

Working Group on Sustainability, End of year report, 2011-2012

Committee composition for this year:

Faculty: Philip Camill (Chair), Paul E. Schaffner, Susan E. Wegner

Staff: Barry Mills, President; S. Catherine Longley, Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration & Treasurer; Keisha Payson, Coordinator for a Sustainable Bowdoin; Eileen Johnson, ES Program Manager; Sarah Paul, Career Advisor; Ben Farrell, Associate Director of Residential Education

Students: Jonathan Held '14, Daniel Lowinger '12

Will Barkalow '14 is the liaison to the student group, Green Bowdoin Alliance.

Major goals:

- Goal as part of the Bowdoin Climate Action Plan: Evaluate possibilities for achieving 5% of the overall greenhouse gas emissions reductions through behavioral change/energy conservation (5% = 1.3 million lbs. CO₂e)
- Discuss whether community wide energy conservation on campus should focus on individual-based action items or building-based energy conservation approaches
- Evaluate the effectiveness of building energy competitions for meeting this carbon reduction goal
- Develop a strategy for campus education
- Define next steps that can infuse campus life and be sustained after the WGS dissolves

Summary of principal accomplishments:

- Discussed potential dates and ways to engage the campus community (including new members and first-year students) with information about the carbon neutrality initiative
- President Mills issued a message to the campus with an update about the carbon neutrality activities and accomplishments to date (Fall 2011)
- Discussions on individual-based approaches: This strategy would include providing faculty, staff, and students with a list of specific action items that could help individuals contribute to energy reductions across campus. One possible campaign slogan was “Lose 500 pounds of CO₂”, but this theme was abandoned because of the potential sensitivity of the message regarding issues of eating disorders and self image. After much discussion over several meetings, including consultations with other institutions who have implemented such a plan (Carnegie Mellon University), the WGS confirmed that the individual-based approach (asking individuals to make specific pledges to action items and then attempting to account for these changes) would be too difficult. CMU and many other schools are moving more towards the whole-building approach like the Lucid Dashboard system that Bowdoin has in place.
- Discussions on building-based approaches: This approach would focus on whether energy competitions with the ~40 buildings on the Dashboard system would allow Bowdoin to meet the 5% reduction that is part of the behavioral contribution to the Climate Action Plan.
- Evaluation of the efficacy of the building approach was accomplished following two energy competitions. The October 2011 dorm energy competition reduced emissions campus-wide by 20,000 lbs. CO₂e, or only 1.5% of this 5% reduction target. Extending

the competition to 9 months and including academic buildings would likely increase reductions to 10-14% of the overall 5% reduction target. The February-March 2012 energy competition achieved a similar outcome. Net campus-wide reduction of approximately 13,000 lbs CO₂e. Given that the behavioral change part of the climate action plan was 5% of the overall emissions reduction, this means one month of energy savings accounts for only 1% of the 5% target. If the competition were extended to 9 months this would still be less than 10% of the behavioral conservation target, and there are diminishing returns each year as buildings improve in energy savings, so these reductions over the long term are likely not achievable.

- We therefore conclude that the overall 5% carbon emission reduction target is too ambitious based on the kinds of metrics (whole building energy use) that are currently available at Bowdoin for energy reduction accounting. However, we reaffirm the educational benefits of greenhouse emission/energy reductions and wish to continue promoting individual actions and curricular opportunities for addressing C neutrality and sustainability.
- Successful co-curricular events to raise awareness of sustainability and carbon neutrality during academic year 2011-2012 included: (1) week-long pilot program by the student group Green Bowdoin Alliance to turn out campus lights, (2) Feb 10 Common Hour by Auden Schendler, (3) improvement of the Bowdoin sustainability website to focus on action items that students can do now, (4) engagement with social houses to educate about sustainability and carbon neutrality, (5) active engagement across campus by dorm and office eco-reps, (6) creation of a new student group called “Green Athletes” to help athletic teams engage sustainability and carbon neutrality, (7) development of a footprint graphic by Communications for visualizing the annual C emission reductions (to be used as banners, posters, and on the web), (8) positive benefits of the energy competitions (good public engagement, net energy reduction campus-wide, students appreciated the reminder about energy savings and carbon neutrality after winter break), (9) listing of Bowdoin courses related to sustainability and carbon neutrality with the AASHE STARS program--a central clearinghouse of information on what colleges and universities are doing to achieve carbon neutrality, (10) continued conversations with faculty across campus for engaging these issues in the curriculum and crosslisting courses with Environmental Studies.

Ongoing needs/next steps:

The following action items were identified as potential next steps for sustaining the activities of the WGS after the working group dissolves in May 2012:

- Expand eco-reps and office eco-rep programs. Include more college houses.
- Integrate the C neutrality initiative more intentionally throughout orientation. Initial conversations were held with the Dean of Students Office Summer 2011, where it was determined that the orientation schedule was too busy to add material. However, the WGS feels strongly that more information about carbon neutrality needs to be incorporated into the Pre-O and first-year experience. The goal is not to define a slot for this but to have a very brief message developed and delivered multiple times throughout the orientation program by key speakers (McKeen Center, OLC/BOC, President Mills, Deans Lohman and Foster, Pre-O trip leaders, dorm proctors). Work with Sarah Paul, Ben Farrell, and Emily Tong (the new orientation program manager).

- Develop a set of critical messages that highlight the fundamental commitments of the College.
- Develop stronger links of C neutrality and sustainability with the BOC, especially Pre-O mentoring.
- Implement a brief education program about C neutrality at Bowdoin for first-year students to be coordinated between Res Life and dorm proctors.
- Develop a protocol for discussing C neutrality for everyone involved with student training (e.g., captain's training, athletic team eco-reps).
- Consider developing art installations around campus as a means of public education about sustainability, in general, and C neutrality, in particular.
- Promote two lists of action items (faculty/staff and students) for what individuals can do to reduce energy use on campus. Include as part of the annual updates about the C neutrality reductions and feature them prominently on the Sustainability Bowdoin webpage.
- Continue to infuse environment, C neutrality, and sustainability across the curriculum. The AASHE STARS reporting system will be a vehicle for listing all courses across campus that include a focus on environment, sustainability, or C neutrality. Continue to invite faculty across campus to develop new courses, tweak existing courses, and crosslist courses with the ES Program. Encourage faculty to revisit the environmental mission statement and consider ways to incorporate these themes into their courses.
- Make the implementation committee meeting open to the community for input at least once per year.
- Continue to examine new ways to engage the campus community, with events such as lunchtime faculty seminars, "Uncommon Hour", and FDC/McKeen Center workshops. Possibly invite external faculty members specializing on sustainability across the curriculum to assist with conversations. David Collings has initiated a conversation about climate change (14-May) with faculty across campus. This will facilitate the continuation of curricular, co-curricular, and community discussions on climate change mitigation, adaptation, and impacts. Initial plans are for these discussions to be ongoing throughout summer and fall 2012. If you are interested in joining these conversations, please contact David Collings.