



A REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT ON

Sustainability



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The University of Texas at Austin Staff Council
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Prepared by The University of Texas at Austin Staff Council
Annual committee on Sustainability

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Executive Summary

Staff at the University of Texas at Austin frequently express a strong interest in front-line sustainability initiatives such as recycling, energy conservation, water conservation, and campus landscape. Austin is a conservation-minded city, and the desire for on-campus environmental initiatives has grown alongside Austin's available programs, such as single-stream recycling and composting. However, it has not historically been clear what role non-technical staff can take in moving campus initiatives forward. During the past ten years, several organizations have risen and declined, including Green 'Horns and the UT Sustainability Network (both now defunct), which attempted to connect sustainability-minded staff with each other and with decision-makers at the university. These failed largely because of a lack of supporting structure. The expanding academic and operational programs in the Office of Sustainability have provided a new opportunity to guide and support staff involvement. A formal partnership between UT Staff Council and the Office of Sustainability was launched in the 2012-2013 year, which specifically included an annual committee on Sustainability chaired by At-Large member Karen Blaney.

The concept for the committee was that it would contribute to existing initiatives that would benefit from staff involvement. These included the expansion of indoor recycling and water bottle fountain retrofits.

Indoor Recycling Optimization

The university has been recycling office paper and cardboard for about fifteen years. To support paper recycling, Facilities Services selected and began distributing blue bins in a variety of sizes, which has continued on request, with minimal tracking. When the student-led Campus Environmental Center began outdoor recycling in 2004, some employees began using the same indoor blue bins to collect cans and plastics to transport to the exterior bins, even requesting additional bins specifically for these materials. The CEC attempted to organize the 'Indoor Recyclers,' as they were called, as a volunteer network for about three years, but this effort faded after Facilities Services took full operational responsibility for the exterior bins.

Despite the demise of the recycling network, staff have continued to take an active interest in recycling. Many departments have continued to voluntarily transport their cans and bottles outside for recycling. The catchall address recycling@austin.utexas.edu receives at least three inquiries per week about various materials, and blue bins are also requested frequently. The UT Staff Council committee's objective was to bring 'regular' staff into more direct interaction with the process of standardizing the indoor bins and creating an educational campaign for single-stream recycling, which is set to become official campus procedure in September 2013. Single-stream recycling is defined as the ability to mingle paper, cardboard, glass, plastics, and cans in the same bin. As our current recycling vendor is already a single-stream recycler, the switch on campus is primarily cultural, educational and practical rather than a complete change of service type.

The members of the Staff Council Sustainability committee reviewed the blue bin and sticker prototypes and were able to provide feedback on how to passively educate staff with stickers, websites, and posters. They also provided feedback on general rules of bin placement.

Facilities Services and the Office of Sustainability now have a joint single-stream working group that has recently decided on a procedure for rollout of new bins and stickers via Custodial Service crews to take place in July and August 2013. The committee will be fully briefed on the procedure and given the opportunity to be present and assist when the rollout occurs in their area.

Water Bottle Filler – Fountain Retrofits

The second initiative offered to the UT Staff Council as a whole was identifying water fountains suitable for retrofitting with water bottle fillers. The retrofits were funded by the UT Green Fee in 2011. During the first year, 2011-2012, the thirty (30) installations were done from a list of locations identified solely by students. After the year concluded with some funds unspent, the UT Staff Council joined the Campus Environmental Center in submitting an amendment to the Green Fee Committee for 2012-2013, naming UTSC as a partner on the grant.

With the help of UTSC, thirteen additional stations have been identified with potentially more to come.

Future Projects

Staff engagement via UT Staff Council will continue to be a priority for the Office of Sustainability. In the second year of the committee, the focus will move away from “shovel-ready” projects like recycling to incorporating more ideas sourced directly from staff. Examples of ideas we may pursue include:

A. Staff Listening Session

In addition to gathering ideas from individuals who join the Sustainability Committee, the Committee may choose to organize and host a single event, or series, consisting of open conversation and brainstorming from staff about potential projects for the Committee or for other units. These sessions would be designed by the Committee and modeled after successful events at other universities.

B. Campus-Wide Sustainability Fair

Campus Planning & Facilities Management has held a successful Sustainability Fair featuring vendors and on-campus departments for the past four years, but it has not been widely advertised on campus. The Committee might explore making this a campus-wide event focused on staff but open to all.

C. Sustainability Training Module

Another increasingly popular initiative at universities nationwide is an online campus sustainability training module available to all staff. The Committee would research successful examples of these trainings and work with UT administration on writing and testing a training module.