

# Strategies for Institutionalizing Sustainability on Campus

*Summary by Rosi Kerr*

## *Panelists*

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In this session, two strategies for institutionalizing sustainability were compared and contrasted. Each presenter provided a brief overview of his/her position followed by a brief explanation of the institutional strategy that was employed. The example of the University of California initiative provided a systemic perspective, while the Yale University presentation illustrated a campus specific approach.

## **UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT**

### **The UC Strategy: Committees**

The University of California system is comprised of 10 campuses and more than 100 million gross square feet of building space. Collectively the UC system has a large impact on the use of natural resources throughout the state and beyond, with an aggregate enrollment of more than 200,000 students. This demography makes the UC system a perfect laboratory for experimenting with a multi-campus approach to sustainability. The UC sustainability program emerged from a feasibility study and policy that was adopted in 2003. The position of Sustainability Specialist for the UC system was created and placed in the system-wide Office of the President. The Sustainability Specialist is responsible for overseeing the development of and providing support to sustainability activities at each of the UC institutions.

The strategy of the Sustainability Specialist has been to assist with the development of sustainability-themed committees across the UC system. Naming the committees, choosing the right members, situating them within the appropriate office, and determining the appropriate meeting frequency all have significant impacts on the effectiveness of each committee. The Specialist must think strategically about all of these questions. The role of students and faculty and their

respective positions on the committee also are important to consider. Students, for example, add enormous energy but within a short time frame and, often, with limited effectiveness because student involvement sometimes makes faculty and staff feel correspondingly less likely to take a committee seriously. In the UC system, each campus determines its own set of sustainability priorities. The Committee at UC Berkeley, for example, has focused on Sustainability Awards, a Green Development Fund, a Campus Sustainability Assessment and an alumni network.

### **Assessments**

Assessments of current impacts and identifying potential opportunities have been an important starting place for improving sustainability on the various UC campuses. At UC Berkeley, a graduate student led the effort and undergraduates provided the workforce. This enabled a very thorough and comprehensive review. In contrast, UC Santa Barbara hired a consultant to develop a Sustainability Master Plan and to train members of the community to be “Sustainability Change Agents” using the Natural Step system. This has resulted in very ambitious goals for this campus. Other UC campuses are planning to complete related campus sustainability assessments within the year.

### **Developing Offices of Sustainability**

Each campus is taking steps towards developing what may eventually become an Office of Sustainability. The reporting lines for each of these offices will vary from campus to campus. This is a critical question and crucial to the success and desired impacts of the office. The temptation seems to be to place this position within the facilities department, though ideally they should not be situated there because it could potentially limit their effectiveness outside of operational responsibilities. UC Santa Barbara has three people working on sustainability (facilities, procurement and education) with the eventual goal of shifting the office from facilities to a higher level, possibly the provost’s Office. Other UC campuses [Los Angeles, Berkeley, Riverside, San Francisco and San Diego] are in the process of establishing a sustainability manager or director position for their university.

### **Finding Tipping Points, Sharing Information and Using Existing Resources**

The current sustainability specialist views his role as that of a change agent or catalyst. To make the most of his time, he searches for tipping points where a little push from him goes a long way. He seeks to empower, legitimize and support the efforts of sustainability activities on each of the UC campuses. He uses email, a website, the American Association of Sustainability in Higher Education bulletin, lectures and classes as his media. He also mentors student activists and has frequent conference calls with faculty and staff. He works to make connections between people and to be a repository of information that is useful to others. One example is bringing together the right people to create standard documents and contracts for green building projects. Another is developing training programs to share institutional knowledge and disseminate information.

A UC Sustainability Conference was established as a way to increase communication and exchange between the campuses. This annual event brings together stakeholders from the entire UC system and other California universities to celebrate and learn from the progress that is being made. The conference attracts more participants each year and adds breadth and depth to the campus dialogue.

### **Sustainability Policy Achievements**

What are the results of the UC system efforts? The UC sustainability efforts are having a noticeable impact on support structures that reverberate outside of the university system. The UC capital building program, for example, will spend \$8 billion on construction alone. Other accomplishments include:

#### 1. A System-wide Sustainability Steering Committee

The steering committee includes representatives at the vice chancellor level from all ten campuses plus faculty experts and state government representatives. This committee helps coordinate sustainability efforts across the system and gets reports from 6 topical system wide working groups (Sustainable Transportation, Climate Change, Sustainable Operations, Sustainable Purchasing, Green Building for Renovations, and Sustainable Food Systems)

#### 2. An Updated Climate Policy

The policy is consistent with the state of California climate and energy policy. In addition to near- and medium-term goals for emission reductions by 2014 and 2020, the policy sets an ultimate vision of becoming “climate neutral” as soon as possible.

#### 3. New Policy Initiatives

- A sustainable operations policy using LEED for Existing Buildings
- Extending green building policy requirements to renovation projects
- A waste reduction policy
- A comprehensive purchasing policy
- A sustainable food systems policy is still about one year out

The new policy initiatives have had considerable impact. In just three years the culture in the UC system has changed drastically. Stakeholders are more involved and sustainability is increasingly institutionalized. And, while there is still a long way to go, the pace is picking up.

### **PROGRESS TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY AT YALE**

Yale’s Office of Sustainability, which reports jointly to the Office of Facilities and the Office of the Provost, was created to generate increased momentum and facilitate the process of developing and implementing best sustainability practices at Yale. New

energy was added to the community's historical grassroots sustainability efforts and to the University's early formal mechanisms, such as the Provost's Advisory Committee on Environmental Management. In 2004 Yale strengthened its commitment by creating the position of Sustainability Director and, through her efforts, the Office of Sustainability. The initial role of the office was to:

- Engage students, faculty, and staff in gaining understanding of current patterns and consequences of behaviors;
- Encourage creative dialogue to explore desirable sustainable characteristics and the means to achieve them;
- Incorporate sustainability principles into operational functions and educational framework in order to influence actions from the local to the global level.

Integrating sustainability into a University requires process. There are a range of complex issues sustainability engages – including moral and ethical ones – that often require community debate and resolution.

### **Setting the Course**

The Sustainability Director must learn to understand and be conversant in the culture of the university. The Sustainability Director must identify where the key leverage points and decision-makers are and how change, more broadly, happens within the institution. Questions that shape this discussion include: What is the culture of the university and how does it evolve? How can it become more sustainable? At Yale, dialogue on sustainability has evolved from resistance to broad-based acceptance and engagement.

In an effort to understand, analyze and make recommendations on how to create sustainable systems at Yale, four campus-wide Sustainability Committees were convened – Energy Task Force, Integrated Waste Management Committee, Transportation Policy Committee and Marketing and Communication Committee. In year two a Sustainable Design and Construction Committee was created. A vice-presidential level administrator was invited to chair each committee and this, it turns out, has been the secret of the success of these committees. These committees reflect only the initial priority areas. Future committees will tackle additional campus challenges such as water, land management, and procurement.

### **How Will the Results be Achieved?**

Not all of the work and decision-making that produces results occurs inside the Office of Sustainability. Part of the job is highlighting successes that are already occurring and bringing people together to share information. Partnering with academics and helping existing groups find resources is also an important piece of the puzzle. One of the most critical skills of a sustainability director is the ability to recognize and influence how decisions are made. Figuring out how the institution

makes decisions enables one to tip that process from one that reinforces the status quo to one that seeks designs that offer innovative solutions. Some of the key strategies include:

- Engaging stakeholders in the solution, as opposed to the problem.
- Recognizing the difference between an individual's concern and an institutional endorsement.
- Developing language that institutionalizes the changes that are sought. For example, instead of "increased cost" develop a language of "institutional investment."

At Yale, the Office of Sustainability is still working on bringing the pieces together and creating bridges between areas of the institution that might bring opportunities for increased sustainability.

Yale is now positioned to build upon and maintain momentum for a comprehensive and strategic approach to becoming a sustainable campus. In an effort to determine if Yale is advancing within the context of the sustainability strategy, a comprehensive set of metrics were developed. These metrics are now systematically being collected on an annual basis in an effort to track progress and potentially benchmark Yale with peer institutions, particularly those in the northeast region of the United States. The primary challenge facing the analysis of these metrics, is determining how to interpret the data and in turn, provide a set of short and long-term targets for the campus. The systematized collection of this data also provides an opportunity to determine and potentially influence causal relationships.

For a comprehensive list of Yale's sustainability efforts go to: [www.yale.edu/sustainability](http://www.yale.edu/sustainability).

