

## **Environmental Issues Committee**

March 16, 2011

12:00 PM

Umpqua River Room, EMU

### **Members in Attendance:**

Art Farley, Steve Mital, Lauren Wirtis, Jennifer Ellis, Alan Dickman, Ramah Leith, Christian Pich, Peg Gearhart, Nathan Howard, Wesley Thompson, Doug Brooke, and Louisa de Heer

### **Meeting Minutes**

Art Farley began the meeting by opening the floor up for questions or comments about the minutes. Christian Pich mentioned that he was not on the list to receive Environmental Issues Committee (EIC) emails, and had not seen the minutes. The minutes were unanimously approved with one abstention by Christian Pich.

Art Farley said that Steve Mital would be discussing a list of updates for the term and then the committee could talk about moving forward next term. Steve Mital updated the EIC members on the following topics:

#### Take Back the Tap

Steve Mital met with the group working on this campaign to talk about what a report to submit to the EIC and the Faculty Senate would look like. The group requested a faculty advisor from the EIC and Alan Dickman agreed to take that role and move the project along.

#### Green Cleaning Supplies Purchasing

The EIC had a meeting in the fall where Bill Kasper (Facilities) came and presented information about the University of Oregon's current green cleaning supplies policies. However, those policies are not codified. The Office of Sustainability began looking into other green cleaning supplies purchasing programs and working with Bill Kasper in an effort to make sure sustainable practices are continued after "the champions" of the program retire. We also get sustainability credit for having a policy formally on the books. Bill Kasper, in the EIC meeting three months ago, said that he would have a policy draft ready to show the EIC in March. That draft is not ready, but Facilities has moved forward. Steve Mital "helped them set up a relationship with the Green Products Design Network, [which] has identified two graduate students in chemistry who are now going to work with a custodial team to develop a list of chemicals that are [acceptable] and then turn that list into policy."

Art Farley asked if there was a date for completion of a policy. Steve Mital replied that he had not yet seen a timeline for completion. Facilities realized they did not have the necessary staffing or expertise to create this policy on their own, so they have been working the past few months to reach out and acquire the necessary help.

Doug Brooke inquired about how he could interface with the Green Products Design Network to make sure that they do not have any hazardous waste issues. Steve Mital said the person to contact would be Julie Haack.

### Carbon Offsets

The EIC voted that the carbon offsets should be purchased from Climate Trust's program at Lochmead Farm. There was a story about it in the Daily Emerald and Steve Mital is trying to get one in the Register Guard as well. During Earth Week, Steve is trying to set up a field trip to go visit the project. Usually the easiest day to arrange for people to go is on Friday; however, since Friday is Earth Day, the trip may have to be earlier in the week since many people will be occupied by events happening on campus that day. In the end there will probably be about 15-20 people who take a van out to the dairy for a two to three hour trip.

Christian Pich asked if the University of Oregon was supporting the entire offset program. Steve Mital replied that the University was purchasing a portion of the (approximately \$10 million) project. Christian noted that there was no registry of people supporting the project on their website. Steve said that he had recognized that fact and was in communication with Climate Trust about that issue.

### Green House Gas Emissions Inventory

The inventory was just finished for the 2010 fiscal year, which ended June 30<sup>th</sup>. The report is in the process of being converted into a PowerPoint presentation that Steve Mital will be giving on April 7<sup>th</sup> in Lillis (a notice will be sent out soon) for an hour to the university community and the public "for anyone who want to learn the details about [the University of Oregon's] green house gases: who's responsible, where they come from, how they compare to last year and the year before, etc."

### Eco-Challenge

The Eco-Challenge is an Earth Week event initiated by the Office of Sustainability and supported by the Environmental Studies office and the Humanities Center. The idea is to get people to make a commitment to some small amount of behavior change that would have environmental benefits either in their personal life or their professional life. To participate one goes to the homepage (<http://www.uoecochallenge.org/>), logs in or registers, and chooses his/her eco-challenge. One interesting feature is that there is a page that shows all of the participants. Right now there are about 100 participants

including the president, Steve Mital is trying to get some of the other prominent people on campus, such as major athletes to participate as well. The end of this term will denote the end of what is being called the “silent phase” where the program has 100 participants who are hopefully recognizable to others on campus. Once Spring Break is over a much more public campaign will begin to get students, faculty, and staff to sign up with the goal of reaching 1,000 participants. Steve asked that those on the EIC committee who choose to participate and also use Facebook sign up for the Facebook feature in an effort to encourage participation or to email others about the event. Hopefully, by reaching 1,000 participants, the list of people can be presented to senior administrators and used as way to argue that sustainable action is a value on campus, which could strengthen the sustainability community and create opportunities for additional resources to be allocated to sustainability events, research, and classes.

Nathan Howard asked if some of the problems with the website had been fixed. Steve Mital responded that the website does not seem to be compatible with Safari and that people using Safari reported that the website would save some of their fields but not all of them. There is currently a “band-aid” on the top of the home page and the developer is trying to fix the problem. Nathan inquired if other browsers had been identified as not working, such as Google Chrome, or if Safari was the only browser that did not work. Steve answered that Safari was the only one identified. Google Analytics had been run on the site to see how many people were using each browser to reach the site, and most people are using either Firefox or Safari, so those are the main browsers on which the developer is focusing.

Steve Mital went on to say that many other universities have become interested in this program and asked if they could “piggy-back” on it. Athletics asked if they could “promote it to their fan base” even if they aren’t students, faculty or staff. This year Athletics was asked not to do that until the problems were all worked out, but the Alumni Network may become involved in subsequent years. Thus, success this year will lead to opportunities to expand in the future.

The website allows the viewer to use different features to see who is participating. Participants can be viewed by status (i.e. student, faculty, or staff) and by department. There is an impact page on the website that Steve will be updating soon that will reflect various statistics, such as which department has the most participants. The goal for the program is 1,000 participants and right now the number is roughly one-tenth of that.

### Sustainability Tracking Assessment and Rating System (STARS)

This is a six month long project to which the University of Oregon agreed. Approximately 230 other universities have also signed up and STARS is “expected to become the dominant reporting system that universities will engage in to gauge their sustainability efforts.” Areas evaluated include the curriculum, research, operations, and engagement. The University of Oregon was amongst the inaugural group to participate. Every

university is rated Basic, Bronze, Silver, Gold, or Platinum. On February 25, 2011 we submitted our report and fell in with the 50% of universities who received a Silver rating (22% received gold and 24% earned bronze).

Steve Mital went on to discuss the information available on the STARS website (<https://stars.aashe.org/>). From the home page you can look at the reports for the University of Oregon or any other university in which you are interested. Many people have noted that Oregon State University and Portland State University both received a gold rating. Consequently, Steve said he'd like to "begin [the] conversation with some caveats about the reporting." The concept behind STARS is to have an "apples to apples" reporting system that fairly compares universities across the nation, however that is nearly impossible for several reasons. First, the weights applied to the scoring criteria are somewhat arbitrary. Second, and most importantly, STARS is a measurement based on self-assessment. Consequently, there may be pressure to make one's university appear "greener" than it is. "[This doesn't mean that people are blatantly dishonest," the STARS criteria leave a lot of room for interpretation. For example, in the *Education and Research* section it is up to the evaluator to define a "sustainability-oriented course" and count up how many the university offers. The University of Oregon used a "very rigorous definition led by faculty in the Environmental Studies program" for the criteria for what is "sustainability-oriented." On the other hand, "we know some of our peers set very loose definitions."

This system will be tightened up over time. There has already been a lot of feedback from universities like us, saying "we put a lot of effort into rigorous, fair, and honest reporting and we're being penalized for it." For example, the University of Oregon is proud to say that 7% of food for the university is purchased locally, because it is near impossible to purchase more than that for a large institution. Institutions "saying they're purchasing 20-30% of their food local and organic," which seems hard to do in this region especially at certain times of the year. Hopefully, feedback such as this to the STARS institute will lead to more stringent criteria as well as an auditing mechanism. The University of Oregon definition of a "sustainability-oriented curriculum" is solid and possibly "the best one out there," so it would be beneficial for that definition or one like it to be universally adopted and applied.

Overall, the University of Oregon was conservative in its reporting believing that it is much easier to build points over time than it is to rebuild your reputation. There are several highlights worth mentioning. One, we received at least some credit in nearly all of the roughly 140 categories, meaning we have programs in every facet of campus and all we need to do is strengthen those programs to earn more points in the future. Two, the STARS report forced us to create a tight network of data collection and sourcing. For each credit there is a "responsible party" citing the source of the data used to evaluate the University for that credit. Thus, this report is the best new place to go if you need to know who to talk to about some aspect of sustainability on campus.

Steve Mital then opened up the floor for questions about the STARS report.

Louisa de Heer asked how long it took Steve's team to put the report together. Steve replied that "most of the credit belongs to Evan Lewis," the graduate student working in the Office of Sustainability. The report occupied approximately three-quarters of his 20-hour work week from September 2010 to February 2011 when the office submitted the report. Most of that time was spent tracking down data and finding out who has the data. Knowing the information about data collection now, the report process should take significantly less time in the future.

Nathan Howard commented that at the OUS Sustainability Conference the executive director for the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), who is responsible for the STARS report system, said that the reason no one gets Platinum is that no one is 100% sustainable and has zero impact on the environment. It seems to be a positive thing that so many universities were rated Silver and Gold, because it shows that there is a lot of room for progress. Steve Mital agreed saying that he believes this is a "great tool to benchmark our progress against ourselves." Steve also mentioned that the director of AASHE said that she was "disappointed at how many universities gave themselves a gold rating" and that most universities should be at the bronze or silver level indicating that they're on the right path but still have a lot of work to do.

Alan Dickman asked if the STARS report is updated annually. Steve Mital replied that the report can be updated at a minimum of once every five years and a maximum of once every three years. Alan followed up asking what the new criteria might be. Steve answered that it would be hard to predict but it will change. AASHE said up front that there would be alterations to the system since this was the first year. AASHE is currently being "flooded with emails" from universities about what criteria to alter and/or fix. Steve noted that he had recommended that AASHE establish some sort of auditing system, otherwise notion of having a comparative system falls apart.

Art Farley noted that there could be major differences between universities' potential ratings and how hard it is to obtain more points based on location in the country and access to local foods and alternative forms of energy. Furthermore, being a research institution may mean that more energy is used to support that curriculum.

Nathan Howard asked if hydro power was counted as a renewable energy in the STARS report. Steve Mital said that it was not. This is unfortunate since the University gets most of its power from EWEB, which primarily sources energy from hydro-powered dams. Thus, it is a relatively clean source, which is why the University hasn't spent a lot of money on renewable energy credits. However, the STARS report how much renewable energy a university is purchasing and our answer is "none." There are places in the country where it does make sense for a university to spend money on renewable

energy credits, but since the University has a relatively clean energy source it chooses to spend that money elsewhere.

Louisa de Heer asked if there was a top-down declaration to those collecting and reporting the data back to your office to make reporting a priority or if Evan Lewis had to go to each person and request the data specifically. Steve Mital responded that there was no top-down declaration. Instead, an email was sent out from the Office of Sustainability to all of the different people who would be reporting telling them about the STARS report, why it was important, and how it would benefit them and their department in the future (i.e. cut down on the number of emails about data to which you have to respond). Most of the time spent on the report was simply finding out who had the data, requesting it, and making sure those people followed through. Some last stragglers finally had to be notified that the President was about to sign a letter saying “the STARS report was ‘complete and accurate’” that day and it will be misinformation unless you send me this information. All the information was then received within half an hour.

Art Farley said that Lauren Wirtis would be in contact with everyone about setting times and dates for the EIC meetings in the coming months. Steve Mital added that the first thing on the agenda at the April meeting would be addressing the Comprehensive Environmental Policy.

**The meeting was adjourned at 12:42 PM.**