President’s Universitywide Sustainability Committee (PUSC) Minutes
Minutes of March 15, 2012
Bernhard Center - President’s Dining Room

Members: Pat Holton, Harold Glasser, Matt Hollander, Kate Binder, Paul Pancella, Mary Peterson, Sarah Pratt, Paul Terzino, JeffSpoelstra, Betsy Aller, Maia Hausler, Nola Wiersma, Carolyn Noack, Mervyn Elliott, Samson Olanipekun, Paul Farber

Procedural Items

Approval of Agenda

Jeff changed Proposed Agenda item 5.c. to “Membership Criteria” and added 5.d. “OfS Work Plan”.

Motion by Matt to approve the amended proposed Agenda; seconded by Harold; amended Agenda approved.

Approval of Minutes

Fredah provided Jeff with minor updates to the minutes.

Motion by Matt to approve the Minutes with minor updates; seconded by Pat; amended Minutes approved.

Announcements

Samson contacted GSAC. They are willing to give the PUSC/OfS a spot on the agenda in April (This meeting was rescheduled to May 11). The OfS will commit someone. Mary requested EcoMugs for faculty. They are available at cost ($7) for faculty or staff. The OfS will deliver bulk orders time permitting. Mervyn indicated that his teaching schedule will conflict with PUSC in the Fall and possibly Spring, but that he wants to remain involved.

Review

OfS Mission and Goals and University Strategic Plan

The Proposed Agenda provided ahead of time included links to previous PUSC work that led to the OfS Mission and Goals in 2010 (enclosed). Jeff indicated that he would present a case for leaving the 2-year old OfS Mission and Goals the same despite some encouraging updates to the University Strategic Plan. The University commitments that were reviewed to create the original Mission and Goals have changed very little (see footnotes to OfS Mission and Goals). Only the University Mission Statement has changed. OfS reviewed the changes to the University Mission and also focused on Goal 5 of the Strategic Plan (enclosed). Sustainability is used in a more general sense and not just linked to environmental stewardship as in the past.

University Strategic Plan Draft Indicators

Members reviewed and discussed the draft list of indicators intended to measure progress on the new University Strategic Plan (enclosed). Using this list was a way to review the critical elements of the strategic plan in brief. Jeff pointed out that sustainability is included in the Goal 5 indicator description. Mary suggested that Goal #4 would fit under the umbrella of sustainability although the proposed metrics don’t necessarily reflect what the PUSC would likely use as metrics, but perhaps we should focus first on Goal 5. Harold argued that we are trying to create a distinctive learning experience too under Goal 1 (e.g., StART, Wesustain Interns), and we are trying to promote innovative learning and discovery under Goal 2. Harold also argued that multiple goals integrate with “improving quality of life for all”. The PUSC and OfS operate with sustainability as a larger umbrella concept that is bigger than the popular social, economic, and
environmental, sustainability practices often called the “triple bottom line”. All of the 5 goals fit under our sustainability umbrella conceptual framework. Jeff suggested that the PUSC and OfS view all activities through this larger lens of sustainability. Members agreed that the OfS Mission and Goals still align with the new University Strategic Plan.

**Revisions**

**Strategic Sustainability Initiatives Table**

The Strategic Sustainability Initiatives (SSI) table (enclosed) lays out broad initiatives intended to help the University meet its sustainability commitments. Several initiatives have sub initiatives or projects not included on the table. A decreasing number of activities have been carried out by the PUSC and an increasing number are being carried out by the OfS. The original SSI Report and initiatives table was created in 2009 (http://www.wmich.edu/sustainability/pdf/initiatives-report.pdf). The table was updated in 2010 with colors added to indicate initiative status. This update (2012) displays proposed color (status) changes that demonstrate progress.

- **Green** = work underway or complete
- **Yellow** = some progress or promising development
- **Red** = work not progressing

The table’s colored columns suggest color changes for the 2012 revision. The notes column includes some of the recent sub initiatives or projects that justify the proposed color changes. Categories I-IV are prioritized. Category V is not currently prioritized. Members discussed whether the initiatives still make sense, and whether we were missing any.

The OfS requested PUSC advice and clarity as it works to develop a work plan for the next year that integrates recent initiatives (e.g., StART). Pat asked whether the OfS has a list of things it wants to add to the table? The OfS does have a list of over 80 projects that are in various stages of development. Matt described these as a compilation of “what we are involved in”. The project list represents sub initiatives or implementation projects that are could move the broad initiatives on the table forward.

Harold said the StART Initiative and the Humanities Climate Group are promising developments that can help to engage cross college faculty and departmental staff. Others, like the listed BTR Park item are out of our control and will likely stay red indefinitely.

Mary suggested that the PUSC should not just recommend removing red initiatives, but should also recognize success in green areas by marking them as accomplished, in a monitoring phase, or achieved perhaps with different colors or on a separate table.

Jeff suggested that some successful initiatives might be institutionalized. Mary suggested that defining institutionalized is just as complicated as sustainability. Are electric vehicle purchases institutionalized when the fleet is 10% EVs, 75%, or 100%, for example?

Clarification was given for the Technical vs. Planned column. Before the OfS existed, the issue was that we could “just make Technical issues happen relatively easily” through the authority of a key campus administrator. Planned items, especially on the curriculum side, need to help and nurture and foster larger scale Universitywide conversations before any meaningful action can take place. For example IV.3 might have financial support but it would also need committed faculty to move forward successfully.

Paul F. asked how we fit the conceptual realm, the realm of ideas, on the table. Sustainability is such an ambiguous notion itself. What does it mean? It clearly means different things to different people. There is an academic place that should exist for discussion, thinking, and theorizing on the idea of sustainability. There is a need for a place for the dwelling on these ideas in an ongoing way. Harold shares this area of interest. Perhaps another initiative would be appropriate. Harold asked if sustainability by its nature is something that is inherently associated with an imperative? If so, what does that mean? We tend to move in the direction of what is doable and technical in nature. But sustainability requires thought about what is worth sustaining, which is a question of meaning and not simply action.

Mervyn said that this is tricky because outside perception tends toward “what you are doing in committee”. The reporting out can’t be “just thinking”, because showing progress typically revolves around some action. This list does demonstrate progress, but it is tricky. If all items are green then we are done. If all are red why not just give up. He also suggested
moving green items to an achievement list.

Matt suggested that Paul’s interest areas might fit under the Research Category V item related to a suggested “Center for Interdisciplinary Sustainability Research, Teaching, Operations, and Outreach” (bullet 2) and could be one of the first steps toward establishing such a “Center”. The word Center does imply a physical space.

Harold agreed and reminded the PUSC that they agreed years ago that implementation of the initiatives would only happen if it was someone’s job, and now we have an OIS with this never-ending job of fostering a sustainable campus and campus culture of sustainability. We’ve realized, that with the OIS in Faunce that we are limited by physical space. For example, the new Humanities Center is a place people want to go. Discussions are ongoing for some future OIS space. OIS is interested in being a part of a Living Building Challenge project (https://ilbi.org/lbc). With all the conversations so far on this, the word “Center” is probably no longer the right word, but people are clamoring for sustainability certificates, minors, or a collaborative grad program (e.g., combining behavior change with energy conservation research and policy). One idea has been to create a different kind of track in an existing Master’s program. And, big NSF grants require a demonstrated commitment to sustainability with space and faculty involvement. Harold believes we can address Paul’s interest area before addressing the space question. The first question at the StART luncheon was about faculty perspectives on sustainability just to open the philosophical conversation. Paul said that it revealed that the conversation was very preliminary. Perhaps such an effort could be hosted by the Ethics or Humanities Center. Harold and Paul will continue this discussion offline.

**CATEGORY V OF THE SSI TABLE**

The Office of the Vice President for Research continues work on a research strategy. We’ve been advised that OVPR is seeking to identify existing or potential research clusters and competencies. Sustainability is being discussed as one of 5 pillars/clusters. OVPR is also developing a plan to guide its own assistance to the university community.

The OIS may gain access to a more flexible web platform after May 1. Discussions are ongoing with University Relations. This will help as national organizations data mine WMU sustainability efforts for national campus sustainability rankings. This can also help when grant reviewers seek background information.

Members discussed the yellow status of the manufacturing research center initiative under Category V. The idea started with John Patton. When John received a large grant on the topic and developed his program the status moved from red to yellow. If that program becomes more integrated with the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences and curriculum overall it should move it to green. The OIS is already collaborating regularly with Sr. Design projects and several Student Sustainability Grant projects.

Members agreed to move the last bulleted initiative out. The SSG program has been successfully created and now moves to an ongoing status.

Mary moved that OIS set up an “ongoing activity” table or color for initiatives like the completed but ongoing SSG. Seconded by Holton. Discussion - the OIS will decide on color, label, table, etc. Motion passed.

**REGARDING RANKINGS IN CATEGORY V OF THE SSI TABLE**

Matt pointed out that rankings are tricky because many initiative-related opportunities come up without warning and the OIS take them on using its existing capacity. Having highly ranked/prioritized items may not automatically help launch a new initiative.

Harold suggested that the PUSC and OIS urge OVPR and the Development Office work together to help expand external funding for sustainability research and teaching, and also assist in the creation of an Institute or other body that could help coordinate this activity.

Mary moved that category V Bullet #2 be moved to first priority. Betsy seconded. Motion passed.

Harold asked if the OVPR/research bulleted initiative be #2? Members noted its necessity and progress already discussed. Motion by (inaudible) to move the OVPR/research item to priority #2. Seconded by (inaudible). Motion passed.
Members discussed the use of the word “Center”. Harold suggested that based on feedback from several parties it would probably be better to use the word “Institute” to represent what is needed to truly facilitate cross college teaching and curriculum initiatives. As we understand things, the OfS can’t do this, nor can “Centers” on campus. Mary, motioned, to change Center to Institute. Seconded by Matt. Discussion - Mervyn noted that it may be doable but could take a lot of time and other programs may be competing for attention. Harold suggested that the creation of Institutes can happen quickly when they have wide support. And sustainability is now highlighted in university planning documents. Motion passed.

**OTHER UPDATES**

Matt suggested that we add human powered vehicles to category II priority 4.

Harold requested that PUSC members send any new project, or “sub-initiative” ideas to Jeff. The OfS will present its running list of over 80 projects/initiatives/tasks soon after.

Harold initiated a discussion of University Strategic Plan draft Indicator item 5 which suggests measuring energy consumption in BTUs. To be consistent with what the University is already doing, he recommended a change to eCO2, which is the unit used for the ACUPCC. Betsy moved to suggest that BTU be changed to eCO2. Mary seconded. Motion Passed.

**STATUS UPDATES**

As time permits, the OfS will:

- Finalize PUSC member commitments and alternates
- Advertise to fill at-large seats; compile responses for April review (if available)
- Prepare PUSC membership criteria
- Prepare a welcome packet for new PUSC members
- Generate a draft OfS work plan targeted for June review by the PUSC
- Follow the work plan with proposed indicators

Harold suggested that the PUSC hold a philosophical and practical discussion (July or August) about indicators that are really meaningful. The Campus Sustainability and Assessment Project (2003) recommended a small set of indicators directly tied to policy and practice in the home institution. Solid indicators tied to policy and practice here at WMU could affect what is taught in classrooms too. Paul F. suggested that this might be somewhat risky to; it could create opposition as we drill down to a better understanding of what sustainability means.

April 2012 PUSC meeting – Carolyn Noack will present an overview of the Draft Waste Reduction & Recycling Strategic Plan.

May 2012 PUSC meeting – Cancelled

Matt moved to adjourn. Betsy seconded. Adjourned at 4:55pm.