

PROPOSAL FOR THE PHASED DEVELOPMENT OF A CENTER FOR SUSTAINABILITY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

Adapted from the 2005 Sustainability Task Force Final Report

INTRODUCTION

Environmental sustainability has emerged as a major concern facing large institutions such as the University of Kansas. Sustainability – understood as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs— is now a critical filter with which to evaluate the function of operations ranging from energy use to waste management, including both the built and natural environment. Sustainability also incorporates the pursuit of economic prosperity and social justice with the goal of environmental responsibility, making it more than just an issue of the environment but one of the global community as a whole.

As an institution of higher education, the University of Kansas is poised to make a significant contribution to a sustainable future. The university's pursuit of sustainability provides a mechanism to recognize numerous benefits, including: cost savings; learning opportunities; research opportunities; positive interactions between faculty, staff and students; and positive alumni relations. As a sustainable campus, the University of Kansas would promote these associated academic and operational benefits along with global awareness and humanitarian values.

More specifically, KU's support of the ideas contained in this proposal would help establish guidelines for responsible growth, reduce campus energy and resource consumption, and foster interdisciplinary research that will significantly impact our campus and the surrounding community. In doing so, the University will expand its role as an innovative leader in Kansas, the region, and beyond.

Background

In Fall 2004, a Sustainability Task Force comprised of students, faculty, and staff was appointed by the Provost to examine the feasibility of organizing a hub at KU for research and project implementation that would make existing and future campus operations more environmentally responsible. In March of the following year, the Task Force submitted a set of recommendations (see attached Executive Summary) with the ultimate goal of positioning “the University of Kansas as a leader in sustainable practices and sustainability education and research”. The objective of the proposal was to “create a Center for Sustainability that will serve students, faculty, and staff as a centralized hub for coordination of sustainability activities and research.”¹ To achieve this objective, the group provided the following recommendations:

1. Create a Center for Sustainability with staff that includes one full-time staff member, one part-time faculty member, and one or more part-time students.
 - a. Drawing on the model of the KU Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE), form groups of “ambassadors” from across all units of campus to generate new ideas and broaden environmental awareness.
2. After a process of review and revision, implement the existing Campus Environmental Policy.
 - a. Appoint a new Committee on the Environment (COE) charged with duties that include establishing goals and timelines for implementing the existing environmental policy and providing annual recommendations to the Provost, along with current charges as defined by the EHS Council in the University of Kansas Lawrence Campus Safety Program (KUSP).

¹ University of Kansas Sustainability Task Force Final Report, submitted March 30, 2005

Nearly one year after the original recommendations were presented, there has been no significant progress towards the goal put forth by the Sustainability Task Force. The Department of Environment, Health, and Safety has made necessary revisions to the Campus Environmental Policy to more accurately address issues of implementation. Additionally, members of the task force have continued to meet to discuss specific issues as they arise, with leadership from student organizations joining the discussion. This group helped sponsor a Campus Sustainability Day webcast attended by approximately 40 students, faculty, and staff, and provided input to Chevron Energy Solutions regarding their campus energy education campaign. However, an organized group such as this without the granted authority, staff, or resources to implement change cannot effectively address the encompassing issues of sustainability.

PROPOSAL

To begin working towards the goal of a sustainable KU, it is recommended that the University of Kansas employ a phased approach to implementing the Sustainability Task Force's proposal.

The initial phase of the project will define sustainability for our campus by setting measurable goals for operating an efficient and environmentally responsible institution and begin developing strategies for achieving those goals. It will also create opportunities for students to learn about sustainability through coursework, research, and service. Through such an approach, the University can begin laying the foundation for a Center for Sustainability in a cost-effective manner while addressing the recommendations originally presented.

Recommendations

Establishing a centralized hub to coordinate sustainability activities and research remains an essential strategy in addressing sustainability at the University of Kansas. This phase of the project will begin to form that hub through staff and student positions and a Provost-appointed committee:

1. Create a full-time staff position with additional funding for a student hourly staff pool within the Environmental Stewardship Program to begin working towards the recommendations provided by the Sustainability Task Force and begin taking steps toward a sustainable future by utilizing existing resources.
2. Appoint a new Committee on the Environment (COE) charged with establishing indicators and goals for a sustainable campus, including goals and timelines for implementing the existing environmental policy, and providing annual recommendations to the Provost. These duties would complement current charges as defined by the EHS Council in the University of Kansas Lawrence Campus Safety Program (KUSP).

Objectives

Staff and committee members will work together to reach the following set of objectives:

1. *Research and establish indicators for sustainability at the University of Kansas:* Staff will work with the COE, with input from sustainability centers nationwide, to identify indicators that will be used in evaluating progress toward a sustainable KU. Along with this, the staff and COE will research and establish methods for measuring these indicators. Indicators will encompass a range of aspects outlined in the Campus Environmental Policy (e.g. resource use, waste reduction, effluents and emissions, purchasing guidelines, design/construction standards), but will also address student exposure to sustainability education, awareness among faculty and staff, and research opportunities.
2. *Research and document baseline conditions utilizing those indicators:* Using the indicators and methods of measurement established under Objective #1, staff will research and document the current status of the Lawrence campus with regard to sustainability. Data collected will be used as a baseline in evaluating progress.

3. *Establish and prioritize goals for a sustainable KU:* Staff will work with the COE and campus departments to establish goals for sustainability connected to the established indicators. Goals will be prioritized based on cost-effectiveness and urgency of need.
4. *Begin researching high priority projects related to goals:* Staff will work with student interns, faculty members, graduate researchers and/or others with interest in sustainability to begin researching strategies for reaching high priority goals. Depending on the scope of the projects and resources available, efforts will be focused on a small number of projects (1 to 3) each year, (starting in spring 2007 at the earliest) with additional research carried out as time allows. Example projects include:
 - a. Examining energy use in facilities not included in the agreement with ChevronTexaco and developing an energy conservation plan. This may include studying building user behavior and suggesting specific conservation measures, developing general resources for energy conservation education, and establishing goals for energy efficiency and consumption in new construction.
 - b. Developing a system to measure and analyze the campus solid waste stream, resulting in recommendations for reducing campus waste and improving recycling efforts.
 - c. Examining opportunities for reducing stormwater runoff, recovering rainwater for purposes of irrigation, and incorporating gray-water systems in future construction.
 - d. Developing education resources for individuals responsible for procurement to encourage sustainable purchases and contract agreements. One example includes the purchase of energy efficient equipment with a low life-cycle cost.
5. *Identify and promote student opportunities for sustainability education and research:* To assist students pursuing sustainability education, staff will work with campus departments to compile a list of course offerings that focus on or support concepts of sustainability. Staff will also work with faculty and campus research units to identify opportunities for student involvement with projects that impact campus sustainability.
6. *Promote basic concepts of sustainability among the campus community:* Staff will develop presentations and educational materials to promote sustainable practices and lifestyles among students, faculty, and staff. Resources will include a website dedicated to campus sustainability.
7. *Begin developing a network of sustainability ambassadors:* Staff will begin developing a system for distributing information, gathering feedback, and encouraging self-evaluation to connect campus departments and student organizations to a central hub. Through interactions with the campus community, staff will identify candidates willing to serve as sustainability ambassadors for their department or organization. As recommended by the Sustainability Task Force, this network will include student, faculty, and staff ambassadors.
8. *Identify and pursue funding opportunities for sustainability research:* Staff will seek funding for campus sustainability research with the goal of establishing a grant program for graduate and undergraduate research and project implementation related to the sustainability goals established under Objective #3. Opportunities identified under Objective #5 could also be enhanced through this program.

Implementation

The objectives outlined above have the potential to affect a broad range of campus departments, and goals set in meeting these objectives will eventually impact all campus operations. To successfully attain these and future objectives of the project, it will be necessary to institutionalize the concepts of sustainability at the University of Kansas. This cannot be done by a single office or committee alone, but will require collaboration with and between all campus units. In effect, staff and committee members will facilitate a much larger process by serving as a hub for a campus-wide network. However, associated staff, committee members, and partnering entities will play specific roles in coordinating this effort.

Full Time Staff

A full-time staff member will be responsible for maintaining the general operations of the project, and will be housed within the Environmental Stewardship Program. Direction will be guided by recommendations provided to the Office of the Provost by the COE (see below). This position will work closely with other office employees, administrative units, and the COE. Job duties during the initial phase of the project include:

1. Coordinate with staff and COE to draft an indicator list and goals for sustainability
2. Gather information on current research and practices carried out on campus
3. Identify and promote opportunities for students to learn about sustainability and become involved in sustainability research
4. Form partnerships with campus departments; Encourage collaboration between departments/student organization through information sharing
5. Provide sustainability education and outreach to campus departments
6. Lay groundwork for faculty and staff components of a sustainability ambassador network
7. Work with COE and student staff to accomplish the objectives listed above

Student Hourly Staff

A part-time student staff member will serve as a liaison to other student groups and assist the full-time staff member with research projects selected during this phase of the project. More than one student may be hired based on the project(s) selected. Job duties during the initial phase of the project will include:

1. Assist with drafting of indicator list and goals
2. Gather information/archive student research related to sustainability
3. Provide outreach to student organizations
4. Lay groundwork for the student component of a sustainability network
5. Provide assistance to staff as needed to accomplish objectives

Committee on the Environment

A reconstituted Committee on the Environment (COE) remains an essential component to the success of this project. Composition of the committee should be based on recommendations provided by the Sustainability Task Force. Because this committee will deal with a broad range of issues, the COE will provide recommendations to the Vice Provost most closely associated with the issue, who will in turn advise staff on addressing these recommendations. In addition to charges defined by Appendix 4 of KUSP and the Task Force's recommendations, responsibilities during the initial phase of the project will include:

1. Establish indicators for sustainability at KU
2. Establish and prioritize goals for a sustainable KU

Other Partners

Staff will work closely with the Environmental Studies Program to meet some of the research needs of this project. The Environmental Studies Program has proposed curriculum revisions that include an interdisciplinary capstone project. When applicable, the instructor of this course may coordinate with project staff to assist with sustainability research.

The program will also collaborate with the Center for Service Learning. This partnership, along with others formed with academic departments, will create the opportunity to develop more service learning courses and increase participation in service learning and research.

EVALUATION

The Committee on the Environment will monitor the progress of this project and submit an annual report to the Provost. The objectives listed above, along with any additional objectives established by staff or the COE will be used to evaluate the success of the project. Establishing indicators and measurement tools under Objective #1 also sets up a system for long-term evaluation of the project.

CHANGES FROM ORIGINAL PROPOSAL

The staffing and structure detailed above deviates from the original proposal but does not significantly compromise the original intent. Modifications are noted here.

1. The full-time staff position has been moved into an existing department, instead of creating a new unit responsible directly to the Office of the Provost, to more effectively establish the position before it is moved to an independent center. This allows the staff to benefit from and build upon existing relationships and eliminates the administrative burden of creating a new department at this time.
2. The part-time faculty has been eliminated entirely to reduce costs, with the expectation that a faculty position will be added in the next phase of development. Partnerships with the Environmental Studies Program and other academic departments will supplement, but in no way replace, the academic branch of the hub that would have been coordinated through the faculty position. Students involved with the project will not benefit from an associated faculty advisor as outlined in the original proposal, but staff will instead be responsible for fostering relationships necessary to make this branch of the hub as functional as possible.
3. The role of the COE has been broadened beyond just addressing the Campus Environmental Policy. Setting goals for a Sustainable KU will incorporate goals for implementing the policy, among other issues primarily of an academic nature. The charge and composition of this committee lends itself to carrying out the complete process and not just those components that deal specifically with the Campus Environmental Policy. Additionally, instead of providing recommendations directly to the Provost, the COE will submit recommendations to the Vice Provost most closely associated with each issue.
4. Additional objectives have been included in this proposal to further define the project and the role of those responsible for implementation. These additions serve to support and enhance the original proposal.

CONCLUSION

The proposed structure provides an opportunity for KU to establish goals for future growth and begin developing a hub to coordinate our valuable campus resources. Across the university, academic units strive to prepare students for the professional workforce, with communication and research skills, creative minds, and developed technical competence. This project will provide direct contributions to these efforts while making our campus more efficient and both fiscally and environmentally responsible. The benefits of student research and service, combined with the collaborative relationships formed between campus departments will put the University of Kansas on the path to a sustainable future.

Efforts of the Sustainability Task Force and other members of the campus community have proven there is a strong interest and an immediate need to pursue environmental sustainability. We urge the University to seize this opportunity to make further critical contributions toward a sustainable future and enhance our image as an outstanding institution of higher education.