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Sustainability Tour WMU: The Green Walkthrough

There is a gap between ecological projects done on campus and student awareness of these practices. This is unfortunate because we do not advertise what we are doing on campus to cut consumption and educate. This is a significant overlook when considering the thirty percent increase in environmental studies students from the 2008 to 2009 academic year, as well as the 'go green' mantra which saturates our sociopolitical climate. We need outreach, especially since this is such a time critical issue.

When I first came to WMU, I took a campus tour, like most prospective students will do. When on the tour, I finally asked about what was being done on campus to be sustainable, since it was not mentioned during the tour. My tour guide couldn't answer my simple question – "what is being done on campus to highlight sustainability?" I do not fault the tour guide, because after thinking about it for a while, I figured sustainability was not her expertise and it's not her job to know every nuance of the university's policies and projects. When prospective enrollees, new students, or freshman come to our institution, we need to have an interactive, ecologically educational experience for them if we are to emerge as a leader in sustainable collegiate practices.

This will have innumerable benefits for our campus. First, we have yet another topic to add to the list of reasons to become a student here. When giving a campus tour, these can definitely influence prospective students to enroll. Second, if we are a cutting edge university as it relates to sustainability, this is a new, exciting thing that will make us a unique or standout option for enrollees. Finally, why not highlight the sustainable efforts we engage in as a university? We as an academic institution have a commitment to teach our pupils how to live an ecologically responsible life.

Here are but a few key points that really show our commitment to sustainable practices:

- In the WMU Facility Life Cycle Design Guidelines, the university has pledged to use materials with post consumer or post industrial content where feasible, such as structural steel, aluminum windows, gypsum board, acoustical ceiling tiles, rubber floor tiles, carpeting and toilet partitions. This is in addition to their pledge to use long lasting, renewable and local if possible materials. In addition, a 50% minimum of construction waste is to be "salvaged, recycled or otherwise diverted from landfill or incineration".
- WMU avoided spending \$149,845 on electricity during the 2007-2008 winter closure period by using the Building Automation System (BAS).
- WMU avoided spending \$312,943 in steam energy expenses by using the BAS method of energy conservation during the 2007-2008 winter closure period.
- Between July 1, 1995 and July 1, 2006, WMU has invested \$4.5 million in energy conservation measures. The total savings, or cost avoidance from this expenditure has been \$16.9 million. The return on investment on average for energy saving procedures is averaging 25-40%.
- The excess heat expended from the ice making machine at Lawson Arena is recovered to heat the pool in Gabel Natatorium.
- New laundry machines throughout campus have reduced water consumption by approximately 60%, and amount to a water savings of 1,637,856 gallons per year.

The following map details the current route of the student tours. Along the route, many points of information regarding sustainability have been integrated into the campus tour. This information is presented to the tour guides via regular training sessions. In the session, the students who provide the walkthroughs are played a videotape where I explain certain key points. Trainers also receive a brief informational packet in order to assimilate more knowledge for tour use. The tour begins and ends at the Seibert Administration building. I have outlined the path on the included map. Circular points on the map indicate areas during the tour where there is a specific stopping point to talk about sustainable initiatives, as opposed to mentioning them during the tour (which also happens).

