**Narrative**

**Introduction**

## The Office of Sustainability (OS) provides overarching leadership to transform campus into a model for sustainability and to integrate sustainability principles into our campus culture. The OS scope of work encompasses all components of the University’s mission: education, research, and engagement, as well as effecting change in campus operations and policies. The OS sets campus-wide sustainability goals and works to enhance communication and collaboration among campus units to achieve these goals. The OS also provides organizational leadership for numerous sustainability initiatives that bring together campus and community on campus. For example, the OS works with campus units, student groups, and community partners to develop and promote engagement activities and enhance communication about sustainability initiatives. Much of the work by the OS is about educating, motivating, communicating, and celebrating sustainability with various stakeholders.

## The following five sections of the narrative highlight the OS’s impact in promoting sustainability across the University and the neighboring communities: planning for sustainability, fostering a culture of sustainability on the campus, educating our future leaders, discovering solutions through research, engagement, and communication of successes.

**Establishing a Plan for Sustainability**

The OS provided leadership in developing the 2010 Illinois Climate Action Plan (iCAP), which commits the University to carbon-neutrality by 2050 and includes more than 100 major goals in 8 categories in 60 pages. The OS secured participation of all stakeholders in the creation of the iCAP, which has led to a remarkable success in implementation of iCAP and the campus is on track to meet most major commitment well before the due date. As first the Big Ten university to submit a Climate Action Plan to the American College & University Presidents’ Climate Commitment (ACUPCC), Illinois is leading the charge for integrating sustainability in higher education in the Midwest and not just on the campus.

The OS staff organized and led the process for writing the iCAP, which began in May 2009. The initial meetings were open to the public and all of the campus community was invited to participate. The next step was a series of sub-groups working on various topic areas, including water, waste, transportation, energy, and more. These sub-groups met extensively to brainstorm and recommend action items. The OS then gathered the drafts provided by the sub-groups and worked with campus leadership to finalize the plan and submit it to the ACUPCC. The iCAP has provided the framework and the goals for sustainability for the campus.

In addition to overseeing the creation of the iCAP, the OS was instrumental in negotiating aggressive interim goals for sustainability. To set these goals, the OS staff worked with members of the campus Sustainability Council and specific decision makers on campus to negotiate goals that would be achievable as well as goals that would stretch our efforts. This process, as led by the OS, included recommendations of targets, review of campus abilities to meet the targets, and adjustment as necessary to come to an agreeable goal.

After targets were agreed upon, the OS coordinated final sign-off of the iCAP and submitted it to the ACUPCC in May 2010, 12 months after beginning the process. The Office is accountable for tracking and reporting progress toward the iCAP goals, and provides support for ongoing implementation efforts in the various campus departments. Development of the iCAP and carefully monitoring its implementation has allowed the campus to major strides towards sustainability. Here are a few examples of how the campus is ahead of schedule in meeting several iCAP targets.

1) The iCAP committed Illinois to higher building standards by increasing all new campus buildings from LEED Silver to LEED Gold by 2011, and from LEED Gold to LEED Platinum by 2015. Additionally, all major renovations, over $5 million must achieve LEED certification. Illinois is home to five LEED buildings: the Business Instructional Facility earned LEED Platinum; the Blue Waters Petascale Facility and the Yeh Center earned LEED Gold; and the Student Dining and Residential Programs Building and Nugent Residence Hall earned Silver certification.

Campus has two additional buildings in progress that will also seek LEED certification. The new Electrical & Computer Engineering building will seek LEED Platinum certification and is striving for net-zero energy design that will enable the building to supply all of its own energy. It will be the largest net-zero energy building in the nation. The Lincoln Hall renovation will seek LEED Silver Certification.

2) The iCAP committed Illinois to a 20% reduction in energy consumption by 2015 and 30% by 2020 using a fiscal year 2008 baseline. Conservation efforts have led to a 19% reduction to date, only 1% shy of the 2015 goal. The energy use emissions reduction goal is 15% by fiscal year 2015, and campus has already achieved a 14% reduction. The water conservation goal is a 20% reduction by 2015 using a 2008 baseline. The University is well on its way with a 16% reduction so far with three years to go.

3) The OS ensured that the iCAP included the plan to capture savings from energy reduction efforts and reallocate them to additional sustainability projects. Illinois’ significant investments toward sustainability efforts in the past four years include more than $19 million in campus funds and $6.5 million in grant funds. These investments have realized approximately $12 million in energy savings so far. In 2011 the OS facilitated an effort that has led to establishment of a revolving loan fund of $1.75 million through collaboration and contributions from both campus administration and the Student Sustainability Committee (SSC). The revolving loan fund will be allocated to campus projects that reduce energy or water consumption and have a payback period of five years or less.

**Educating our Future Leaders**

The OS has strived to make each member of the campus community aware of sustainability efforts through enhancements to the academic curriculum. This includes assisting with course development, integrating sustainability concepts into core classes, and creating special educational events. Today sustainability education can be found across many disciplines at Illinois; more than 250 courses related to sustainability are offered through 43 diverse departments on campus. To support inclusion of sustainability in academic curriculum, the OS had established an Education Task Force in 2009. The Education Task Force was charged to infuse sustainable thinking into campus missions through new education activities. This group developed [sustainability learning outcomes](http://sustainability.illinois.edu/SETF-learningoutcomes.html) to serve as a useful resource for enhancing campus course and program offerings related to sustainability. This task force inventoried existing course and program offerings and published a guide to assist students in choosing courses with a sustainability component. They also identified gaps that can be filled through partnerships with academic departments.

Additionally, the OS facilitates an annual curriculum workshop designed to help faculty and teaching professionals infuse sustainability into their courses. The Teaching Sustainability Workshop aims to create an open and supportive environment for faculty and instructors from all disciplines to interactively engage in mutual learning about sustainability and to brainstorm and experiment with novel and interdisciplinary educational approaches. The intent is that every Illinois graduate will have a fundamental grasp of sustainability and continue to practice sustainable behavior in their homes and future careers. In three years, more than 60 instructors across disciplines have participated in this workshop. The modifications to their courses will reach approximately 10,000 students each year.

The OS also supports the recurring Scholarship of Sustainability Series each spring. This Series began in Spring 2010, and it provides an in-depth examination of sustainability issues, with readings and videos of each lecture available on-line. The Series is open to faculty, staff, students, and the community at large. There are typically four or five courses connected to the Series for students seeking credit for participation. Each year, the Scholarship of Sustainability Series reaches thousands of people of all ages and backgrounds.

**Discovering Solutions through Research**

Research is central to the sustainability of our campus and the region. Already a world leader in sustainability and climate research, Illinois has developed opportunities for community partners and cooperating federal agencies to collaborate with researchers from diverse disciplines to explore new frontiers in discovering solutions to the challenges ahead. Innovative research collaborations focused on creating knowledge and new technologies have been developed to discover, analyze, and implement new approaches for addressing the challenges associated with sustainability.

For example, the OS collaborates with the Center for the Advancement of Sustainability Innovations (CASI) in the Engineer Research and Development Center of the US Army. CASI supports the Army strategy for sustainability, which pursues sustainable practices in all Army operations. As part of this partnership, the OS shares opportunities for Illinois faculty and research students to learn and develop professionally through collaborative research and development studies and to address issues and coordinate efforts regarding joint research for advancing sustainability innovations. Further, the OS works with CASI on a Sustainability Innovations Seminar Series that brings in distinguished speakers twice per year on mutually relevant topics.

The OS has infused sustainability into the University’s mission of research by facilitating collaboration on various sustainability research efforts. These efforts include connecting research interests of faculty to the operation challenges of our facilities. The OS is a resource for identifying opportunities to connect researchers to iCAP implementation. For example, the iCAP calls for discontinuing the use of coal at campus’ Abbott Power Plant by 2017. The OS identified several faculty members whose research interests align with this huge undertaking to assist in decision-making. The OS has also provided support to faculty preparing proposals for federal funding, especially in regard to living learning laboratories for sustainability.

**Cultivating a Culture of Sustainability on Campus**

The OS at Illinois is affecting behavior change through various outreach initiatives. Each semester, the OS participates in a number of opportunities to engage with new stakeholders. The primary outreach activity in the fall semester is Sustainability Week. In collaboration with several campus units, the OS has sponsored Sustainability Week for two years, and it continues to be very well received by the campus and community. The week is comprised of activities designed to educate and motivate individuals to make more sustainable decisions in their daily lives. Typically, this includes workshops and activities to promote active transportation like biking or walking; information about the benefits of growing or purchasing local foods; waste reduction efforts; and last year it included a green career panel, as well as a Quad Walk with the Chancellor, highlighting sustainability projects on the main quad. The week is highlighted with a nationally known guest speaker of relevant interests and topics.

Another highlight of the fall semester is Quad Day, a student organization and resource fair for students held the Sunday before classes begin. The OS has a booth on Quad Day and works to educate new students about sustainability on campus and the many ways they can become involved. This is an excellent opportunity for getting new student aware of and interested in sustainability efforts on campus. Likewise, the All Employee Expo has become known as new faculty and staff orientation day, and the OS is there to inform new employees about sustainability and to offer tips for a greener campus.

In the spring semester, the OS supports Earth Week. Led by the registered student organization Students for Environmental Concerns, the Earth Week celebration is an Illinois tradition to widen sustainable practice awareness to the campus community. The events planned for the week showcase many organizations that promote sustainability, engage students to be more involved in sustainable efforts, and allow students to use sustainability in their own lives along with entertainment to celebrate the beauty of our earth. The OS supports this student effort by providing guidance and resources to the planning and implementation process.

**Engaging Stakeholders Through Meaningful Collaborations**

The OS also partners with sustainability professionals off-campus. OS staff meet regularly with representatives from the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission and local agencies. These meetings are held to share and discuss sustainability plans, successful efforts, and data to aid in the development of the Champaign and Urbana climate action plans. Recent conversations include a discussion and consensus on the boundaries to be used for counting greenhouse gas emissions and methods for calculating transportation emissions throughout the area.

The OS supports community interaction and involvement in sustainability through organizations such as the Champaign County Sustainability Network (CCNet). CCNet fosters collaboration around leadership opportunities for Champaign County with the theme of sustainability. CCNet enables Champaign County to attract and retain innovative ideas, products and people, and attracts external financial resources in the form of federal funds, research dollars and new corporate investments. As a community outreach effort, the OS also supports the Illinois Green Business Association (IGBA), a Champaign non-profit organization that assists businesses in reducing their ecological foot-print by attaining green certification.  IGBA staff provides three distinct services:  green business certification, personalized business services, and public education.

Further, OS staff members represent campus on the Green University and College Subcommittee of the Green Government Coordinating Council. This is an excellent opportunity to learn from and share with sustainability professionals on campuses throughout the state. In recent years, OS staff members have participated in a Policy Workgroup. The role of this workgroup is to identify legislative and policy barriers related to sustainability in higher education, work with state leaders to remove these barriers, and potentially assist in the development of future legislation and/or policies. For example, last year the workgroup researched the policies and potential for the use of grey water and waterless urinals. Currently, each of these options is against the state plumbing code. However, we did learn that the Illinois Department of Public Health is developing a green amendment to the plumbing code.

The OS also participates in the Big Ten & Friends Environmental Stewardship Group, with Facilities and Services. This is a group of sustainability professionals from each of the Big Ten universities. The group meets at least twice per year, either in person or virtually, to collaborate on common challenges faced by Big Ten institutions. Discussions cover a wide range of sustainability topics. In 2011, the OS represented Illinois during a discussion about Energy Star and volunteered to gather data on scientific laboratory equipment. The data will help show that higher education institutions are a large market for the industry, so the Big Ten may be able to influence manufacturers toward more energy efficient products.

On the national level, the OS funds and manages campus membership in the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), the American College and University President’s Climate Commitment (ACUPCC), and the National Council for Science and the Environment (NCSE). The OS encourages and supports Illinois faculty to attend and present at AASHE’s annual conferences, as they do have relevant research and best practices to share with national leaders in the area. Likewise, the OS sponsors faculty who attend the NCSE conferences. The OS is proud that last year an Illinois faculty member served as president of the Council of Environmental Deans and Directors to the NCSE.

**Communicating Success**

Illinois is committed to excellence and intends to be the model of sustainability for all Universities in the nation. Illinois is a leader in sustainability among our peers, as can be seen through state and national rankings. The OS is responsible for reporting campus progress on sustainability initiatives to various agencies. For example, this campus voluntarily signed on to the Illinois Campus Sustainability Compact pledging to perform at the Gold Level. The OS prepared the application for campus and Illinois did achieve Gold Level recognition. In addition, the state requires all of its agencies to report on sustainability initiatives each year. The OS coordinates the campus annual report for submission to the Green Governments Coordinating Council.

Illinois is also a signatory to the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment (ACUPCC). We are one of more than 600 educational institutions participating in this endeavor. The ACUPCC requires significant reporting each year including updated greenhouse gas emissions inventories every other year, and progress reports on campus actions on the alternate year. The OS is responsible for coordinating and submitting these inventories and reports, to keep our institution in good standing with the ACUPCC.

In addition, the OS coordinates responses to a variety of national surveys and rankings, and consistently ranks in the upper percentile among Big Ten universities. The OS collects data from all across campus to report our sustainable activities with regard to energy conservation and generation, dining services, waste reduction, transportation, and investment practices. The data is then provided to the Sierra Club, the Princeton Review, and the Sustainable Endowments Institute. Reporting to these organizations a substantial undertaking as the Sierra Club alone includes approximately 75 different data points. Since the creation of the OS, Illinois has improved its ranking on all of these national surveys. For example, in the Sierra Club Cool Schools survey Illinois has climbed from #78 to #48, rose from a grade C to grade B in the Sustainable Endowments Institute, and improved on the Princeton Review from 92% to 95%.

**Conclusion**

Illinois is committed to excellence in sustainability, and through the efforts of the OS, it permeates all facets of our campus culture. We are graduating more sustainability literate students, we are encouraging action on our own campus and throughout the region, and we are participating in the critical conversations and activities that will ensure a more sustainable future.