

FACULTY SENATE COMMITTEE ON UNIVERSITY PLANNING

Recommendation for Developing an Ecologically Sustainable University (Advisory and Consultative)

In September, 1998, a group of Penn State faculty, staff and students released *The Penn State Indicators Report*. This report did something that had never before been done--it examined Penn State through the lens of sustainability to evaluate whether the University was moving toward or away from sustainable practices. This analysis relied on thirty-four sustainability indicators in areas such as energy, food, water, waste, transportation, buildings, and decision making

The 1998 *Indicators Report* attracted both local and national attention and in late 1999 the "Indicators" group created Penn State's Green Destiny Council, a faculty-staff-student association committed to promoting ecological responsibility at Penn State. The Green Destiny Council believes that institutions of higher education can be leverage points in the transition to a sustainable society in so far as they model sustainable practices and foster ecological literacy.

In April 2000, the Green Destiny Council released *Indicators 2000*, an update of the original 1998 *Indicators Report* (<http://www.bio.psu.edu/Greendestiny/indicators.html>). The new report cites some improvements at Penn State but makes it clear that there is still a considerable sustainability deficit at our university. The Report suggests that the time has come to join Penn State's individual environmental initiatives into a comprehensive Ecological Mission.

What would an Ecological Mission look like for Penn State? Simply stated, it would define the pre-conditions for genuine sustainability at Penn State. For example, in the area of energy use, an essential precondition for long-term sustainability is the significant reduction in the university's reliance on fossil fuels. The unrestrained use of fossil fuels throughout the world causes air pollution, acid precipitation, chronic health problems, and, very likely, climate change. American universities, like Penn State, are in a position to set an example to students, business and society in general of ecological responsibility by articulating an ecological mission which includes a commitment to reduce fossil fuel dependence. Indeed, leading the way on this important effort is intimately related to the mission of a great university. In fact it is paramount that we, the University, set an example for our students on being ecologically sustainable.

Another precondition for genuine sustainability is the adoption of practices that dramatically reduce waste. At present, Penn State continually receives products from distant sources, consumes these products, and then funnels enormous quantities of waste to distant landfills. Instead Penn State needs, as a component of its long-term ecological mission, the clear intent to minimize solid, liquid and hazardous wastes.

A comprehensive ecological mission for Penn State would also include long-term targets in the realms of water conservation, land stewardship, low-impact transportation, sustainable food production, and "green" building construction.

Of course, all of us in the Penn State community recognize that there will be up-front costs involved in doing such things as reducing dependence on fossil fuels, promoting zero-waste technologies, and constructing "green" buildings, but we also know that waste is expensive and that up-front investments in sustainable practices might pay off over the long-term, especially if environmental and social costs were calculated and educational benefits were tallied.

Another major result of the University adopting a policy and actions in regards to sustainability is the impact on students. Indeed, some would say that this is the most important outcome. If the

University set an example of sustainability it would be a powerful role model for our students and greatly multiply the effects of the undertaking. Graduates having experienced living in such an environment while attending Penn State will carry this orientation with them throughout their lives and influence other individuals and organizations.

RATIONALE

There is a need for Penn State to develop long term goals in regards to ecological sustainability and to incorporate them into the University's Strategic Plan. These goals would encourage all sectors of the University to explore resource-use options that are more conserving, healthful, and efficient. It is our sincere hope that the Faculty Senate will endorse the recommendation listed below which supports the Green Destiny Council's general ecological mission policy statement. By doing so, we will set an example for our students and society on how to meet the many environmental challenges of today and in the future. Supporting ecological sustainability will not only promote environmental improvements within the University and Pennsylvania, but also economic health. As Senator Gaylord Nelson put it, "The environment is the economy." By adopting a strong position on these issues, our University will stand out as a leader on this front. This leadership role will attract students, faculty and funding for the University in addition to enhancing Pennsylvania's reputation with regard to environmental stewardship.

RECOMMENDATION

The Faculty Senate hereby recommends that Penn State incorporate, to the fullest extent possible, the following LONG-TERM GOALS into all future Strategic Plans.

- Significantly Reduce Fossil Fuel Dependence
- Conserve and Protect Water Resources
- Minimize Solid, Liquid, and Hazardous Wastes
- Utilize, to the Fullest Extent Possible, Food Produced Using Sustainable Practices
- Create and Abide by a Land Ethic that Promotes Stewardship of Natural Processes, Ecosystems, and the Conservation of Green Space
- Promote and Use Sustainable Transportation Options
- Strive to Create Sustainable Campus Environments by Considering Ecological Impacts in the Planning, Design, Construction, Renovation and Maintenance of all University Facilities.
- Promote Ecological Literacy by Modeling Sustainable Practices
- Act as a "Role model" for Students and Society for Ecological Responsibility
- Act as a Lead Institution in Promoting and Supporting Research for a Sustainable World.

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