Office of Sustainability
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

Sustainability Advisory Council (SAC) – Executive Summary
Prioritization Meeting, April 9th, 2021
11:00am - 12:30pm
Full recording available here

Julie Newman	Guest Speak
Mo Bischof	SAC Member
Cheryl Gittens	SAC Member
Mark Guthier	SAC Member
John Horn	SAC Member
Catherine McDonald	SAC Member Alternate
Sarah Schutt	SAC Member
Natalie Tinsen	SAC Member
Giri Venkataramanan	SAC Member
Nola Walker	SAC Member
Michael Williams	SAC Member
Josh Arnold	Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff
Alex Frank	Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff
Deb Gurke	Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff
Andrea Hicks	Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff
Nathan Jandl	Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff
Jake McCulloch	Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff
Missy Nergard	Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff

Summary Notes
I. **Welcome & Goals for Today**
  a. *Planning & Administration Initial Prioritization Results*
    ● Social Sustainability, Sustainability Integration, and Institutional Structures for Sustainability were top priority

II. **Defining a Strategy and Making it Actionable (Dr. Julie Newman (MIT))**
  b. *Dr. Julie Newman (MIT)*
    ● Julie Newman, Ph.D. joined MIT in 2013 as the first Director of Sustainability for the institute, where she was charged with launching an Office of Sustainability; she also holds a lecturer appointment with the Department of Urban Studies and Planning

- In 2004, Julie founded the Office of Sustainability at Yale University where she held a lecturer appointment with the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies
- Prior to that she assisted with the launch of the University of New Hampshire Sustainability Institute in 1997. In 2004, Julie founded the Northeast Campus Sustainability Consortium, the longest standing active network of university sustainability professionals in the United States, to advance education and action for sustainable development on university campuses in the northeast and maritime region
- Reflecting on what to share in a short period of time following reviewing the work the SAC has already been doing, here are a few ideas to reflect on:
  - Where is the Office of Sustainability situated within the university and what is the leadership commitment to that?
  - Right level of staffing and funding based on charge, size of institute, purpose, role, etc.
    - I'm not a fan of centralizing everything into a sustainability office. There's a so-called right-sized-office that maps to the institute but then there's distributed leadership
  - Centralized and decentralized bodes well
- It's vital to frame the value proposition of the Office of Sustainability to ensure it's never seen as marginalized or extra or just "greening" something, it has to be completely institutionalized; when you start to map the value proposition, you begin to realize what a unique skill set this group of people has within the office
  - Thinking about that unique skill set, sustainability is a bunch of misfits that don't quite fit perfectly into one department so we're kind of perfect for this role in that we can very comfortably go between working with students, staff, and faculty, to navigating between operations and academics, and addressing multidisciplinary complex problems
  - That is the joy and the value of sustainability's role, it's also perfectly situated for this time during COVID where issues of environmental justice and equity are coming and we can be flexible and purposeful in that evolution of a sustainability office's role
  - Challenge/ need to develop incremental and long-term plans
    - MIT focused more on the world and less so internally
    - For example, our first climate goal was a 32% reduction to align with the federal plans, there was no way we could have gone from zero [reductions] to net-zero, the systems were not in place, this showed me the importance of identifying those changes that are appropriate for each institution based on current status and goals
  - Creating a centralized data system available to students, staff, and faculty alike with the same data
  - Finding the language and role to humbly recognize that the university is as much a part of the challenge of sustainability as it is a key player in solving for climate change, solving for sustainable development, and educating the next generation that will solve these multidisciplinary, complex problems
  - Sustainability across scales

- Sustainability at MIT
  - BY DESIGN...applying what we know
  - BY CHOICE...empowering community members to have an impact
  - TO SOLVE FOR...pioneering new frontiers in sustainability
- Scales of impact
  - You, Campus, City, Globe
- Solve for sustainability at MIT: Campus as a test bed
  - All the work we do must address both of these areas: Research and Course Engagement; Operation and Campus Infrastructure
- Areas of Impact
  - Zero-carbon campus
  - Climate resilience
  - Material life cycles
  - Thriving networks
  - Healthy people

c. *Questions:*
- How do you get the data into the system?
  - Developed using the OSI Pi data system, data scientist works with our internal engineers
  - Metering is game changing to harvest this data and reduces need to contact facilities for data allowing us to address specific areas of opportunity
  - Check out the MIT Climate Resiliency Dashboard which forecasts climate changes impact on campus
- How engaged are MIT alumni?
  - It ebbs and flows but alumni are extremely engaged right now because we are on the verge of launching a new plan for climate action; they've gone so far as to create their own community: MIT Alumni for Climate Action
  - We could be more involved but it comes down to capacity, we could certainly use more specific engagement and alumni networking staff
  - There is a climate sustainability branch of alumni that we stay up-to-date with
  - One thing I didn't get into was the amount of research groups focused on sustainability with which many alumni engage
- You've used data successfully to change the decision making process and we'd like to aspire to that, can you share a success story of turning the tide?
  - Working closely with utilities to see how they were assessing areas of opportunity on campus based on the data system we've developed, we've developed this method to use rank ordering to help determine where to put our resources

2. **Listening Session Debrief**
   a. *Support for high priority focus areas*
   - Sustainability institute;
   - Sustainability Leadership and Advocacy;

- Green Energy & Electricity;
- Social Sustainability;
- Sustainability Integration;

b. *Focus areas that should be higher priorities*
- Campus as a Living Lab;
- Sustainability Learning Requirement;
- Sustainability Onboarding & Training;
- Sustainable Food;
- Sustainable Investments;
- Employee Engagement;

c. *General*
- More explicitly recognize and incorporate other cultures and worldviews; acknowledge the settler-colonial framework
- Build a plan for implementation, progress tracking
- There shouldn't be a burden put on students / staff / faculty when implementing these priorities – allow flexibility and build effective incentives
- Social Sustainability should not be a single recommendation, but distributed across all areas
- Green revolving fund is more of an initiative than a focus area

d. *Question:*
- What was the makeup of listening session's participants?
  - Lots of folks we've heard from before, about half students and half faculty/ staff

3. **Student Subcommittee Debrief**
- The student subcommittee discussed the top three items in each focus area at their latest meeting
  - Academics
    - Sustainability Institute identified as most important
    - Raise priority of Campus as a Living Lab
    - Tailor different classes to sustainability
  - Engagement:
    - Important to engage with more student orgs
    - Sustainable Athletics should be moved up the list
  - Operations
    - Sustainable Landscapes and Food Sustainability should be higher priorities
  - Planning & Administration
    - Divestment should be the top priority

4. **Prioritization Framework**
a. *2010 Sustainability Task Force Report Lessons Learned*
- Defined a mission: "*The University of Wisconsin – Madison aligns research and education on sustainability (our purpose) with campus operations (our practices) in the service of environmental, economic, and social responsibility to people and the planet.*"
- Successes

- - o Established Office of Sustainability and subsequent website and newsletter
    - o Campus Landscape Master Plan
    - o Transportation Sustainability
- 25+ projects with limited to no progress
- We want to compare what that report identified as areas to address with what we've prepared so far to get a sense of what issues might linger
- Our proposed framework
  - o Expanding the framework from 2010 which included campus operations, education, and research to include our culture, our purpose, and our practice, which overlap to create sustainability leadership
  - o Organizes focus areas by these categories
  - o *Priority focus areas* are those we will develop action plans for and are ready to move on; *enabling focus areas* are those which specific action items might be needed to be successful; *supporting focus areas* will be pursued opportunistically
- Advancing priority Focus Areas
  - o Action Plan
    - ▪ Lead
    - ▪ Support Team Members
    - ▪ Key Stakeholders
    - ▪ Action and Resources Needed to be Successful
    - ▪ Metrics to Track Success
    - ▪ Timeline
  - o The facilitation team would be responsible for drafting these but perhaps engage council members one on one for specific feedback

5. **Group Discussions**
   a. *Key Takeaways*
   - Sustainability should not be a choice, but a priority
   - Open this discussion to all of our stakeholders to ensure everyone's voice is heard
   - Make sure students are at the center of all these decisions and initiatives, students are the mission of the university
   - Julie's enthusiasm will fill my day, there is light at the end and I'm feeling very optimistic that we can do this together
   - I appreciate the framework, the people that have been part of this committee understand the framework but I want to ask how it will be digested by the public
     - o It's important to take steps in the communications to tell them in plain English what we're doing, why we're doing it, and why it's so important that they are an active participant
   - Literacy – we always have a lot to learn to inform our prioritization and decision-making process, our culture of learning is critical to think about at all times
     - o How do we become better decision makers? The framework is clear and concrete, Julie's idea of sustainability definitions reminded me of diversity definitions, we have to own the same definition and think about who is at the table
   - The framework is very clear, the issue for all of us is to acknowledge that we are part of an education organization and have a responsibility to educate

- o Importance of language is critical
- o I love the notion of how we are walking the walk with all of our stakeholders, especially students
- o Finally, when we say "social sustainability" for me, it loses the richness of what we mean by it when we're really talking about equity, inclusivity, and justice
- I echo literacy and communication ideas, I was very inspired by Julie's model and how it can apply to other situations, ours included
- This group is making recommendations to the provost and VCFA; do we have a responsibility to think about how our recommendations are able to be resourced? Do we need to think about what is actually actionable from a resource perspective?
- Very inspired by Julie's overview, it's so important that we have a shared understanding and shared values about what we're talking about and what we care about, contextualize that priority
  - o We need to learn how to become translators and stewards of these ideas, how are we prepared to steward what we're learning and help facilitate the plan into our spaces
  - o I feel a sense of urgency for us to align campus stakeholders with this work and explain how it applies to everyone's work