From the OEP Director: Metric-Mania

“You can’t manage what you don’t measure.” The old b-school adage was never truer than when spoken about the work of sustainability offices at colleges and universities, UConn’s included, as recently as 5 to 10 years ago. Back then, colleagues would ask me, “how will you know when you’ve succeeded?”

Now, over the past six years, we seem to have reached a milestone on the other end of the measurement spectrum. In fact, so many surveys and green campus report cards had emerged by 2010 that the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) convened a group of senior campus sustainability professionals to address a growing sense of “survey fatigue.” The result was an ultra-comprehensive set of standardized metrics - the Sustainability Tracking Assessment and Rating System - now known acro-affectionately as STARS. Since then, STARS has become the basis for all U.S. campus sustainability surveys, like those that determine the annual Sierra Club and Princeton Review rankings of America’s greenest colleges. Add to this, the emergence of the University of Indonesia’s GreenMetric World University ranking, now entering its fourth year, and “metric mania” comes to mind.

In this bright light of objectivity, lo and behold, 2013 was UConn’s year to shine. In January, we were ranked #1 in the world, according to GreenMetric. Then, in August, we earned the top spot in the Sierra Club’s Cool Schools national ranking. (cont’d. p. 5)

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Next Steps for Campus Sustainability

This semester’s EPAC meeting ended with brainstorming sessions on next steps for UConn’s sustainability efforts. Members broke out into Academics and Operations groups, using our top 10-rated categories from the Sierra survey as a starting point. Below are a few ideas raised by each group.

Operations:
- Focus on stormwater, both in educating the campus on where it goes, as well as how we mitigate its effects with low impact development (LID) features.
- Build support for a bike-friendly campus, including more parking for bikes and scooters, as well as a bike infrastructure survey.
- Increase education about recycling, including more bins, and outreach to new students.

Academics:
- Make our definition of sustainability known to the campus community, including environmental and social dimensions.
- Propose a General Education requirement for sustainability, since many classes students are already taking would count.
- Build on areas of strength within programs to encourage environmental research, and as a platform for expanding into other areas.

The full list will be distributed to EPAC members and other interested parties for further input. Email us at envpolicy@uconn.edu if you would like to be included.

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Football Green GameDay
On September 14th, 35 volunteers from the EcoHouse learning community, the EcoHusky student organization, and the Honors UNIV Environmental Sustainability class joined forces with the OEP to promote recycling at the UConn vs. Maryland Football Green GameDay. Volunteers were paired up and assigned a parking lot (blue, red, or gray) to collect recyclables from and educate the fans on the importance of recycling. Tailgaters were very receptive and appreciative of the volunteers’ effort. Overall the event was very successful — volunteers collected 875lbs of recyclables! The OEP tent at Fanfest featured a memory game set up with matching single stream recycling items. Both children and adults gathered around the OEP table to play the game and winners were offered a giveaway—carabineers, sunglasses, tattoos, coin purses, and t-shirts. The table also featured information on UConn’s #1 ranking for Sierra’s 2013 Cool Schools Survey.

Above: Volunteers at GGD; Left: A Volunteer from EcoHouse empties her recycling bag; Right: the OEP Fanfest table

Campus Sustainability Day
On October 21st, UConn observed an important day in the world of environmentalism: Campus Sustainability Day (CSD). CSD is an annual AASHE sponsored event. This year was especially exciting because we had the opportunity to celebrate our new #1 ranking in the Sierra Club’s “Coolest Schools” Survey! A sustainable breakfast reception was attended by representatives from green organizations like the Sierra Club, EcoHouse and EcoHusky (including Avery Point members), as well as students, faculty, staff, donors, and administrators who assisted in the completion of the Sierra survey. President Susan Herbst, who has presided over many environmental initiatives at UConn, gave brief remarks. The president spoke about the pride our university feels from the new ranking, as well as the enduring importance of environmental sustainability.

CSD: Wall-E Showing
The evening of CSD, students gathered to watch the film Wall-E, which shows the consequences of overconsumption: Earth covered in garbage. As students filtered into the theater, environmental groups on campus like Spring Valley Farm, EcoHouse, the Environmental Committee of Honors Council, and EcoHusky spoke about how they help with campus sustainability. Then, students kicked back and enjoyed the film, which prepared them for a lively post-movie discussion about sustainability initiatives at UConn, as well as ways to better reach students on topics concerning the environment. Intern Emily McInerney led a conversation about increasing student awareness of campus sustainability efforts, then solicited their ideas about how to make UConn more sustainable in the future.
EcoMadness Competition

EcoMadness, our annual competition to save water and energy in first- and second-year residence halls was a big success! With sub-metering data from Facilities, the OEP partnered with Residential Education to help 23 dorms in 6 residential areas compete this year. RAs from different dorm areas motivated the students in their buildings with different activities, such as glow-in-the-dark Frisbee, to encourage turning out the lights. EcoCaptains helped educate their fellow students by putting cards in the bathrooms reminding people not to waste water, and notes about unplugging electronics to avoid phantom load under people’s doors. Each dorm area held an EcoMadness kick-off party during the competition where students played sustainability games, learned tips to save water and energy, and enjoyed some healthy snacks. At the end of the competition, the winning dorms received an ice cream party sponsored by ResEd and Dining Services. Dozens of student residents attended each party, and dining services provided reusable bowls, spoons, and ice cream scoops to reduce waste from the events.

Winners

Water Reduction: Allen/Kingston (Towers) reduced their water usage by 10.6%
Water Use Per Capita: Sprague (East) used only 31.9 gallons of water per person
Energy Reduction: Beecher/Vinton (Towers) reduced their energy usage by 6.4%
Energy Use Per Capita: Holcomb (East) used only 3.2 kWh per person

Although percentage reductions were down compared to EcoMadness results in previous years, the month-long baselines measured to start this year’s competition were significantly lower than in previous years. Meanwhile, per capita use of energy and water among all participants was lower than usage in previous years. It looks like the Class of 2017 was pretty green to start!

Seasonally dry conditions this Fall left Connecticut rivers and streams with low flow rates. UConn’s water supply system draws from well-fields that can further reduce low flows in the Fenton and Willimantic Rivers. Consequently, UConn announced a Stage IA Water Supply Advisory requesting members of the UConn community adopt a number of water conservation strategies. The Advisory remains in effect until further notice and offers the following suggestions:

*Take shorter showers
*Wash Full Laundry Loads
*Don’t let the faucet run unnecessarily
*Run dishwashers only when completely full
*Don’t use public water to wash building exteriors, driveways, sidewalks or vehicles
*Reuse water: as opposed to pouring water down the drain, it may be used to water plants, etc.
*Report leaky fixtures at UConn to Facilities Operations (486-3113)

EcoHusky Student Group Initiatives

Volunteers from EcoHusky helped remove invasive plants from the Hillside Environmental Education Park (HEEP) on September 22nd. The “invasive pull” protects native species and increases biodiversity in the 65-acre North Campus park. The target plant was Japanese stiltgrass. Through several years of weeding, the stiltgrass will be effectively suppressed.

The annual ING Hartford Marathon was held on October 12th in Bushnell Park. This year, EcoHusky and Eco-House volunteers partnered with event organizers to facilitate food waste composting by runners and their family and friends. Composting is an earth-friendly way to reduce waste and greenhouse gas emissions from organic material. Compost enriches soil and reduces the need for harmful chemical fertilizers.
Water Reclamation Facility Up and Running

This summer, UConn’s state-of-the-art, $25 million reclaimed water facility officially opened. The RWF provides tertiary treatment of UConn’s sewage effluent in order to replace potable water for certain uses that don’t require drinking water quality. UConn’s facility can process up to a million gallons a day, but on most days is usually processing between 200,000 and 500,000 gallons. The water is used primarily for heating and cooling water in the Co-generation power plant on campus, which has allowed UConn to reduce or even eliminate the use of potable water for centralized heating and cooling. Much of the water used at the Co-gen returns to the UConn wastewater treatment plant and RWF to be retreated and reused once more. This cycle allows us to both reduce the potable water we use, as well as reduce the amount of effluent we discharge. The water goes through three treatment steps: microfiltration, UV disinfection, and then disinfection with sodium hypochlorite to prevent any residual bacterial growth. University President Susan Herbst and DEEP Commissioner Dan Esty both spoke at the official opening event, citing the RWF as an example of UConn’s leadership role in environmental sustainability.

EPAC Notes

The University’s Environmental Policy Advisory Council (EPAC), which was established in 2003 and is advisory to the President and Provost on environmental sustainability issues, held its fall meeting on November 19th.

After reports from operational and academic departments on the various environmental initiatives in progress on campus, the committee held a breakout session to allow members to brainstorm different ideas for helping UConn maintain momentum and leadership on campus sustainability.

Welcome new EPAC undergrad student reps, Natalie Vierra and Jessie Frech (EcoHusky president) and grad student, Udayarka Karra. Also appointed this fall are Tim Fisher, new Dean of the Law School, Tysen Kendig, AVP Communications, Mike Jednak, AVP Facilities Operations, Dwight Atherton, Manager, Parking and Dave Lotreck, Manager, Building & Grounds. Thank you to our outgoing members for their service!

EV Charging Station Grant

In 2012, UConn was one of 18 locations selected by Connecticut Light & Power (CL&P) for its “Plug My Ride” program, which provided an electric vehicle (EV) charging station on campus, located in the Motor Pool parking lot. It’s open to the public for free use from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Over the past year, CL&P and the University’s School of Engineering conducted a study demonstrating that UConn’s charging station was in the top 5% statewide for usage. Recently, UConn’s Transportation, Parking & Logistics office and interns at the OEP collaborated to apply for and obtain a grant for the installation of two more EV charging stations. We were notified by DEEP in October that we’ll receive $4,000 to install these additional stations. They’ll be located in the North and South Parking Garages, where they must be publicly accessible and free of charge for at least five years.

Our recent environmental awareness survey showed that over 30% of the campus community thinks that recycling is the #1 environmental issue UConn needs to work on, but only about 35% of the campus community knows that UConn has single stream recycling. Single Stream (Mixed) Recycling means that any recyclable can go in any recycling container! So feel free to put your soda cans in a paper recycling bin, and any recycling in the blue bins in offices and classrooms. Call our office at 6-5773 if you have any questions!
Metric Mania (cont’d from p. 1)

However, before the glow from the celebration of our lofty rankings had faded, some UConn colleagues, who once questioned our ability to measure success, now caution us about the equivalent of “teaching to the test.” They fear becoming too beholden to the cold, hard data of metrics. After all, shouldn’t sustainability, especially in the hallowed halls of higher education, be about the never-ending pursuit of an enhanced state of awareness and engagement? Suddenly, our new challenge is in finding the right balance of time spent measuring progress versus actually doing the things that enable it!

So where does UConn go from here? We held brainstorming sessions on this question at our fall EPAC meeting, seeking guidance for future campus sustainability directions (see p.1). If you have any ideas, please send them to me at rich.miller@uconn.edu. Whether qualitative or quantitative, we need and welcome your input!

$2M Clean Energy MicroGrid Grant

In August, the state Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP) announced that UConn had received a $2.14 million grant to develop a clean energy microgrid at the Depot Campus. UConn is one of nine grant recipients, chosen from more than 20 institutional and municipal applicants, who had each submitted a proposal for a share of $15 million during the first phase of DEEP’s planned three-phase microgrid program.

The State of Connecticut is a national leader in promoting microgrids, which are forms of distributed generation of electricity and/or heat and cooling, that can operate in “island mode” for multiple “critical needs” facilities during an outage in the utility-owned power grid. Microgrids are an important part of a more reliable and resilient energy infrastructure, especially considering extended storm-related power outages that have occurred recently and are expected to worsen as a result of climate change.

UConn’s microgrid is the first major initiative stemming from the 2012 Adaptation amendment to our Climate Action Plan. It will use the 400kW hydrogen fuel cell at the Depot Campus, as well as a 6.6kW solar array, both of which were installed in 2012. As such, it will also be a research and “how-to” demonstration platform for the use of clean and renewable energy in place of conventional gas turbines and diesel generators in a microgrid.

The microgrid will allow core Depot Campus buildings to stay operational when the state faces major storm-related outages. Several cottages at the Depot Campus will also be available as public warming centers, with kitchen and bathroom use, and charging stations for EVs and other electronic devices. Installation of the state-of-the-art microgrid switchgear and electrical infrastructure will begin in early-2014 and should be com-

Environmental Awareness Survey

The Office of Environmental Policy conducted our regular environmental awareness survey of undergraduates. This survey checks existing knowledge, as well as what respondents think about environmental programs on campus. This year we also surveyed graduate students and faculty/staff. We had a total of 621 respondents.

Key Findings:

* Graduate students, faculty, and staff deemed water issues as the most important environmental issue on campus while the undergraduates viewed recycling as most important.
* Graduate students and faculty respondents tended to recycle more items and more often than undergraduate respondents.
* Undergrads thought that more recycling bins around campus would increase recycling rates, while Grads and Faculty thought more outreach would increase recycling.
* Both parties would like to see more bike paths and more use of the bike loans program
* 34.46% of Undergraduate respondents never use the shuttle system

* Only 35% of Undergraduate respondents lower the thermostat when leaving their room.
* Energy Conservation was considered the most important feature for new building construction
Green Office Certificate Program

The Green Office Certificate is an award given to offices for their sustainability practices and environmental consciousness. You can apply by taking our point-based survey of green office practices. Based on your responses, you could be silver, gold, or platinum certified! Please contact our office at 6-5773 or email corinne.tagliarina@uconn.edu if you are interested in your office taking part. Our interns will work with your office to help you make changes to earn a better score! Go Green! Stay Blue!

Certified as a Green Office

Meet the Sustainability Coordinators

Corinne Tagliarina joined the OEP as the Sustainability Coordinator in May 2013. Corinne is a Ph.D. candidate in the department of Political Science and is in the Human Rights Certificate program. Corinne graduated from Bowling Green State University in Ohio in 2008 with a B.A. in Political Science and English, and from UConn in 2010 with a M.A. in Political Science. She is currently writing her dissertation on the institutionalization of the human right to water under the direction of Dr. Shareen Hertel. She really enjoys working at the OEP, especially when she gets to work with our fabulous interns!

Dave Wanik is the Assistant Sustainability Coordinator for the OEP. He is a Ph.D. candidate in Environmental Engineering at UConn, writing his dissertation under the direction of Dr. Emmanouil Anagnostou and Dr. Brian Hartman. His research focuses on the development and implementation of real-time forecasting and damage modeling for resiliency in electrical utility transmission and distribution systems. Before coming to OEP, Dave worked for a Fortune 500 energy company and a Fortune 50 high-technology company in environmental remediation, compliance and health and safety roles. He also worked as a field assistant for the department of Natural Resources and the Environment on green roof hydrology and water quality research at UConn. He received his B.S. in Environmental Science and his M.S. in Environmental Engineering from the University of Connecticut.

Close to Home Giving Campaign

UConn’s annual Close to Home campaign allows UConn’s faculty and staff an opportunity to make a donation to the University. If you choose to give, please consider directing your donation to the Campus Sustainability Fund #22701. This donation would help UConn continue to improve upon campus sustainability and support the initiatives which have led to UConn’s #1 Sierra greenest schools ranking. Every donation, regardless of size, is important. When faculty and staff show their dedication and pride in the institution it signifies to alumni and others that UConn and the CSF are worthy of their support, too. Please show your support by joining fellow faculty and staff in making a donation today! We appreciate the support we have received from UConn faculty and staff over the years!

Find the OEP Online:

Our WordPress blog features articles from our student interns on UConn’s sustainability accomplishments!

The UConn Today blog has articles about “greening the Husky Blue,” including experiences abroad.