

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee: Good Governance Leads to Sustainability



Company name: UW-Milwaukee
Location: Milwaukee, Wisconsin
www4.uwm.edu
Founded: 1956
Scope: Milwaukee
Employees: 3,500

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Sustainability, which accounts for environmental stewardship, economic viability, and social responsibility, is a process by which an institution makes its decisions for operations, needs, and growth that account for this triple bottom line. At UW-Milwaukee, thanks to sound governance practices, sustainability goes beyond green efforts and involves a coordinated effort to share and demonstrate this value throughout the campus.

According to the draft ISO 26000 guidelines, "the adoption of socially responsible organizational governance practices encourages more informed decision-making based on an improved understanding of the expectations of society and of the risks and opportunities associated with social responsibility."

Perhaps nowhere is that more important than in a university setting such as UW-Milwaukee, where the administration, staff, and faculty are focused on serving and stimulating society by developing in the almost 30,000 students a heightened intellectual, cultural, and humane sensitivity.

"Chancellor Carlos Santiago's vision of supporting strong governance principles aligned with stakeholders' interests and accountability into the decision-making and implementation of our sustainability plan is the key," notes Joan Prince, UWM vice chancellor for partnerships and innovation

Student Efforts Lead to Organizational Change

At UWM, it was the hearts and minds of its biggest stakeholders—the students—that led the charge. In the fall of 2006, students who

represented several organizations came together and addressed the administration about UWM's commitment to sustainability. The result of this dialogue between students and administration resulted in the hiring of the University's first environmental sustainability coordinator, Kate M. Nelson. This was the first full-time position of its kind in the University of Wisconsin system.

Now UWM's facility services has a more rigorous recycling of metal and construction and demolition debris for campus remodeling, a natural lawn care pilot project, green cleaning products and practices, as well as a newly organized process for unwanted campus furniture and electronic waste that diverts thousands of pounds every month from landfills. Many large and small energy efficiency and renewable energy projects are in the works, from changing light bulbs, to major efficiency upgrades in campus HVAC systems, as well as working with faculty from the School of Engineering and Applied Science to implement UWM's first photovoltaic panels and potential wind turbine.

Accountability Through Innovation

Featuring a 33,000-square-foot green roof was just one part of UWM's commitment to sustainability and stormwater management. Located on the Sandburg Commons, this green roof was completed in fall 2008, and became the third official green roof on campus alongside the Great Lakes Research Facility and a small demonstration green roof on the west side of UWM's Student Union. An interpretive path of stormwater

catchment is currently planned on the northeast quarter of campus and will collect runoff from campus parking lots as well as several disconnected downspouts.

"From faculty to staff, to committees and student organizations, sustainability is a measure of accountability across campus," says Nelson. The campus has conducted its greenhouse gas inventory, measured its baseline waste through RecycleMania, and is continually assessing what it means to be more sustainable.

UWM's restaurant operations features local foods from Wisconsin farms when in season, and reduces waste by sending its kitchen compost to Growing Power, a local urban farm. The UWM Bookstore offers "green" clothing, bottles, and bags. The UWM Union Theater continues its environmental film series, "Share the Earth" to packed audiences. A UWM Sustainability Fund was established under the UWM Foundation to gather resources and buy-in from across campus and the community to match funding on projects that will make UWM a more sustainable campus. The School of Continuing Education offers several courses to residents and businesses on sustainability.

Attracting Students

The movement is growing at UWM, and sound planning and governance continues to bring all entities on campus together. The focus on sustainability is important not only in reducing costs and helping the environment, but also for recruiting students. Among 10,300 college applicants and parents of applicants surveyed by The Princeton Review for the 2008 "College Hopes & Worries Survey," 63 percent of respondents said they would value having information about a college's commitment to the environment.

"It was a dotted landscape just a couple of years ago, with efforts driven by the School of Architecture and Urban Planning, Conservation and Environmental Sciences, and others scattered across disciplines and departments. Now it is a concerted effort across campus looking to be an example within the region and the State of Wisconsin," Prince says.

