Introduction

Successful implementation of sustainability is an interdisciplinary and cross-departmental effort. In order to realize the mission, vision, and guiding principles of Florida Gulf Coast University, it is critical that we infuse sustainability into every aspect of our institution. All decisions, both small and large should be made through the lens of sustainability and should be guided by our Strategic Plan. Using sustainability as 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, for Fiscal Years 12-13, 13-14, and 14-15. 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.

Findings:

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 of the 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 the 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 must be dedicated and we recommend the following actions be incorporated into FGCU’s next Strategic Plan:

1. **Institutionalize an interdepartmental clearinghouse for continual land stewardship**
   a) In April 2013, the ESC presented a report to the PBC titled “Florida Gulf Coast University Campus Land Use”, which resulted from many forums held with University constituents in a variety of settings, and from e-mail surveys. The final report identified many questions and concerns held by all campus constituents regarding “control and use of the Nature Trails; research in sensitive habitats; lack of oversight of campus projects; landscaping practices, and whether the long-term management plan is consistent with best practices and needs for the greater region.” It recommended that FGCU establish a land use clearinghouse to formalize the planning, development, and use of our property so that they are guided by sustainable development principles from project inception to completion and maintenance. This clearinghouse must be integrated into all new development projects, be responsible for trail use oversight, and coordinate interdepartmental land use relationships between stakeholders. FGCU should be relying more on the expertise already embodied by the faculty and staff, rather than on outside consultants, with divided loyalties. The following excerpts from the Land Use Report highlight the role that the ESC should play in realizing such a clearinghouse:

   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 committee that houses these functions and serves as a facilitator for the institution.
Seeing that this recommendation from two years ago has not yet come to fruition, we recommend that the framework for integrating this land-use clearinghouse into facility design, land planning, and research processes be evaluated and adapted as needed to function properly.

2. **Identify all courses with a sustainability focus or with sustainability content through the same framework used to identify degree requirements.**
   a) Students will be able to more easily identify, select, and register for courses that include sustainability content, and it will encourage more faculty members to add sustainability to their courses.
   b) This information is necessary to maintain our Gold Rating from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education.

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

4. **Establish a Green Revolving Fund (GRF).**
   a) 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. GRFs provide a dedicated funding source to high-performance sustainability projects that generate cost-savings. GRF project management software makes it possible to easily track a project’s costs, payback period, return on investment, and understand carbon emission reductions.
   b) 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.
   c) 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 in the arena of sustainability, enabling us to better fulfill our niche as a top-rated institution for environmental and sustainability education.

5. **Integrate our commitment to sustainability into our endowment.**
   a) Track existing investments (as percentage of total investment pool)
b) 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

6. **Update our Climate Action Plan with the American College & University Presidents’ Climate Commitment.**
   a) 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.**
   a) Internally offer 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.
   b) 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 so that they may be realized and we can maintain our eminence as a national leader in campus sustainability.

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