

Sustainability Conversation

4.14.09

Maucker Union

10-15 minutes

Good morning.

Thank you for making time in your schedules to participate in this very important conversation about an issue of immense long-term importance.

- **'Participate' is the key word, because our intent today is to engage in real-time information gathering.**

Sustainability is going to become one of the most important issues in all our lives—at home, in our cars, at the workplace—in everything we do and everywhere we go.

No one has all the answers, and I cannot think of another first-tier issue that will require the kind of collective action that we will need as a university, a community, and a society

- **in order to achieve real and meaningful sustainability in all of these contexts.**

The word 'sustainability' is being bandied about so much that it probably behooves us to define the term as a starting point, at least to the extent that we can.

- **Some would say 'sustainability' is just conservation or environmentalism dressed up in new clothes.**
- **Others may see it as energy efficiency and cost containment necessary for economic progress.**
- **No doubt some simply view it as the right thing to do from a humanitarian standpoint.**

The United Nations Brundtland Commission in 1987 defined sustainability as, "...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

- **That, to me, is concise and inclusive.**
- **It takes all of the elements I mentioned into account and gives them cross-generational relevance.**

Now, you ask, 'aren't we already practicing these things?'

- **Some of them, yes; some we've been doing for a long time, and with good results.**
- **UNI has a long history of conservation, energy efficiency, and recycling.**

I encourage you to go to the 'UNI c.a.r.e.' website - the official site for our sustainability initiative.

Click the publications tab, and read the paper titled "*Energy Conservation and Sustainability Initiatives at the University of Northern Iowa: Past, Present, and Future.*"

It is the definitive account of what we've done and what we are doing.

- **A lot of this will never make the evening news because it is highly technical information.**
- **If you are not an engineer, it may even be somewhat boring.**

Briefly, though, I can tell you that we generate 40 percent of our own electricity using systems that are 40 percent more efficient than typical power plants.

We are in our 19th year of recycling mixed paper.

- **In 2007, UNI received the Iowa Recycling Association's 'Best School Recycling Program Award.'**

We are a member of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE).

- **This allows us to collaborate with other members in gathering information on best practices in sustainability at other universities.**

Additionally, UNI is currently establishing a baseline for our campus carbon footprint through a greenhouse gas emission survey.

We have joined the U.S. Green Building Council, and are seeking its Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) silver certification for all new buildings and major capital renovations, including Sabin Hall.

We have introduced myriad recycling initiatives and pollution control prevention programs, installed pervious pavements, and purchased hybrid cars and blended fuel vehicles.

We are taking a very significant step in hiring a sustainability engineer to provide leadership in managing and integrating all of these components.

I think it is important that UNI currently offers more than 180 courses that deal with some aspect of sustainability.

- **Many of our students and faculty are already engaged in research and service initiatives.**
- **If I may point to just one example, UNI MBA student Zach Hedrington just won the Pappajohn New Venture Business Plan Award for his work with biomass fuels.**
- **Zach has been active with Cedar Falls Utilities, and last month he went to Washington D.C., where he met with**

Iowa senators and representatives to talk about this important work.

UNI has several entities and programs whose purpose is to promote exceptional public-private partnerships that advance sustainable practices, including:

- **Iowa Waste Reduction Center**
- **Center for Energy and Environmental Education**
- **Buy Fresh Buy Local**
- **Recycle and Reuse Technology Transfer Center**
- **National Ag-Based Lubricants**
- **Industrial Technology Center's Electrical and Information Engineering Technology program**
- **and Geo TREE.**

So, to answer my own question of a few minutes ago, yes, we are doing a lot.

But, along with everyone else on the planet, we simply have to do better.

- **There is no question that some self sacrifice will be required--as individuals, as communities and as a society.**
- **But I would argue that 'sacrifice' is an unnecessarily pejorative term, because what may seem like sacrifice in the short term will be inevitably transformed into long-term benefits for the general good.**

With today's conversation we can help each other figure out how to connect the dots through an interdisciplinary, dynamic, systemic commitment that represents fundamental changes in the way we operate,

- **including what we teach and how we teach it.**

So why are we doing this now, when we have so many other pressing issues on our plates?

First, we're all under intense economic pressure to come up with long-term solutions for a number of issues, including sustainability.

- **Citing high energy prices, environmental issues, world events, and federal and state policy actions, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities includes sustainability among its Top 10 State Policy Issues for Higher Education in 2009.**

Second, we have a mandate from the Board of Regents and the state of Iowa.

The Board of Regents has developed a Sustainability Plan that aims to make its institutions leaders in the nation on operational practices, education, research and economic development.

The Sustainability Plan expresses a clear vision for eight functional areas.

- **In planning and development, we must demonstrate a commitment to sustainability and incorporate environmental stewardship in our campus master plan.**
- **Our purchasing plan will balance reduced environmental impact with our fiscal responsibilities,**
 - **and consider environmental and social impact costs over the lifetime of products and services.**
- **We will pursue climate neutral operations with regard to our energy use.**
- **We will reduce the volume of materials and resources consumed, with the long-term objective of contributing to a waste free society.**
- **Our transportation strategies will aim to increase fuel efficiency, reduce emissions, and provide opportunities for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.**
- **We will pursue water saving and efficiency measures, including collection technologies and re-use mechanisms.**
- **Through our curriculum, we will provide educational programs and research opportunities that facilitate students' ability to engage the community effectively in matters of environmental, social, and economic sustainability.**

- **Through our economic development, outreach and research activities, we will serve as a world-leading model and consultant to businesses and organizations on sustainability issues.**

This is an ambitious vision, with ambitious goals that will take time to implement and achieve.

Today, we are taking our university to the next level by engaging the campus and the community in best practices that enhance our local, long-term sustainability.

We have already created a structure upon which to build.

- **It is similar to those in place at our sister Regents institutions.**

Our University Energy Conservation Committee was established in 2006,

- **and has been guided very ably since its inception by Jim Walters.**

- **I want to thank Jim for his effective leadership of this committee.**

- **The committee has eight task groups working to engage the campus community and audit campus practices.**

- **The task groups have been compiling best practices in recycling, green procurement practices and policies, and classroom scheduling.**
- **They are, and have been, our “boots on the ground” in preparing us for this broader conversation.**
- **Last August, we created a nine-member Advisory Council to provide guidance and support to the Energy Conservation Committee, to work with the state and the Board of Regents, and to inform the university community.**
 - **I want to take this opportunity to thank Tom Schellhardt for his overall leadership of the Council.**

As a university we have a leadership role to play, and it is in the best interest of our students that the curriculum and our outreach and research priorities reflect global 21st century imperatives.

Economics and mandates aside, sustainability in form and function as defined by the Bruntland Commission is the right and rational thing to do.

Your presence and participation today demonstrates that you recognize that.

- **I encourage you to speak freely and think outside the box.**

- **I assure you that the results of these conversations will come back to the Council and me.**
- **We will review the reports and decide where to go from here.**

Before I turn the proceedings over to Dave Whitsett, I have one more important item of business,

- **and that is to recognize and thank Jack Yates for his vision and leadership in making this event happen today.**

Once again, thank you all for being here.

I wish you a stimulating and productive conversation.

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