Student-Centered Sustainable Café

ENVS 4100: Appropriate Technology and Sustainability
The Campus as a Living Learning Laboratory
Dr. Harold Glasser

By: Taylor Sawyer, Conor Downey, Marianne Twork, Nora Gimpel,
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I. Executive Summary

While investigating unsustainable issues on Western Michigan University campus, our team identified the current dining options as a concern. This was also made evident by the efforts of previous students: Ash Norton, Ryan Walters, Amelia Stefanac, Kristiena Sartorelli, Caleb Oliver, Ian Orawiec, Brian Balconi, and Susie Drust. (For more detailed information on their efforts please visit the section titled Best Practices on Campus.) Past surveys were also helpful in identifying issues needing to be addressed. Previous students laid the foundation for this project; we seek to continue working past issues they were unable to overcome.

Unsustainable food on campus is ready to be addressed with a collaborative university effort. The vacancy of the former Campus Trends space in the Bernhard Center offers a location where unsustainable food can be addressed. Our student-centered café concept will serve sustainable, local and affordable dining options to both students and faculty. It also promotes recruitment and retention, showing future students a positive space on campus that allows for healthy choices, and an atmosphere that promotes education on sustainability and health. Currently, there are very limited options for celebrating the incredible diversity of student talents and creativity. To promote sustainability on campus, our team wishes to create a student-centered, interdisciplinary, intergenerational, culturally diverse place for students and faculty.

After spurring conversation with students and faculty we decided that the best way to have positive results was to raise awareness and gain further support for our project. We wrote and passed a resolution with the WSA, which helped to advance our efforts. In response to gaining WSA’s support we decided to host an open house event to “reimagine” the former Campus Trends space. This open house resulted with overwhelming support that promoted our concept. Over 150 attendees took a survey we created revealing 97% supported the café concept. We are researching best practice on other campuses to identify methods which will help the collaboration get off the ground. (Please see the Best Practices on Other Campus section for more information.)

We are hoping to pitch our presentation to influential decision makers to make progress that will include definite acquisition of the former “Campus Trends” space. We will be at WMU next year and plan to keep working to implement our idea. We are continuing work this summer to secure the space and influence decision makers to move our idea forward with a collaborative university effort. A student-centered sustainable café is the best strategy to address the desire for healthy, diet sensitive food, while providing a space that showcases student talents, and promotes the creation of a culture of sustainability on campus.
II. Introduction

Our team aims to create a sustainable student-centered café for all disciplines of students and faculty. Our café concept would educate those who attend on sustainable food choices while promoting health on campus. The food choices we make can negatively influence the Earth and degrade natural resources. Harmful pesticides and over processing can cause adverse health effects that can be avoided through conscious diet decisions. We are working towards solving these problems with our café proposal. It promotes healthy eating and living, while educating students on positive choices by offering healthy, local, and diet sensitive options such as vegan and vegetarian choices. The 2014 Student Sustainability Survey indicates that students are looking for healthier dining options on campus, as well as a student-centered café. By collaborating with Western Michigan University Student affairs, Dining Services, and utilizing the resources already available in the Bernhard center, the implementation of our café would require a fraction of the funding needed to install an entire restaurant style café.

Past projects focused on an entirely student run café and had faced obstacles. These students were treated like outside business by administration seeking detailed business plans, and monetary contributions for rent and utilities. Our team is seeking to make a collaborative University effort. Our open house has made a major contribution toward proving the concept for this sustainable café will succeed on campus. We hope to influence WMU administrators to understand and promote our idea. We need decision makers to help us change the status quo. The Bronco Mall currently offers Biggby Coffee, Subway, and Santorini Grill. These establishments offer students a variety of choices but do not provide healthy, local, organic options or celebrate the incredible diversity of student's talents and creativity.

President Dunn signed on to the ACUPCC (American College & University Presidents' Climate Commitment) in 2009, pledging climate neutrality through set goals. The Talloires Declaration promotes our idea of opening a sustainable student-centered café. According to the guidelines WMU has agreed to take action in ten different ways. Specifically, (1.) To increase awareness of Environmentally sustainability, (2.) Create an institutional culture of sustainability (7.) Collaborate for interdisciplinary approaches, (10.) Maintain the movement, with work towards the other goals as well. Our main goal is to create movement towards a more distinguished sustainable culture through education and hands on experience.

According to the 2009 Strategic Sustainability Initiatives Report (in part four curriculum) of the prioritized strategic Sustainability Initiatives states that “WMU is looking to create more opportunities for structured internships and projects for students to collaborate with staff, administrators, and faculty to address key campus sustainability issues.” We feel that our café would create opportunities for students to be provided with a multitude of different projects and internships, with sustainability practices on campus. In section two of the Operations/In-reach Initiatives the report explicitly states that “Work with student groups to facilitate the creation of a student- run café that emphasizes local and organic foods.” Our project is literally mentioned in the Appendix 4: Complete Catalog of Strategic Sustainability Initiatives.

In the WMU Campus Master Plan of 2001, many of the primary goals mentioned in part three we are working towards implementing. We help to achieve goal one of creating a “sense of place.” We are hoping to make the atmosphere unique and vibrant, like the student population at WMU. In Part four, WMU Master Planning Guidelines: Fundamental Concepts, we will be a “creating campus activity hub for the campus community, which will be centrally located and visually distinct with core open space, facilities and amenities to attract students
and visitors.” We strongly believe that our space will not only draw in students but increase retention.

Our project also fits into the WMU Academic Affairs Strategic plan because one of its goals is “student centrality in premier undergraduate and graduate education encompassing the arts, sciences and professions.” We plan to utilize student art and musicians to help create a vibrant student center. Our café is focused on appreciation of students work and builds on the idea that the student center should belong to the students.

To conclude, we would like to reify the fact that in many of the current WMU documents, our café satisfies at least some aspect or goal. The 2009 Strategic Sustainability Initiatives Report, states directly a need for a student-centered sustainable café or the Talloires document gives ten goals, which fit perfectly into the café. We feel that even though we are going to have many hurdles and people to convince, our project will directly and positively impact campus by; increasing healthy food options, decreasing carbon emissions, increasing student awareness on sustainability and overall creating a space in the Bernhard Center that is initiated by the students and focuses on the whole WMU community. The open house that we planned and held showed student support for the project and left student affairs with results. Students and faculty want this option on campus and are ready to assist and at promote the idea.

III. Methodology

We started by researching past Appropriate Technology and Sustainability (ENVS 4100) projects and found numerous student reports addressing the need for a sustainable student-centered café. These projects outlined in the Best Practices on Campus section developed the core from which we worked. By gathering information from these projects we gained a better understanding of the obstacles past projects faced and current problems. While our team was finalizing our vision of a student-centered café some dialog was not very encouraging. However these dialogs gave insight to more of the issues we would have overcome. After becoming familiar with the previous efforts towards a student-led café we decided to take a different approach, by pursuing a student-centered café with a collaborative university effort. Efforts from a number of departments will be necessary to ensure long-term success. Notably, Chef Nick Petruska of WMU catering is very educated in the green food movement and ready to help us move our project forward. Other helpful faculty included Lynne Heasley and Carol Weideman, among others named in our contact list. Student Affairs, Dining Services, and the Bernhard Center are import for us to continue working with.

As an initial step in our project we met with Paul Terzino of the Bernhard Center, we talked about logistics and financing of the space. Terzino laid out that the next steps included proving to the University that a student-centered café was the best option for the space based on student support. After conversing with staff and students we decided to seek student support to back our efforts. Nicole Davenport, the Western Student Association (WSA) sustainability chair, we were able to meet and help draft a resolution. Once written, the resolution was distributed and Nicole, Taylor, and Nora presented the student-centered café project. After the presentation to WSA voted in support of our café initiative.

After gaining support from our student government, we wanted to reach out to the rest of the student body. We decided to host an event in the vacated Campus Trends location to reimagine this space for our student-centered café. We reserved the empty space in the basement through the Bernhard Center and began to plan our event. We got in touch with Chef Nick to help us by catering the event. We met with Chef Nick to have planning
sessions for what we wanted to see on the menu. We also met with the RSO, the Modern Painters Society (MPS), they provided us with many vibrant pieces of art. One of our team members reached out to Nathan Svizan, a WMU student, and a member of the band Marrowstone Cooperative to headline for our event. To further solidify entertainment we then collaborated with the Campus Beet's Tim Bauer. Cameron Gregory, a graphic designer from the Office for Sustainability designed a flyer that we disseminated throughout campus. The Office for Sustainability provided funds to cater the event and help with advertising on the website. Along with the fliers we used social media to promote the event.

On the day of the event, we hung art and set up the room while anxiously anticipating the arrival of guests. During the event, we had a steady stream of students for open mic, as well as our team explaining our café movement. We collaborated with two students from Professor Allen Webb's Food Justice class that made surveys and helped set up for the event. We utilized one of the students to do a more informative oral survey during the event. The open house was a success and the positive results of the survey will be used to show overwhelming student support for the concept.

We concentrated our efforts on the implantation of a collaborative student-centered café operated by professionals with the help of students. We compared qualities and limitations from past Western Michigan University initiatives with best practice examples from other universities to create a uniform concept for our initiative. Overall in the short time we worked on the project we made significant strides forward. Gaining WSAs' support in combination with the Campus Trends Reimagining shows our café concept would be a great success at WMU. More work is still needed and if a collaborative university effort is made the student-centered café will be primed for long-term success.

IV. Best Practices On Campus

Sustainable Café

The café effort began in 2007 and a number of other student reports have followed. In 2007 Ash Norton sat in the very same position as we did, wondering why Western Michigan University did not have a sustainable, diet friendly type of café on campus. In his research, he identified: WMU has not addressed the concern for the unsustainable food system it participates in, and that a sustainable café would serve as a living learning laboratory, student led cafés at other universities, and goals to challenge students to meet sustainability ideals.

WISCC

In 2008 Mathew Hollander and Ryan Walters started the Weekly Initiative for a Student Cooperative Café (WISCC). WISCC became a registered student organization and held meetings twice a week to move the café project forward. WISCC helped raise awareness in the WMU community for a sustainable student-centered café.

The Purple Potato

The next progression in the café was the Purple Potato project by Kristiena Sartoelli, Caleb Oliver, and Ian Orawiec. In 2010 the Purple Potato set out to gain more student support. To effectively express to administration how important it is for WMU to have a café like the one we envision. They created a survey with number of questions they were able to identify student desires. Bulleted below are some of the results.
When asked to rate importance in uses of a café, of the students surveyed:
· 45.6% said a café with a place for students to gather is important.
· 36.9% said a place to showcase their art is important.
· 30.7% said a place for students to showcase their music is important
· 39.4% said it was very important for students to have a place to study

When asked to rate different types of food options, of the students surveyed:
· 52.0% said that having local (within 100 miles) food available was very important.
· 35.5% said it was very important to have organic food.
· 30.3% said that having vegetarian food was very important.
· 29.5% said it was important that there be allergy sensitivity food options offered.

**The Campus Beet**

The Campus Beet was started “to offer fresh, delicious, and ecologically sounds food, to build the local economy and to support the WMU community. The café will provide a space to cultivate growth, and expression, while offering an opportunity for student leadership experiences and interdisciplinary learning.” (Campus Beet, 2012) The Campus Beet has evolved to a registered student organization (RSO) on campus. They hold weekly lunches on campus to promote a healthier more sustainable campus, charging only three dollars per lunch. For three dollars, a different meal is provided each week that is made from locally sourced ingredients and is vegetarian friendly.

The Campus Beet raised awareness through their successful weekly lunches and planned events on campus. The first event planned for 100 people and yielded over 125. They conducted a survey and received extremely positive feedback. The Campus Beet ran with the success and held a second event that featured a mock café, live music, student art, poetry and local foods for 400 people and over 500 attendees showed. The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) called the event “a runaway success.” (Smith, 2011) Since this last event, the Campus Beet Continues to hold weekly lunches in the basement of the Wesley Center on main campus.

Along with these successes comes a multitude of challenges and problems. The Campus Beet’s events were unsuccessful in spurring collaboration with the University. Lack of persistence and complacency with the status quo of one meal a week has left this RSO in a rut. The Campus Beet is not losing money on the lunches, but they do not make a profit. The Campus Beet uses the money to perpetuate the lunches, but is not successful in gaining a profit to help propel them forward. The lack of collaboration with the university leaves them at a standstill and lack of success to expand their idea. Student turnover affects this RSO greatly, when the leaders graduated the Campus Beet lost its drive and faltered greatly with its leadership. We feel that we can take the Campus Beet as a good example to learn from because we can circumvent all of the problems they are facing by being persistent and collaborating with the University.

**Spatial Analysis**

One year later the two more reports were completed to continue the café initiative, intern Brian Baleoni completed the Campus Beet Spatial Analysis. This report examined potential café locations on campus. A ranking system was created and measured the features important for the cafés location like utilities, ventilation, ambience, lighting, traffic, and kitchen hardware were ranked. Out of a possible 41 points the top location scored a 35. This location was strongly favored in comparison to the other nine location investigated with the
next location only scoring 23. In agreement with our suggestion the report identifies the Student Service Center as the best location for the café.

**Internship Opportunities for the Campus Beet**

In the same year another important report was published. Susie Drust reported on intern options for the Campus Beet. Importantly, our recommendation for the café includes paid student internships for those who work in the café. Susie explored three options for internship in the café. The first was using pre-existing departmental internships. Second, creating an internship opportunity specifically for the café and the creation of a new course for the internship to run through. The third option was to run the café internship through WMU’s Service Learning Program. Susie reported the third option as the best way to connect the University, students, and the café. This option does require the creation of a new course to operate through. In order to create this Service Learning opportunity three task need to be completed:

- A survey of departments and faculty interested in hosting the course
- A survey of student interest and support
- Research into long term possibility of an institute for sustainability

**V. Best Practices on Other Campuses**

**University of California-Berkeley**

The Berkeley Student Food Collective was founded in November 2010. The idea was conceived in March 2009 by a group of student leaders who were heading a campaign to prevent a Panda Express from entering UC Berkeley’s student union. The Berkeley Student Food Collective is a grocery market and educational center aimed at providing a healthy alternative to students at a low cost, while educating students and the community about healthy diets. The organization features a strict food purchasing policy that includes food that is local, community based, and is ecologically sound. The Collective is made up of 40 volunteers and one full-time staff member.

This is similar to the vision of our initiative and is a viable option on how to reduce the effects of student-worker turnover. Before opening the storefront location, the Collective sold meals on campus once a week using a local business’ kitchen to prepare meals. This plan allowed the collective to test potential menu options, receive useful feedback from students, gather data on sales, cost of ingredients, and labor requirements before full implementation was achieved. Our initiative could use this strategy to maximizing its capabilities while minimizing cost. The Collective is not yet profitable but is able to maintain developmental progress thanks to grants and donations. This is an example of a student-initiated co-op focused on educating the public on healthy and sustainable food options.

**Eastern Illinois University**

The Café is a fairly new student run café at Eastern Illinois University. Students in the Family and Consumer Sciences program at the university run this café. The Café is open only to faculty and other staff from Monday to Thursday from 8:30 am to 11:30 a.m, they also take reservations for catering. The adviser of the program, Jim Painter, says “The goal is to give students hands-on, practical experience so that they can actually have business experience running a restaurant by the time they graduate.” (Cruikshank, 2014) This is a useful model for collaborating with the Family and Consumer Sciences program.
Undesirable traits of this café’s operation include faculty and staff only service. The main goal of this café is not to make money but to simply educate students in the Family and Consumer Sciences program. Students can work in the Café as part of a class or as an independent study, where they may take on more important roles such as management.

**Pitzer College**

The Shakedown Café in Claremont, California, is a student founded and managed restaurant and community space serving locally sourced meals that are both environmentally and socially sustainable. This café started in 2007, when five undergraduates noticed a Chinese restaurant on campus had vacated. The core values for starting this café focused on connecting people with their food. With emphasis on conscious consumption and ethical business practices, they work with local farms and vendors to promote a local market. The Shakedown has committed to fostering a lively community that promotes self-expression, discussion, education and empowerment for Pitzer students, faculty, staff and community members.

After reading more about the Shakedown café, contact with senior student Emma Shorr was made. After mentioning that we were looking to start a café similar to the Shakedown at WMU, she was very helpful. She sent the manifesto of how the Shakedown was run (Located in Appendix, The Second Shakedown Manifesto). Every issue is covered in the manifesto to ensure the café can be run with the continuous turnover of students. The Shakedown’s manifesto will be very helpful as a guide in writing a similar document for a café at WMU.

In creating a café at WMU some key elements should be considered. The atmosphere is in line with the type of space we want to create, an interactive atmosphere with displays of art and music. We also need to ensure success despite student turnover so we are promoting collaboration between students, administrators and faculty.

**Lemonade**

Lemonade is a restaurant-caféeteria hybrid and could serve as a possible model for our café. Started in L.A, California, locations have continued to pop up across California and even Dubai. The style of the restaurant matches the demand and type of lifestyle of a college student. At Lemonade guests grab a tray and choose from a buffet of prepared hot and cold dishes displayed behind the counter. They select a portion size of 1, 2, or 3 and make decision on their dish. This portion selection could be helpful in reducing post-consumer food waste. One aspect that is different than what we are aiming for is the atmosphere, because of its grab and go style. In our café we will cater to students that need quick grab and go food, while also providing a diverse, relaxed environment to spend time in. Integrating the best parts of these cafés and restaurants we will allow for the implementation of a café that best serves the WMU community.

**VI. Discussion**

Western Michigan University is working on building a culture of sustainability. Part of our team’s mission involves propelling WMU towards furthering our image of sustainability leadership. We aim to make a sustainable campus café for students and faculty to enjoy. This will promote sustainability on campus by providing: healthy food options, educational experiences, increased retention, student interaction, and support to the local economy. The services provided by this café will allow the WMU community to collectively come together and make a positive impact for the future.
Many typical American diets focus on processed, modified, pesticide sprayed foods that can cause deterioration in health over time. Many studies call for a change in diet with reduced meat consumption, leading to more vegan and vegetarian diet choices. There is also a movement towards organic, local and non-GMO foods. Students who choose a specialized diet or are restricted by an allergy have a limited number of options on campus. Our café would offer options to those who struggle to find options to suit their dietary needs.

The 2014 Student Sustainability Survey identified that students are looking for “more healthy food options on campus”. The café concept would offer meals at an affordable price to address this problem. Besides just offering healthy choices, it would allow students to consume food sourced by local suppliers. Education will help influence students to make healthier choices.

By embracing student talents and delivering a venue in which they can express themselves, students can grow as individuals and foster a community culture on campus. For the students of the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences the café could act as a learning laboratory and provide internship opportunities. Students would gain first-hand experience in food services.

The Bernhard Center is the universities student service center. By locating our café here, we can revamp this space. The student service center will benefit by having a culturally diverse place that encourages student interaction. Recruitment and retention will be improved by the increased services offered to students and prospective students will see the café as a lively and attractive place to gather and be social. It will give the future students something unique to look forward to doing on campus.

Practicing sustainable business will make our local community stronger. By using local farms and food vendors we will strengthen the local economy. We hope to utilize the current campus food initiatives such as the Gibbs House permaculture plan and the Stadium Drive community garden. We would like to incorporate these university projects into our café and forge collaboration with these groups of students on campus.

**VII. Limitations of our Analysis and Future Work**

The final vision of the café we have includes collaboration between students and the university for very specific reasons. The first limitation that we were faced with dealt with our vision having low feasibility led solely by students. In theory, the idea of a student-led café that integrates all aspects of the student sounds ideal. It would give the students a space to call their own, giving them an opportunity to learn valuable career lessons in a university setting. As we went further with our plan, we started to realize that having a completely student-led and operated café meant a multitude of things including being the highest bidder on the space, paying for rent, and renovations. Students at the university level have a relatively quick four-year turnover rate. With students graduating, the cohesiveness and willingness to keep the café running decreases when students leave. Our vision will progress and improve over many years; it requires a stable and consistent management system. In order to be successful in this endeavor, it will require a permanent management and advisory staff to keep the goals of the in line with the everyday operations.

Corresponding with a multitude of people allowed our project to move forward and gain momentum. Although, we were met with obstacles such as cohesiveness of our vision and scheduling constraints, making meetings difficult. We were asked questions that we did not know how to answer at the time, leaving confusion with people that we met on what we were trying to accomplish. As our project moved forward, we were able to fully grasp a
common, attainable vision that we could confidently share in meetings. Formulating a vision allowed us to clearly move forward.

In order to show student support, our team presented a WSA proposal. When we presented to the WSA we were met with many challenging questions and rebuttals. The proposal faced some protest for the following reasons: WSA members interest in securing dining options at other locations like the aviation school, concern over lack of funding, concern with organic and local food prices, and confusion over the vision that we presented. We were able to leave the WSA meeting with not only an approved proposal, but advice on how to move forward based on student ideas.

After securing WSA support, we began to organize the open house event. The persistent problem that remained in our way was lack of time. Organization of a successful event takes careful consideration of aspects and details, which is time intensive. We did not want our open house to seem like it was haphazardly thrown together, therefore diminishing the effectiveness and decreasing our credibility and image. Time is required to effectively market the event to ensure a full room of attendees. Consulting with different faculty supporters for the event caused conflicting visions and ideas. We took productive advice and gladly accepted ideas, but we needed to make sure that we stayed true to our vision and moved forward by helpful integrating advice and opinions.

During the set up for the event, we ran into limitations with hanging the artwork. We learned that we were not able to nail art into the walls, leaving us with nowhere to hang the various pieces of art that students volunteered. Interdepartmental collaboration from students is a main part of our mission, so displaying art was an important hurdle. We were able to circumvent this problem by buying command strips and putting pieces of art on the shelving units. We were worried that the command strips might not hold the art properly. Luckily, the command strips held the art in place for the event. We had over 150 attendees that showed up to our event, with showed astonishing support but also left us with limited seating and limited food. Towards the end of the night, we ran out of certain foods. In preparation of the food, our team was not careful to double-check the menu. Many of our dishes included dairy that were marked as vegan. In the future, we will have to be diligent with labeling of the menu to be sensitive to differing diets.

**VII. Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, we feel that with hard work and persistence, our café will be open by the fall of 2014. We proved to the University that students and faculty have an interest with the support that we received, and positive feed back from the open house. Our café concept would fit into the larger system of sustainability on campus and the local community. Whether it is the 2014 Sustainability Survey, WSA support or our open house having over 150 attendees and a 97% approval rating on our survey, we conclude the current student population has expressed a want for our concept to be seen in the Bernhard Center. Integrating sustainable food options on campus and raising awareness and education
supports current campus initiatives. Tackling unsustainable food on campus is the next step to continue building a culture of sustainability.

The first thing that we are going to do is starting to work on gathering a team of students from different disciplines in order to bring their specialized talents and skills. We feel that by bringing in students that can specialize in different aspects of running a café, we can stay true to our idea of being student-centered and to operate smoothly. We are going to start drafting a “manifesto” to start clearly defining issues needing to be addressed for the café’s opening and operation. We feel that having our ideas documented and thought out will help create a clear image of what students desire and is necessary for moving forward.

Next, we are going to gather a team of faculty and administrators to help make the café happen. We want to plan a meeting to exchange ideas and hash out feasibility. At the meeting, we are going to begin drafting a “manifesto”, how to get the internship program working, the current constraints, dining services role, menu planning, the funds available and general labor and operations.

Narrowing in on a few extremely successful cafés with similar situations to WMU will allow us to learn first hand about what makes these student-centered cafés successful. We hope to identify problems that these students were challenged by, in order to circumvent these problems while moving forward. We hope to plan visits so that both students and faculty or administrators can visit these cafés. Educating ourselves with first hand experiences will help to propel our concept to forward. In order to see this happen by the fall of 2014, these are the next steps towards a collaborative student-centered café.