Request for the Creation of a University of Wisconsin System President’s Ad Hoc Committee on Sustainability

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly global world college and university systems, many with leaders belonging to the National Association of System Heads (NASH) and State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), are recognizing that one mark of an exceptional system is its commitment to incorporating sustainability into all aspects of its operations. Notable college and university systems fully integrating sustainability into their mission and/or vision statements include, but are not limited to, the State University of New York, University of California and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities.

The University of Wisconsin System's active commitment to sustainability will enhance our capacity to undertake our unique educational missions, while teaching students the skills and values necessary to create a healthier, more equitable future. As we strive to produce more and better-prepared graduates who will positively contribute to a diverse and increasingly global society, we will also maintain the UW's leading edge in research and technology development.

Historically, the Wisconsin Idea has served as a framework for the UW System to provide leadership, foresight and resources to enact innovative public policies for the state of Wisconsin. Furthermore, the Wisconsin Idea has traditionally created value-added opportunities for Wisconsin's private sector, specifically in the areas of agriculture, manufacturing and forestry. Today, the Wisconsin Idea can assist the state in moving toward sustainable economic strategies such as a steady incremental shift to renewable energy and fuel sources. Utilizing the biomass from our working agricultural and forest lands can help offset our need for petroleum imports. This type of forward-thinking is a natural extension of the Wisconsin Idea and the UW System. It is in the spirit of these traditions that this document requests that the President of the UW System convene a broadly representative System-wide President's Ad Hoc Committee on Sustainability (PAHCS) to fulfill the charge described below. This document also provides a recommendation on committee structure.

It is our belief that sustainability is defined as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This simple, yet effective guiding definition was published in the 1987 Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development at http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm (Brundtland Report). The Brundtland Report initiated, at the international level, the search for a path to sustainable development. The threats of global climate change, resource exhaustion, and the ongoing destruction of the earth’s delicate ecosystem, have made this search increasingly urgent in recent years.

The majority of UW campuses have formed sustainability groups that are successfully coordinating many site-specific sustainability efforts. While the institutions will continue to act on local concerns, there are numerous sustainability related capital projects that pose significant engineering, infrastructure and fiscal challenges that can only be addressed by a centrally coordinated effort at the UW System level.
RECOMMENDED CHARGE

PAHCS is charged with the following three actions:

1. Draft a UW System sustainability vision statement that addresses educational, social and environmental sustainability issues to be presented to the President of the UW System for approval.
2. Develop a framework for the creation of a standing committee to address System-wide sustainability challenges. This framework will be forwarded to the President of the UW System with specific details as to the standing committee’s mission, methods to accomplish its mission, structure and organizational reporting line.
3. The Ad Hoc Committee will keep in mind commitments already made by the state and individual campuses within the UW System, including the Tallories Declaration, the American College and University President’s Climate Commitment and Executive Order 145.

The Ad Hoc Committee will fulfill this charge and report to the President of the UW System and the UW System Board of Regents no later than May 2011.

RECOMMENDED STRUCTURE OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE

PAHCS should have a System-wide membership that is diverse and cross-disciplinary. It should include faculty, staff and student sustainability advocates, as well as UW System staff representing specific offices that will have a major role in accomplishing the charge.

Members of PAHCS should be appointed taking the following success-oriented suggestions into consideration.

1. PAHCS should be chaired or co-chaired by member(s) of the UW System President’s Cabinet.
2. Each UW campus/college chancellor shall be encouraged to recommend one campus representative to the committee.
3. The President of the UW System shall appoint a minimum of three UW students to the committee.
4. The following UW System offices should be represented by one or more staff.
   a. Capital Planning and Budget
   b. Budget and Planning