Advancing Environmental Sustainability in Academic Libraries: A Process-Oriented Approach

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Introduction

The climate crisis is a global emergency caused by increased atmospheric greenhouse gases, resulting in global warming and climate change. Libraries are uniquely positioned to contribute to sustainability efforts through their operational practices, collections, and educational initiatives.

This poster presents a framework for implementing sustainable practices in academic libraries, focusing on a process-oriented approach to develop comprehensive recommendations for environmental sustainability.

Methods

The UAL Environmental Sustainability Working Group (ESWG) was established in 2023 to develop a list of recommendations on environmental sustainability. The ESWG adopted a process-oriented approach to sustainability that emphasizes continuous improvement and adaptability. The process-oriented approach included multiple elements:

- Literature review - focused on environmental sustainability in academic libraries, including both current practices and the impact of academic library activities, in order to support evidence-based practice.
- Environmental scan - sustainability policies and initiatives from institutions and libraries globally, with a focus on Canada. We also examined UAlberta sustainability policies
- Staff survey - UAL staff survey about current sustainability practices, areas of concern and priorities. This let us engage stakeholders, align with the values of our community and help create a culture of sustainability within the institution.

Results

Literature Search and Environmental Scan
The literature search and environmental scan can be found in the supplementary materials: bit.ly/CAISenviro25

Recommendations
The ESWG identified three priority recommendations represent the most important steps to advancing environmental sustainability:

1. **Create a continuing sustainability committee**: this will ensure this work is ongoing, reflecting that sustainability is a process and not a one-time thing.
2. **Join the Sustainable Libraries Initiative**: membership will provide more support for sustainability initiatives within our institution.
3. **Complete an Energy Audit**: Energy efficiency is a significant piece of sustainability and a comprehensive energy audit is the first step to determining the environmental impact of our library.

The ESWG also developed further recommendations categorized into four areas:
- **Reducing Waste**
  - Encourage reuse of office materials and follow green purchasing guidelines.
  - Ensure recycling and composting in office areas.
  - Reduce library swag and commit to reusable and sustainable swag options.
- **Travel and Events**
  - Incentivize biking, walking or taking public transit to work.
  - Reduce travel by incentivizing staff attendance at online or local events and committing to hosting online or hybrid events instead of in person.
  - Collect and share travel-related data to for transparency and accountability.
  - Encourage and enable staff to work from home where possible to reduce transit-related emissions.
  - Advocate for major national and international meetings to be held online.
- **Energy Usage and Conservation**
  - Upgrade to energy-efficient lighting, including light timers and lower light options
  - Encourage staff to turn off power bars and devices at the end of the day and ensure power-saving modes are used.
  - Adopt sustainable digital preservation practices.
  - Where building energy efficiency and advocate for green energy.
  - Examine the environmental impact of our collections and selection processes.
- **Education and Accountability**
  - Collect energy use information where available and share a report on yearly energy use.
  - All library units should all develop, implement, and regularly share sustainability initiatives specific to their areas.
  - The library should offer regular sustainability education and training to staff.
  - The library should organize campaigns to encourage energy-saving and waste reduction habits among staff and students.

Discussion

The ESWG used a process-oriented approach, reflecting that sustainability is an ongoing process. We built upon the collected initiatives and research to develop a roadmap to a sustainability. As this work continues, solicit feedback from library stakeholders, and synthesize sustainability developments in the academic sector to improve our approach. Continuous monitoring and improvement ensure that sustainability efforts remain relevant and effective. This iterative approach allows libraries to adapt to changing circumstances and incorporate new knowledge and technologies as they become available.

Conclusion

Academic libraries have a crucial role in promoting environmental sustainability and addressing the climate crisis. By adopting a process-oriented approach, We can significantly reduce its environmental impact, lead by example, and contribute to global climate change efforts.
This approach emphasizes systematic planning, stakeholder engagement, and continuous improvement in creating lasting change. This paper provides a framework that can be adapted by other academic libraries, contributing to environmental stewardship in higher education and shaping a more sustainable future.

Supplementary Materials