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**Florida Gulf Coast University**

**Environmental Sustainability Committee   
Strategic Plan for Sustainability, 2015 Update**

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**FLORIDA GULF COAST UNIVERSITY**

**DEFINITION OF ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY[[1]](#footnote-1)**

The Florida Gulf Coast University definition of environmental sustainability flows from the University Mission to “practice and promote environmental sustainability.”[1] Building on the classic definition of sustainable development, this means operating in a way that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”[2]

A broad understanding of environmental sustainability is considered in FGCU’s teaching, in learning, in curriculum, in scholarship, in research, in service, and in operations. The University is an Affiliate of Earth Charter International and draws inspiration from the Earth Charter vision. The Florida Gulf Coast University Guiding Principles illustrate the aim to instill “in students an environmental consciousness that balances their economic and social aspirations with the imperative for ecological sustainability.”[3] The issues related to “economic, social and ecological sustainability” [4] are embedded in Florida Gulf Coast University’s history and mission This understanding of environmental sustainability is a broad, multifaceted concept that cultivates, in the words of the Earth Charter, “respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace.”[5]

The Florida Gulf Coast University definition of environmental sustainability establishes goals of climate neutrality, renewable resource use, and preservation of habitat while recognizing the limitations imposed on the University by procurement practices and fiduciary responsibilities. Achieving this definition of environmental sustainability is a participatory process requiring collective engagement of the University community members.

**INTRODUCTION**

Successful implementation of sustainability is an interdisciplinary and cross-departmental effort. In order to realize the mission, vison, and guiding principles of Florida Gulf Coast University, it is critical that we utilize sustainability as a framework for decision making and integrate sustainability priorities bilaterally through the FGCU Strategic Plan. Using sustainability as one of FGCU’s competitive advantage is particularly important as we shift our focus towards growth through increased retention and graduation rates in the years to come.

**BACKGROUND**

The Planning and Budget Council (PBC) charged the Environmental Sustainability Committee (ESC) to update the Sustainability Strategic Plan. The ESC created the first Environmental Sustainability Goals in 2010-11 by considering a host of tasks, weighing the challenges, achievability, and existing resources, and identified 50 sustainability tasks in support of the University’s sustainability mission. The ESC updated the Strategic Plan for Sustainability in 2011-12 with information from the division Vice-Presidents on both their on-going and new goals in support of sustainability. The purpose of the 2015 update is to determine what progress has been made toward the goals already, and to recommend sustainability priorities, including methods to measure the University’s progress, which can be incorporated into our overall strategic planning process.

**METHODS**

Building on the work and progress from the previous Sustainability Strategic Plans, we began with the table of goals listed in the 2011-12 Plan. Through communications with division personnel, and by researching the archived information available in SharePoint, we were able to determine the progress attained toward those goals. To the original table, we added departmental goals tagged in SharePoint as relating to Strategic Goal # 5, Environmental Sustainability and Innovation, from 2012-2015. These data are contained in the Appendix to this report. Column F of the table, titled *“Update 6/2015”,* summarizes the progress towards these goals. The action items listed below represent proposed recommendations that could assist Florida Gulf Coast University in reaching our sustainability goals and retaining the public recognition we have already received as a leader in sustainability.

**NOTEWORTHY SUSTAINABILITY ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

FGCU has successfully integrated sustainability into many of our ongoing educational and operational efforts. Since our founding, we have been leaders in energy efficiency and ecosystems enhancement efforts. We are also known for our curricular integration of sustainability through core requirements such as the University Colloquium and Service Learning as well as our transformative relationships with community partners. Some of our greatest accomplishments over the past few years include the attainment of a Gold Rating on the Sustainability, Tracking, Rating, and Assessment System (STARS) report and a Platinum Certification for Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) for Academic Building Seven. Additionally, FGCU adopted a liquid ozone cleaning system for all residence halls, which reduces the amount of cleaning chemicals used and increases worker safety. We also continue to reduce the amount of energy and water used per FTE and manage our grounds to enhance native ecosystems. Academically, a significant number of faculty members are engaged in sustainability research, sustainability content has been successfully integrated into a high percentage of courses, and most programs have formally adopted sustainability learning outcomes.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FGCU STRATEGIC PLAN**

In reviewing previous Sustainability Strategic Plans, we noticed that creating a separate Strategic Plan for Environmental Sustainability Goals was a major barrier to goal attainment because it exists outside of our official University Strategic Planning and budgeting channels. As a result, previous sustainability recommendations frequently lacked the resources needed to meet the desired results. In order to achieve the desired outcomes, financial and professional support mechanisms should be dedicated to this use. In addition to dedicated funding, there should be a clearinghouse to provide better organization of our sustainable initiatives, including our academic and research activities, and provide for professional development in sustainability.

We recommend that the seven following actions be incorporated into FGCU’s next Strategic Plan:

**1. Institutionalize a clearinghouse to blend stewardship and sustainability efforts. [[2]](#footnote-2)**

FGCU’s approach to meeting key performance indicators for sustainability is through decentralized and interdepartmental efforts. The decentralization of these efforts empowers individual offices, departments, and academic units to contribute to sustainability based on their functions and expertise. In this way, every unit can be responsible for and contribute to sustainability at FGCU. However, the decentralized structure also contributes to a lack of unity between efforts, continuity, accountability, and structure. This became obvious to the ESC in 2013 when gathering and analyzing data collected for the “[Florida Gulf Coast University Campus Land Use](http://www.fgcu.edu/Provost/files/Final_Campus_Land_Use_Report.pdf)” report. The following excerpt from the report’s introduction is worth revisiting:

Environmental sustainability is critical to our university mission, yet practices often undertaken by the university commonly proceed without proactively considering issues of sustainability in a comprehensive fashion... The ESC brings together individuals with the intellect and experience to ensure our mission of environmental sustainability is honored in a shared governance manner… We recommend that the structure of the committee and its relationship with other campus constituents be redefined. We envision a central office that houses these functions and serves as a facilitator for the institution.

The clearinghouse would formalize the planning, development, and use of our property, ensuring they are guided by sustainable development principles, and coordinate land-use decisions as they relate to Nature Trails, research in sensitive habitats, campus projects, landscaping, etc., so that long-term management is “consistent with best practices and needs for the greater region.”[[3]](#footnote-3) We recommend that a framework for integrating sustainability into facility design, land planning, and academic and research processes be evaluated and adapted as needed to function properly. We also request greater communication and coordination between university entities responsible for these areas.

Specific strategies for institutionalize sustainability campus wide more effectively are as follows:

* Give campus sustainability[[4]](#footnote-4) stakeholders an active role in planning, prioritization, and decision making for all new development and newly budgeted projects by:
  1. Tasking someone with a broad knowledge of sustainability at FGCU to ensure that the appropriate sustainability expert(s) sit on every steering committee.
  2. Announcing steering committee members so that campus constituents can easily connect with their representatives, and reminding representatives to report back to their constituents at regular intervals.
* Reinstitute quarterly meetings between the ESC and the President as there was with Environmental Sustainability Advisory Council (ESAC).
* Task a person or department to bridge operational and curricular activities, provide ongoing guidance, and coordinate inter-divisional dialogue between General Counsel, Advancement, Financing Corporation, Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, and Administrative Services & Finance. This person or department would help each division in successfully integrating sustainability by spearheading tasks such as:
  1. Writing sustainability into the job descriptions and functions of appropriate employee(s) and/or teams. Maintaining a master list of all employees with sustainability job functions to aid in project coordination and ongoing professional development.
  2. Offering optional sustainability training as a part of the new employee on-boarding process through HR and managing a voluntary Green Office Certification program.
  3. Coordinate efforts to increase curricular offerings, research, and scholarship in sustainability.
  4. Identifying areas of critical need in which hiring new sustainability staff members is recommended such as, but not limited to, a Transportation Demand Manager or Coordinator in Parking Services as suggested in the 2015-20 Campus Master Plan. Providing guidance and assisting in candidate search and selection of these employees.
  5. Providing ongoing opportunities for members of the campus community to understand and become involved with campus master planning, strategic planning, and shared governance processes so that they are prepared to be engaged, environmentally conscious citizens.
  6. Maintaining a database of ongoing sustainability projects and performance benchmarks to ensure accountability and communicate progress both internally and externally.
  7. Regularly updating the ESC and other committees on progress and seek advice when needed.

**2. Identify, document, and recognize all courses with a sustainability focus or with sustainability content through the same framework used to identify course attributes.**

**3. For all disciplines, identify by Department the research related to sustainability occurring at FGCU.**

**4. Establish a Green Revolving Fund (GRF).**

* A Green Revolving Fund is a type of internal financing mechanism that helps organizations generate cost-savings and greenhouse gas emission reductions through sustainability projects. Savings generated from energy efficiencies, renewable energy, and other types of projects are tracked and reinvested into the fund so that it is continually replenished, steadily growing, and available for future sustainability projects. As the May 2015 feature article in the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) monthly *Business Officer* magazine highlights, universities, colleges, and private businesses around the world are recognizing the need to have a dedicated, committed funding source to maintain the continuity of their sustainability initiatives. The result allows organizations to realize environmental and educational missions while saving money, and earning recognition for innovation and leadership.[[5]](#footnote-5) The Physical Plant and Office of Housing & Residence Life are already using their operating budgets to invest in many energy efficiency projects. However, through ongoing energy auditing and monitoring, we are aware of additional projects that, despite demonstrating a relatively fast payback period and high return on investment, would require supplementary funding outside of the current operating budgets. A GRF would facilitate the continual improvement of our campus by creating a mechanism through which these projects could be realized and students could become more involved in these projects.
* A GRF would institutionalize our approach to carbon emission reductions and help us save money. It would also assist us in taking on a leadership role in the arena of sustainability, enabling us to better fulfill our niche as a top-rated institution for environmental and sustainability education.
* We envision a self-sustaining Green Revolving Fund of $1 million to be achieved within 7 years.  The fund will provide capital for sustainability projects and will use the realized savings to replenish and grow the fund in perpetuity. We recommend seeding the fund as follows:

**Year 1**

* + $300,000 in seed money for shovel-ready projects that have been identified through the energy audits completed during the Spring 2015 semester and to continue the benchmarking and auditing process needed to identify future projects and savings. Please see examples of shovel-ready projects on the following page or [view the full report online](http://www.fgcu.edu/EHS/Files/ESC_Energy_ReportApril2015.pdf)[[6]](#footnote-6).
  + A guaranteed repayment schedule of seed money (plus interest or a set fee) will be determined on a project-by-project basis as dictated by the projected payback period.

**Year 2:**

* + $200,000 to seed projects identified in Year 1 and to begin deeper level audits that arise from Year 1 benchmarks.

**Year 3:**

* + 100,000 to complete seed money and continue to fund projects identified in year one and in year 2.

**Year 4-7**:

* + Guaranteed payback of seed money plus interest or set fee (amount to be determined) are repaid from 60% or more of the projects seeded in Years 1-3 and subsequent payments are returned as scheduled in previous years to grow the fund over time. This will continue on a year-after-year schedule.



**5. Integrate our commitment to sustainability into our endowment**.

* **History of Responsible University Investment**
  + Universities have used their economic decision-making power to influence political decisions on the Sudan, Middle East, prison management, and fossil fuels.[[7]](#footnote-7)
  + Divestment is credited with playing a role in moving South Africa toward the end of apartheid.[[8]](#footnote-8)
* **Challenges to Responsible Investment Policy**
  + Defining environmentally and socially responsible investment.
  + Investing responsibly in relation to [Environmental, Social & Governance](http://www.investopedia.com/terms/e/environmental-social-and-governance-esg-criteria.asp?header_alt=true) criteria while maintaining a good ROI and minimizing risk.[[9]](#footnote-9)
* **Specific Recommendations:**
  1. Establish a Committee on Investor Responsibility (CIR) as required to receive full credit on AASHE STARS reporting. This will be a standing subcommittee of the ESC and interface with the Foundation Finance Committee (FFC). The CIR’s charge would be to bring the appropriate stakeholders together to define what environmentally and socially responsible investment means to FGCU and make recommendations. Explore feasible opportunities for increasing investments in the following areas:
     + Investments in renewable energy, sustainable forestry, or other such industries
     + Businesses selected for exemplary sustainability performance
     + Sustainability investment funds
     + Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI)
     + Positively screened mutual funds
     + Green Revolving Funds funded from the endowment
     + Offer donors the opportunity to finance specific sustainability projects or initiatives
  2. Encourage student-centered live learn lab projects where faculty and staff guide students in piloting small-scale sustainability fund management.
     + Progress has already been made with the ESC committee members partnering with Professor Travis Jones and his FIN 6930 and 4934 courses to begin this process.
     + Appoint students, faculty, and staff associated with these projects to the CIR.
  3. Increase transparency by making a snapshot of the amount invested in each fund (as a percentage of total investment pool) that our Foundation holds in the endowment annually.
     + Over 20% of all STARS 2.0 Reporting institutions are currently doing this. About 16 % disclose 100% of their holdings and the remaining schools disclose portions of their holdings.
     + This could be used as a marketing tool. Donors would know that x% of their donation would be invested in environmentally and socially responsible funds.
  4. Become a signatory of the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment Commitment. Establishing a CIR and making snapshots of investments publicly available will allow us to meet the [requisite criteria](http://www.unpri.org/about-pri/the-six-principles/) to be a signatory and gain positive recognition for our efforts.[[10]](#footnote-10)

**6. Update our Climate Action Plan with the American College & University Presidents’ Climate Commitment.**

* This requires key stakeholders setting achievable benchmarks and goals beyond 2020 that will serve us on our publicized path to climate neutrality by 2050.

**7. Provide opportunities for professional staff development in sustainability, and integrate sustainability into daily job functions for employees whenever appropriate and feasible.**

* Welcome all new hires by introducing them to sustainability at FGCU and showcasing the programs and campus features that can benefit them as employees (e.g. access to carpooling program and bike repair stations, personal shred and e-waste collection events, the revered spaces that provide us with important ecosystem services, living with wildlife, etc.). Offer additional introductory training to certain positions, such as those responsible for purchasing.
* Internally offer ongoing sustainability job training for employees, creating sustainability experts to help decrease our institution’s ecological footprint, increase our commitment to civic engagement and diversity, and contribute to the development of a robust and thriving local economy.
* Encourage employees to actively participate in regional and national external professional sustainability organizations such as the Sustainable Purchasing Leadership Council, Green Sports Alliance, Intentional Endowments Network, etc. Doing so will give employees the expertise needed to successfully incorporate sustainability into every facet of the institution and increase FGCU’s visibility as a sustainability leader.

**CONCLUSION**

FGCU is regionally and nationally recognized for many of our sustainability efforts. By analyzing the progress made towards the goals, we were able to identify where we have established successful and ongoing programs and where we could afford to improve. The ESC suggests that the aforementioned recommendations be integrated into our overall campus Strategic Planning process and that departments be encouraged to report on their sustainability goals, so they may be realized, and we can maintain our recognition as a leader in campus sustainability.

1. Approved 10/27/2011; for references imbedded in the definition, please access the full definition available at <http://www.fgcu.edu/Provost/files/Env-Sustainability-Definition_approved-102711.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The strategies and frameworks described in this section were informed by Second Nature’s recent publication available at <http://secondnature.org/climate-guidance/sustainability-planning-and-climate-action-guide/> and raw data pulled from the AASHE STARS reports from institutions with 10,000-20,000 FTE students. Second Nature and AASHE are the leading authorities on integrating and implementing sustainability across higher education. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Florida Gulf Coast University Environmental Sustainability Committee (2013). “Florida Gulf Coast University Campus Land Use.” Available online at <http://www.fgcu.edu/Provost/files/Final_Campus_Land_Use_Report.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Florida Gulf Coast University Definition of Environmental Sustainability (Approved in October, 2011). Available at <http://www.fgcu.edu/Provost/files/Env-Sustainability-Definition_approved-102711.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Hignite, K. (2015). “Pay it Onward.” *Business Officer*, Vol. 48, No. 10. Available online at <http://www.nacubo.org/Business_Officer_Magazine/Current_Issue/May2015/Pay_It_Onward.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Komisar, S. (2015). Energy Efficiency: A Key Component of Environmental Sustainability Efforts and a Source of Substantial Cost Savings for FGCU. Available at <http://www.fgcu.edu/EHS/Files/ESC_Energy_ReportApril2015.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Patey, L. A. (2009). Against the Asian tide: The Sudan divestment campaign. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, *47*(04), 551-573.

   Free, F. (2015). What is Fossil Fuel Divestment. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Feldberg, M. (1978). *American universities: divestment of stock in US corporations with South African affiliates*. Graduate School of Business, University of Cape Town. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Investopedia (n.d.). Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG) Criteria. Available at <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/e/environmental-social-and-governance-esg-criteria.asp?header_alt=true> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The requite criteria includes six principles that are available at <http://www.unpri.org/about-pri/the-six-principles/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)