Sustainability report and areas for further improvement at the University of Cincinnati

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October 20th, 2014

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# Executive Summary

A large and ever growing trend as of late is for organizations to increase their efforts towards green technologies and sustainability. Through a review and grading process, the University of Cincinnati received an overall grade of B+. While the university’s sustainability efforts are above average when compared to other organizations and institutions of similar size, there are still several areas for further improvement. These areas for improvement include improving its food usage, recycling efforts, and transportation methods used. Simple steps such as placing more recycling receptacles around campus can drive further student and faulty involvement in the university’s efforts and promote a more positive sustainability environment at the university. Other more involved steps, but still relatively simple, would be to continue replacing the university transportation fleet with more efficient vehicles and optimized transpiration routes.

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# Introduction

Sustainability means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. The University of Cincinnati has taken this message to heart and made visible strides to improve their sustainability score as defined by the College Sustainability Report Card. This report outlines the current state of those efforts by the university then provides a few solutions based on the findings to further those efforts. Following an explanation of the data collection process, the report will go on to explain what the data means, then draw fact based conclusions on where the university should focus its efforts.

# Approach

To determine the overall grade for the University of Cincinnati’s sustainability efforts the College Sustainability Report Card uses 9 different areas, which include Administration, Climate Change & Energy, Food & Recycling, Green Building, Student Involvement, Transportation, Endowment Transparency, Investment Priorities, and Shareholder Engagement. While each of these areas all are important to the university’s green efforts, some play bigger roles than others. This report will explore those areas and what the university is doing in those areas to increase its green efforts.

# Methods

The information examined in this report comes directly from a survey submitted with the assistance provided by university officials. The survey covered the areas outlined in the approach through interviews with university officials and exploration of publically available information provided by the university. Students were also consulted on several key areas, particularly student involvement, to get a bigger picture of the overall green effort situation at the university.

# Findings

The first observed area the University of Cincinnati placed its efforts is through its administration. The administration in the university has created a sustainability policy, which has been made publicly available, signed the American College and University President’s Climate Commitment (ACUPCC), created a publicly available master sustainability plan, tasked committees to advise the current efforts, and published a web site that details all of its sustainability efforts.

Part of these sustainability efforts included increasing recycling, particularly in dining halls. A couple steps taken includes the university having 100% of the meals served by the university by trayless, a program started back in 2008, continuously auditing the food waste levels of those dining halls, and recycling used cooking oil and biodiesel. Those dining halls however do not recycle traditional materials, which include such items as aluminum, cardboard, glass, paper, and plastics, nor do they provide recycling receptacles for collection of recyclable materials.

Students, like the administration, have taken an interest in the university’s sustainability efforts and formed a committee comprised of about 30 students that plans events to raise awareness and further the efforts of the university. Some of the efforts of the student group include promoting a Sustainability 101 class, petitioning faculty to include recycling receptacles in academic halls, hosting a workshop on lowing your carbon footprint while in university living, and creating a farmers’ market available on campus.

The university has also looked into and implemented ways to make its fleet of about 300 vehicles more efficient. This includes the purchase and use of two 100% electric vehicles and 54 vehicles fueled with E85 or higher. Students are encouraged to travel via methods other than single-occupancy vehicles and have shown a good response at about 32%. While on campus students, faculty, and staff are also offered methods for green, efficient travels like the bus system that travels between university buildings.

# Analysis

The findings of the survey show a clear effort on the part of the administration, faculty, staff, and students to increase sustainability of the university. There are still definite areas for improvement, the main one being the recyclable effort on the part of the university. Currently, as shown by the findings, the university dining halls do not recycle any of the traditional materials or offer places for the people who frequent campus a place to recycle. One step to increase the effort would be to place recycling receptacles campus wide for everyone to use. Another step would be to begin recycling those traditional materials that is

currently just being thrown away. Both of these would reduce the amount of trash being produced by the university and increase the amount of materials that could be reused and repurposed.

Another step that the university can take based on the findings is the replacement of more of their fleet with more efficient vehicles such as the electric and E85 fueled vehicles they have now. These vehicles would not only reduce the emissions but could reduce costs that would otherwise be spent on fuel and could be placed into other efforts. Combining more trips and people in vehicles would also add to the effect this step could have. If the university embraced smarter transportation the entire community will benefit.

# Conclusions

As stated in the analysis previously, the university is doing a lot right, and currently a lot more than the average organization of similar size, but there is always room for improvement. The initiatives by the administration and student leaders to promote green efforts is a great start, and is reflected in the report card, but areas such as recycling and transportation can still improve. By taking from what others have done, such as campus wide recycling receptacles, the university will have a fuller and more complete sustainability effort in place.