

Proposed Sustainability Resource for UNC Undergrads

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Summary

Our mission is to create a sustainability online tool that can be accessed and utilized by UNC-Chapel Hill first-year students. Our goal is that this tool will increase the overall awareness of sustainable actions that can be taken on campus.

Goals and Objectives

It is our goal with this project to create a tool that pulls together community resources, puts information in one easily accessible place, and plugs into the media outlet most utilized by campus students, especially freshmen. We want these students to be able to incorporate sustainable practices in their daily life by making sustainable choices more available. With the plethora of resources and groups on campus, there still seems to be a lack of personal incentive. People know that there are groups on campus, but there is no place where we can go to know practical ways to be sustainable ourselves. We want to enable people to be sustainable on a personal level. Our community has a lot of good resources, and we want to connect students to these resources.

It is hard to measure success for this project. We don't need a certain number of hits on a website or people answering a quiz, we are more geared towards making this resource available and keeping it fresh. Ideally, this tool can be distributed to the larger campus community. Once it is out on major search engines or websites as a link, the resource will be out there. Hopefully it will become a commonly used tool that people can use daily to find out about their community and how to participate in sustainable actions.

Existing Sustainability Education

There is a big push at UNC towards creating a more sustainable campus. There are more than ten student organizations working towards preserving environmental integrity and promoting social justice and economic equality. There are groups working towards the use of renewable energy on campus, the incorporation of local organic food in the dining halls, and fair wages for university staff. There are three different environmentally-related degrees available along with a minor in sustainability. The Institute for the Environment and the Department of Environmental Sciences and Engineering in the Gillings School of Global Public Health both offer numerous ways to explore environmental issues and sustainability through academics.

There is a specific office dedicated to sustainability on campus that offers green building tours along with a wealth of information regarding sustainable practices on campus. People are pushing for new buildings on campus to be LEED certified; some newer buildings already include sustainable features (such as a green roof on the Fed Ex Building and solar panels on Morrison Dorm). Morrison dorm is a themed residence hall

focusing on sustainability. UNC also hosts various special events (such as speakers, conferences, workshops, film showings, etc.) related to the environment and sustainability. You can find almost any type of student environmental group or project you want, if you know where to look.

Despite all these groups and projects, there seems to be a lack of campus-wide sustainability education. These groups, offices, and academic departments welcome people to get involved, but there is little being done to reach out to the campus community, particularly those who are not familiar with the concept of sustainability. There is no comprehensive guide informing students how they can make their own practices more sustainable, like where they can go to get locally grown food and how they can get there. Although “sustainable” may be a prominent buzzword around campus, there is not much done to inform people of the steps they can personally take to become more sustainable.

Market Analysis

Sustainability Background:

Sustainability can be defined as an integrated approach to living and consuming in a manner that is economically viable, ecologically sound and socially responsible. It is the backbone of the “new industrial revolution” as this generation realizes the need to coexist in this system in a manner to preserve it for future generations. The administration of UNC have been working to make the greater UNC system a more sustainable one with job creation based solely on helping the university work towards more sustainable practices, large-scale renewable energy projects, and by supporting an array of student groups focused sharply on different aspects of sustainability. There is a need however, for students, especially younger students to be exposed to the need for and the ways in which they can become more sustainable in their daily lives.

Market Environment:

There is a definite buzz about sustainability reverberating throughout the campus, as with the rest of the country, but it is not specific enough to get a wider population interested in riding the wave. There is a lot of information out there, and it is easy to find if the student is looking for it, but it is harder to apply to his or her own life. According to our study, students spent the most time on email and social networking sites with browsing websites being a top media window also.

Student Profiles:

Carolina students are active in student organizations and volunteering, keeping up with entertainment and pop culture, engaging in the school’s sports and working hard on their studies. Many are aware of the idea of sustainability, but do not understand what it has to do with them or how they can relate it to their current lives. Part of being a student

of UNC is becoming a resident of the greater Chapel Hill area and students grow into being a part of that. Some of the biggest concerns of students are time and money. College is a busy and expensive time in their lives, but it also the time when they cultivate many new values and strengthen old ones.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths:

Many students are already thinking about making their lives more sustainable and as the idea gets more national attention, it has become the natural thing to do. At UNC, the strong presence of civic engagement can easily be capitalized on.

Weaknesses:

Sustainable living can be expensive and time-consuming – two factors that turn many people off immediately. UNC students are sometimes limited to their dorm rooms, and meal plans.

Opportunities:

Students are connected! Most of them are online over 4 hours a day, check their email from their phone even when not online, and turn to search engines whenever they have a question.

Threats:

The internet is already extremely busy for students with all of their social networking, homework assignments and blogs. The tool must be engaging and simple to use to be effective.

Project Details

The original capstone project components called for an online tool for the UNC campus to foster sustainability literacy. The end product that we plan to implement is an online tool designed for first years that enables them to see the various ways that they can participate in sustainability practices specifically in the Chapel Hill/Carrboro area as a new student to the campus community.

Although students showed a remarkable level of comprehension of knowing what sustainability was, we have decided a website would still be a good introduction to the

practices specific to the Carolina's dorm life. The site has four main focus areas: energy conservation, water conservation, buying local, and student life. We chose these topics from our survey results because they were actions that students reportedly did not complete as often as other sustainable practices, such as recycling and taking alternative transportation. Students will be able to click on each category and will be transported to each subsection.

The energy conservation and water conservation pages mirror each other in format. Each page begins with a listing of easy action steps that the first year can do within their dorm with a second section on what the University is doing to conserve in these areas. Universities are big establishments and it is often difficult to keep up with the multitude of interesting projects the University is directing. Sidebars on both pages with include a list of relative academic departments and their links through which students can access course lists of classes offered, a link to a printable pocket guide that denotes conserving action steps, and a list of relative links that have no ties to the university on energy and water. We kept the language of these actions steps simple to prevent any potential confusion. On the energy page, the top of the page displays a sentence why saving energy is important. The subsequent action steps are subdivided into three general groups: computers and other appliances, lighting, and heating and cooling. Quips and humor are interwoven into the action steps with the intent to capture and maintain the viewer's attention and make the steps relatable to the student's daily life activities. The water conservation page has a fact to accompany the reason why water is a precious resource. The water page's action steps are fewer in number and therefore are included in only one category.

The buying local page content combines shopping and food to increase knowledge of local businesses. Its purpose is to share information on businesses specific to the Chapel Hill and Carrboro area that a newly arrived first year may not have had the chance to discover. Oftentimes a hindrance to freshmen is the lack of actual transportation or the expertise of getting to a location from the dorms. Directions to different businesses and travel routes to reach these destinations will be available through Next Bus lengths. In order to provide more convenience, the Next Bus links will be specific to each business location so that the student will only need to type in their starting location. A picture sidebar will showcase various pictures of some of the establishments that the student could visit.

When coming to college, it easy for a first year to be somewhat overwhelmed with the numerous opportunities available to them so this page intends to provide the students with clear choices that relate to sustainability. The student life page is separated into three sections. The first, educational opportunities, lists different sustainability-based programs and various campus centers that allow the student to take an active role in practicing sustainable practices outside of the classroom. The second subdivision lists student organizations with links to the groups' pages and descriptions of each that includes their current focus. Lastly, there is a page about Chapel Hill and Carrboro community organizations that operate outside of the University. We will also display another picture sidebar, as well as helpful general links to campus organizations and Carolina's Sustainability Office.

The site also has a page entitled “About Us” that attributes the website to the Capstone class and provides viewers with some information about the students involved. Contributions from parties outside of the student group are recognized for their assistance as well.

The overall goal of this project design is to allow students to actively interact with a website that informs them of how they can be more sustainable in their direct community.

Implementation Plan

As our target audience for this product is the entire undergraduate student population at UNC, approximately 17,700 people we would like to implement our sustainability information into programs that are offered to incoming students. We hope that by offering our project’s content to new students we will be able to reach those who will be just starting to take part in the university’s community and therefore may prove to have a real impact not only on campus but in the areas surrounding UNC. During the traditional “Week of Welcome” each fall semester, there are many opportunities for our message to be sent to new students. We could incorporate our program into information that is given to students regarding certain environmental groups to whose message our product may apply. We can also deliver our information through the orientation for first year students, CTOPS, where students are led through activities by upperclassmen and presented with a lot of information about groups on campus and ways for which they can become involved in activities that interest them most. We could attach our website program onto the information sessions that first year students receive on navigating the university’s homepage. Since our hope is for our website to have a link on UNC’s sustainability webpage, it can be introduced as such during orientation.

Timeline

We would like for this website to debut by the fall semester of 2009. With all the preliminary work being researched and synthesized this semester, the website should be up and running for incoming students to view. Since the information included in this product is about sustainability on and off campus, we hope that the office of sustainability and the students who are involved in it at UNC will take part in updating the website quarterly.