitment from top-level management — the president or chancellor and the governing board — is necessary to institutionalize sustainability. Currently, one of the most effective ways to do this is to sign the American College & University Presidents' Climate Commitment (ACUPCC), as it demonstrates that commitment and contributes to collective action to address the challenges of climate disruption.

Clear goals: Sustainability challenges are inherently complex and there is a tendency for large groups to jump directly to the level of actions or projects that they feel are feasible in the short-term. Having a clear definition of sustainability at the principle level and measurable goals is required for institutionalizing sustainability in the long-term.

Communication: Communication is to sustainability as location is to real estate — it's all about "communication, communication, communication." A comprehensive and deliberate strategy should be pursued to ensure that sustainability is communicated as a strategic priority at every opportunity — persistently and repetitively — particularly by the president and senior leadership.

Professional Development: To ensure a sustainability perspective is "in the walls" of an organization and is not lost with changes in leadership, comprehensive professional development programs are needed for faculty, staff and administrators. Such programs could include a combination of workshops, training, materials and follow-up mechanisms. The goal is to enable all members of the organization to evaluate their actions through the lens of sustainability goals, thus fostering alignment across the institution and leveraging the skills and creativity of each individual.

Performance Goals & Assessment: Faculty, staff, departments and the institution as a whole should have performance goals that reflect progress towards sustainability. Specific language about sustainability should be in job descriptions and goals and plans for departments. The best

Second Nature
Education for Sustainability

the lead supporting organization of the

AMERICAN COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY
PRESIDENTS' CLIMATE COMMITMENT

Additional Resources

ACUPCC Leadership
Resources Page
www.acupcc.org/leadership

Leading Profound Change
ACUPCC Steering Committee, 2009

Institutionalizing Sustainability:
Shifting Gears, Shifting Culture
Wim Wiewel, March 2011

Corporate Social
Responsibility Is Dead
Kellie Hawke Baxter, May 2011

How to Get Your Boardroom
Engaged in Sustainability
Sally Uren, February 2011

Books

Boldly Sustainable
Peter Bardaglio and Andrea Putman, 2009

The ISIS Agreement
Alan Atkisson, 2008

Leading Change Toward
Sustainability
Bob Doppelt, 2003

Dancing with the Tiger
Brian Nattrass and Mary Altomare, 2002

Good to Great
James Collins, 2001

Mid-Course Correction
Ray Anderson, 1999

Built to Last
James Collins and Jerry Porras, 1997

The Fifth Discipline
Peter Senge, 1991

way to assess progress in a transparent way while engaging with the broader higher education sector is to participate in AASHE's STARS program.

Integrating Disciplines & Departments: A key challenge is to re-imagine and reorganize the structure of the academy so that all disciplines and departments are aligned and supporting one another in ensuring that the institution is contributing to the creation of a sustainable society. This involves integrating teaching, research, operations and community engagement as well as developing trans-disciplinary approaches. One effective model to start this process is to create centers that serve as hubs for various disciplines and departments — though the ultimate goal of these centers should be obsolescence as sustainability is embedded in all learning and research as a core, normative goal.

Student Engagement: All of these efforts are ultimately designed to help students understand sustainability. Direct involvement in sustainability projects on campus is an effective way to provide hands-on experience with these issues. Dedicated staff time in the Student Affairs office and/or Sustainability office will help coordinate the various student groups on campus around sustain-

Northland College students show off the freshly harvested produce they will be bringing on their outdoor orientation trip from the Mino Aki Community Garden.
Photo courtesy Bob Gross

ability goals. Integrating experiential learning opportunities into education, research, operations and community engagement will leverage student enthusiasm and foster creative approaches to real-world challenges on campus and beyond. Every sustainability project represents a potential experiential learning opportunity.

> "The University of California, Irvine integrates sustainability measures into the annual performance goals and appraisals of key personnel in facilities management, parking and transportation, design and construction, procurement, and campus planning."
>
> - Wendell Brase, Vice Chancellor, University of California, Irvine and Chair, University of California Climate Solutions Steering Group

Make the Invisible Visible: Many symptoms of our unsustainable behavior stem from the fact that we are not educated to think systemically or understand the direct and indirect impacts of our actions and the products and services we use. Help students, faculty and staff to see these impacts that are mostly invisible to us by evaluating your supply chain and waste stream and communicating the results in effective, transparent ways.

Partnerships: Build partnerships with other institutions around sustainability. Sustainability challenges are complex and require cross-discipline and cross-sector collaboration. No one institution can become sustainable working in isolation from other institutions and other sectors.