Sustainability has become a hot topic on campuses across the nation. As universities struggle to balance the responsibility to be role models for environmental sustainability with obligations to keep costs contained, it is imperative we consistently measure our efforts against our values and mission.

At the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point we have taken great pride in our deliberate approach to sustainability and the diligence that has preceded each of our efforts. As such, we have done the necessary projects and have avoided the trendy items. While others will “try on” the concept of sustainability for a variety of reasons, we will continue, as we have since the early 70s, to focus on meaningful results by adhering to our values and mission.

Sustainability efforts are fashionable and, in many cases, used as recruitment and promotional tools to attract students. The University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point has made sustainability part of our culture for almost two decades. Our recycling and composting programs have been a fundamental part of our facilities for many years. However, the changes did not occur overnight and without careful cost/benefit analysis. Sustainability and cost containment are integral. Our goal continues to be the reduction of energy (and costs associated with energy use and production) through diligent stewardship and education geared toward meaningful social and behavioral change.

One of the most effective methods to meet our goals for climate neutrality involves reducing our energy consumption by 20 percent through 2010. Our campus has made great strides with our facilities, but we need to re-double our efforts toward encouraging an additional and more intense change. Changing our campus culture in regard to energy conservation is a long-term effort requiring the support of our entire campus community.

Our Sustainability Task Force is comprised of faculty, staff, students and well-respected community members who are committed to sustainability. They are currently creating a report describing current trends and behaviors that will influence what our campus will do to become climate neutral, as well as recommendations for future sustainability efforts. Once the report is complete, we will work with our governance structures, both student and faculty, to gain support for our future efforts.

If cost were not an obstacle, we could easily convert our facilities to include new and innovative methods of energy reduction. However, we live in times of budget reductions, cost containment, and resource consolidation. We simply cannot commit funds to sustainability efforts that “feel good.” There are many efforts currently underway that might seem to help reduce energy consumption, but in reality are either superficial or not appropriate for our campus. Only through careful consideration, consultation, and data gathering can we make educated decisions about our energy use.

UW-Stevens Point is working to improve our “culture of sustainability.” We have made much progress in the past 20 years through the tracking and collection of energy use data in our facilities. It is not the type of work that makes headlines, but it is a long-term approach to campus sustainability enhancement. The costs of new initiatives are always a paramount consideration, and we must examine all emerging possibilities for sustainability and focus on long-term progress. We continue to build sustainability into the fabric of our campus culture, not because it is the current national trend, but to make lasting changes due to our values and our mission.

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