Sustainability at UW–Madison

In November 2019, UW–Madison signed the Resilience Commitment administered by Second Nature. Resilience refers to the ability of institutions, infrastructure, and communities to prepare for the impacts of climate change. The commitment requires that UW–Madison create a Climate Action Plan, assess and improve resilience thresholds, and incorporate resilience into the curriculum. The Office of Sustainability is partnering with stakeholders from the campus and community to inform the Climate Action Plan.

Research and Scholarship

- UW–Madison produced the most climate change research of any midwestern university from 2014–2018 and generated over $459 million in funding for sustainability-related research in fiscal year 2020.

- The Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts, a statewide collaboration between the Nelson Institute and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, will contribute climate modeling and other data to inform Gov. Evers’ Climate Change Task Force.

- American Family Insurance and UW–Madison weather experts are teaming up to better predict catastrophic, wind-related weather events in Wisconsin.

- Jonathan Patz, director of the Global Health Institute, was elected to the National Academy of Medicine in recognition of his pioneering research showing the risk climate change poses to human health.

Teaching and Educational Achievement

- 50 years: age of the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, which was honored by a proclamation presented by Gov. Tony Evers, Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes, and DNR Secretary Preston Cole.

- UW–Madison leveraged its innovative cluster hire program to welcome a freshwater ecologist, a hydrologist, and a water resources economist to address emerging water sustainability issues.

- 338 courses were tagged with a provisional course attribute for sustainability. These courses address economic, social, and environmental topics (e.g., responsible production, reduced inequalities, and clean energy).

- The Green Fund doubled its student involvement during 2019–2020: projects included installing solar panels, prototyping a waste recovery station for catered events, and testing window glazing to prevent bird collisions with glass.

Living the Wisconsin Idea

- UW–Madison students completed 11 projects related to sustainability for Pepin County through the UniverCity Year program. Topics included composting, groundwater quality, and GIS data management.

- The UW South Madison Partnership, home to the Neighborhood Law Clinic and the Odyssey Project, announced an expansion in 2019 to better meet the needs of the South Madison community.

- The Odyssey Project launched Odyssey Beyond Bars, the first-known campus effort to teach face-to-face credit courses to people who are incarcerated. All 15 men in the pilot program will earn three UW credits in English.

A Vibrant Campus Community

- UW–Madison is home to over 15,600 bike parking stalls and is one of only eight universities to be awarded a Platinum designation by the Bicycle Friendly America Program.

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• The LGBTQ Archives, a fast-growing collection of LGBTQ history from Madison, Dane County, and beyond, received the Governor’s Award for Archival Advocacy in 2019.

• Wisconsin Sea Grant collaborated with the Chazen Museum of Art to present “Plastic Entanglements: Ecology, Aesthetics, Materials,” an exhibit that raises awareness about the “complex cultural and material nexus that is plastic.”

• More than 3,000 participants joined the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies and the Office of Sustainability for dozens of virtual workshops, tutorials, and other events to mark the 50th anniversary of Earth Day.

A High-Performing Organization

• Over 100 students, staff, and faculty from around the state gathered at UW–Madison for the UW System Sustainability Conference. The conference resulted in several state-wide working groups as well as a set of recommendations on sustainable development and climate change mitigation for the Governor’s Task Force on Climate Change.

• 60 campus offices partnered with the Office of Sustainability through the Green Office Certification Program.

• UW–Madison hired its first Director of Tribal Relations in 2019. The university is taking additional steps to recognize the 13,000-year history of the Ho-Chunk people on this land and to acknowledge their forcible removal from this region.

• From research on a vaccine and the manufacture of PPE to the development of new mental health resources, UW–Madison has taken an interdisciplinary approach to public health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Wisconsin: The Year Ahead

• The Office of Sustainability will convene virtual listening sessions for campus and community members to learn about the UW–Madison Sustainability Advisory Council and to provide feedback on the Council’s process and intended outcomes.

• The Center for Limnology, Division of Extension, and the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies are supporting UW–Madison’s membership in the Yahara CLEAN Compact, which includes 18 agencies and organizations working to improve water quality in the five Yahara lakes.

38% reduction in Greenhouse Gas Emissions per building square foot since 2007