

University of Wisconsin La Crosse  
Joint Committee on Environmental Sustainability  
2020-2021 Annual Report

JCES has remained committed to the advancement of sustainability, even as the COVID-19 Pandemic has caused drastic changes to our lives and livelihoods.

**Committee Membership**

- Emily Roraff - Co-Chair – Academic Staff Rep.
- Andrew Ericson – Co-Chair – Green Fund Coordinator
- Adam Driscoll – Secretary - Faculty Rep.
- Alysa Remsburg – Environmental Studies Rep.
- Ben Zess - Students for Sustainability Rep.
- Colin Belby - Faculty Rep.
- Daniel Sweetman – Safety and Sustainability Manager
- Drea Higgins - University Centers Rep.
- Guy Herling - Academic Staff Rep.
- Jake Myers - Student Association Sustainability Director
- Katherine Fish - Faculty Rep.
- Lisa Pitot - Faculty Rep.
- Margot Higgins - Environmental Studies Rep.
- Oliva Ahnen - Student Association Rep.
- Pearl Bearhart – University Staff Rep.
- Sophie Byrne - Student Association Rep.
- Steven Fulton – Academic Staff Rep.
- Tesia Marshik - Faculty Rep.

**Bylaw Changes**

Based on the conversations with campus partners, JCES approved several bylaw changes on April 23<sup>rd</sup> related to committee membership: (1) added a representative from the division of Diversity and Inclusion, (2) modified the criteria used to select the representative from Residence Life, (3) corrected outdated language related to the University Staff representatives.

**Environmental Justice**

On March 26<sup>th</sup>, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Diversity and Inclusion Dina Zavala joined JCES to discuss the evolving concept of environmental sustainability and how it intersects with social justice. Our discussion with AVC Zavala generated several helpful ideas on how the committee can continue to expand our focus beyond physical environmental issues to social environmental issues. Specifically, adding a representative from Diversity & Inclusion to JCES, becoming more involved in the campus climate survey, revisiting the green fund application language and the advertisement of the green fund to see if there are ways to invite more grant applications related to environmental justice, and consider ways to prioritize green fund requests that are focused on environmental justice.

## **Sustainability Coordinator**

JCES acknowledges the excellent work that is being done at UWL related to environmental sustainability but believes that the lack of central leadership obstructs the progress that could be made and puts the campus as a significant disadvantage. UWL remains as one of few in the UW System without a sustainability coordinator. For that reason, the committee continued to discuss and explore opportunities for this position to exist. We met with Vice Chancellor Vitaliano Figueroa and Director of University Centers Kyle Burke to see how this position could fit in one of the areas of Student Affairs. They both had concerns about stable funding for the position, particularly with the current COVID related budget concerns. We hope to continue this conversation with them as the effects of the pandemic subside; however, we believe this position would best serve all divisions of the university and that the funding structure should reflect that.

## **Strategic Planning**

JCES began talks of making a formal argument as to why Sustainability should be included in the Strategic Plan in September 2020. The committee researched four main topics for this argument, those being:

- Student Retention and Recruitment
- Environmental Justice
- Financial Impact
- Community Outreach

Rough draft outlines of each section were created but were put on hold as Strategic Planning discussions began among the four governing bodies on campus and JPB. Those discussions focused on the reaffirmation of the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan rather than the creation of a new Strategic Plan while the COVID-19 Pandemic persisted. JCES determined that the best approach to connecting sustainability and the Strategic Plan was to integrate Sustainability into the Pillars of the 2016 – 2020 Strategic Plan. JCES presented these goals to Chancellor Gow and JPB, the Goal Integration Proposal can be found below.

The goals that JCES proposed were not accepted into the current Strategic Plan, however JCES met with Chancellor Gow on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021, and he committed to starting at Sustainability in the next round of Strategic Planning.

### **JCES Goal Integration Proposal**

#### **Increasing Community Engagement**

- Become the regional leader in environmental and sustainability education, activism, and responsibility.
- Leverage past and ongoing successes in environmental and sustainability efforts to build value with community stakeholders.

### Achieving Excellence Through Equity and Diversity

- Highlight and educate the relevancy of intersectionality between the world's most significant issues including but not limited to gender rights, race relations, and climate change.
- Ensure inclusive and equitable sustainability education to promote lifelong opportunities for all.

### Investing in Our People

- Promote an environment of employee development, through ownership, inclusion, and engagement in sustainable programs and facilities.
- Accelerate engagement in climate change mitigation efforts, to ensure a safe and sustainable world for the UWL community.

### Advancing Transformation Education

- Further environmental literacy to help UWL graduates address demands of a world confronted by a climate crisis.
- Integrate sustainability into experiential learning opportunities and undergraduate research across disciplines.
- Promote faculty efforts to embed sustainability concepts and teaching across curriculum.

## **Green Fund**

JCES passed approved various Green Fund grants over the course of the 2020-21 academic year:

- Fall 2020
  - Veterans Memorial Walkway LED Lighting (Large Grant)
    - Medium Priority
  - Whitney Center OZZI Machine (Large Grant)
    - High Priority
- Spring 2021
  - Green Fund Social Media and Advertising Specialist (Mini Grant)
  - Union Sensor Faucets (Large Grant)
    - Low Priority
  - Coate Hall Steam Traps (Large Grant)
    - Medium Priority
  - Whitney Center Pre-consumer composting (Mini Grant)
  - Reusable Period Pantry Products (Mini Grant)
  - Electronics Recycling (Mini Grant)
  - Green Bikes (Mini Grant)

\*Priority ranking criteria can be found in the JCES Bylaws, and Mini Grants are not given priority ranking.

For more detailed information regarding the Green Fund Grants approved during the 2020-21 Academic Year, please refer to this website: [Past projects - Sustainability | UW-La Crosse \(uwlax.edu\)](#)

### **Incomplete and Future Work**

In the October 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting, the committee discussed the maintenance of the Sustainability website ([www.uwlax.edu/sustainability/](http://www.uwlax.edu/sustainability/)). This has been performed in several ways over the last several years, so there may be an opportunity for JCES to help streamline the process.

The UW-La Crosse Sustainability Mission Statement was last reviewed and approved by the shared governance groups in 2014. JCES could look to review, and revise or reaffirm this statement early in the 21-22 year.

Continue to work on the strategic plan. Collaborate with “pillar leads” to see how the above suggestions could be incorporated into their units even if not specifically reported on as part of the strategic plan. Advocate for better representation of sustainability in the next strategic planning process.

Work with university leadership to better understand the changes that have occurred in the Fund 109 allocation process. Learn what restrictions are in place for those funds and discuss if any opportunity exists to reinvest those funds into sustainable, cost saving initiatives.

Several Green Fund grant applications submitted this year were related to replacing or “upgrading” fully functional items in newer buildings for a more sustainable option. It sparked conversation among the group on why some of these features are not part of the initial building plans. So, there may be an opportunity for JCES to better understand the building planning and proposal process, and potentially advocate for better representation related to sustainability throughout that process.

The Joint Planning and Budget Committee unanimously voted in favor of a recommendation to university administrators to investigate and invest in sustainability projects in future Capital Budgets at the end of Spring 2021. There is an opportunity to work with JPB leadership to determine specific projects and make formal recommendations.