

# ***URBANA UNIVERSITY – SUSTAINABILITY CHARTER***

## ***December 17, 2008***

### **Introduction**

Urbana University contributes to the global and local environment and human well being in several important ways. Through its primary mission of education and outreach, Urbana University faculty and programs have made significant contributions to the lives of people who have chosen to attend, or engage with, the University. The University's academic programs provide considerable opportunity and responsibility to consider the example set by the economic, human health, and environmental performance of its campus. Urbana University also influences generations of students whose future behaviors and decisions are shaped by what they learn from their campus experience and the actions of the University's leaders.

The University has an affirmative record of responsible compliance with environmental and safety regulations and a proven effective system of environmental management accountability. As the University plans its future growth, these considerations will support planning and decisions and implementation actions that reflect a balance of economically, environmentally, and socially responsible values.

### **Urbana University**

The University, founded in 1850, serves west-central Ohio, a region dominated by its rural, agrarian roots and also encompassing formerly robust small and mid-size industrial centers (e.g., Springfield, Dayton, Bellefontaine, Piqua, and Urbana). This area is now suffering long and persistent declines in economic vitality. Our mission is direct and focused:

As an independent liberal arts institution, Urbana University's strength lies in its quality faculty, students, and curriculum supported by strong student services. Urbana University prepares students for a lifetime of leadership and service to society through excellent classroom instruction, real world experiences, community partnerships, and technology. It is the mission of Urbana University to offer a liberal arts education in a small college environment emphasizing student learning through individual attention,

excellence in instruction, career-oriented programs, and critical reflection on moral and ethical values.

Urbana University serves a student body uniquely disadvantaged. Our students come predominately from rural, low income families and a majority are first-generation college attendees. The geographic region we serve is likewise disadvantaged, located in a state struggling with low education attainment levels, unsatisfactory employment retention, and the persistent migration of young and educated citizens to other locales. Those features are acute here in rural, agrarian-rooted west-central Ohio where Urbana University operates. We desire to “turn” the University toward effective and impactful service to the region by stressing and developing programs that play to our existing strengths, the heritage of our region, and the demographic profile we serve.

Urbana University carries an endowment of less than \$1.5 million; the regional average for like institutions is in excess of \$100 million. Comparable colleges and universities generate 38 percent of revenue from investments. Urbana University’s investment return accounts for less than three percent of revenue. We are heavily tuition dependent: 80 percent of revenue from tuition and fees. Our student body does not comprise the middle-upper and upper socio-economic demographic often associated with private institutions: 53 percent of our students come from families with annual income of \$50k or less; 55 percent of our students are Pell Grant eligible; 52 percent of our students are first generation college attendees; slightly more than 50 percent of our incoming freshmen score under 18 on the ACT; nearly 85 percent of our students are from within 50 miles of campus. The university has for years been viewed in the region as a safe and accessible campus. Urbana University offers a near-home, alternative to large public colleges and more expensive private institutions within the region and state, and we offer a chance at university success for students who may not meet admission standards for other colleges and universities.

In short, Urbana University provides a postsecondary education opportunity for many students who would not otherwise secure a college degree. We target prospective students who other institutions often ignore and refuse to serve. Eighty percent of students accepted by Urbana University enroll here; one-third accepted at comparable institutions actually enroll. We are serious about our tag line of *Building Solid Futures, One Student at a Time*. An intimate setting and individual attention distinguish Urbana University.

However, the students we serve struggle to succeed in college. Our first to second year retention persists at 52 percent; our six-year graduation rate is 38 percent.

Even as we begin implementing a more strategic approach to ensuring student success, I see, as the new President, a pressing imperative to build a new, more aggressive approach to serving these students and the region. The first step will be the adoption of a core academic and co-curricular program realigned around the principles, tenets, and practice of sustainability (economic, social, and environmental). Such a programmatic realignment can attract, stimulate, and enable current and prospective students. It can motivate and reenergize faculty, staff, and administrators. It can sharpen the University's brand, identity, and performance and it can supplement and expand enrollment, improve student success, and grow the number of graduates beyond the current annual production of 300 to 350 associate, bachelor's and master's degrees.

The following principles will guide Urbana University practices toward sustainability through the management of building design, construction, renovation, procurement, landscape, energy, water, waste, emissions, transportation, human health and productivity.

### **Sustainability Principles**

Urbana University is committed to developing and maintaining an environment that enhances human health and fosters a transition toward sustainability. Sustainability should be advanced through research, analysis, and experience gained over time. To that end, Urbana University is committed to continuous improvement in:

- ***Demonstrating institutional practices that promote and exemplify sustainability***, including measures to increase efficiency and use of renewable resources, and to decrease production of waste and hazardous materials, both in the University's own operations and in those of its suppliers.
- ***Promoting health, productivity and safety*** of the University community through design and maintenance of the built environment.
- ***Enhancing the health of campus ecosystems*** and increasing the diversity of native species.
- ***Developing planning tools*** to enable comparative analysis of sustainability implications and to support long-term economically, environmentally and socially responsible decision making.

- *Encouraging environmental inquiry* and institutional learning throughout the University community.
- *Establishing indicators for sustainability* that will enable monitoring, reporting, and continuous improvement.
- *Recognizing that our planning and actions do not stop at the campus boundary*, and as a result aggressively partner with the City of Urbana, Champaign County, and the business, industry, and agencies that in aggregate define the extended Urbana University neighborhood.

**Urbana University -- Statement of Sustainability Principles  
Implementation Framework**

To achieve success over the long term, University decisions concerning human health and sustainability must be economically sound and seamlessly integrated with established management and financial systems. The initial implementation plan for the University's Sustainability Principles is based on four closely related tracks:

**I. Capital Planning and Construction** -- The University's capital planning and approval process for new construction and major renovation of existing campus facilities will be expanded to incorporate the Sustainability Principles in its review. Each academic and administrative unit proposing a capital project will be required to establish specific objectives consistent with the Principles as part of the formal approval process for capital projects, as is done currently for numerous other priority financial, technical and regulatory issues.

**II. Annual Financial and Budget Planning** -- The University's annual budget planning process will include explicit recognition of the Sustainability Principles in the commitment of operating funds. As part of its internal annual financial plan, each academic and administrative unit will be requested to set specific goals and to report on how expenditures for facilities, support services, procurement and other activities are consistent with the University's commitment to continuous improvement toward campus sustainability.

**III. Supporting the Academic and Administrative Units** - The University will continue to invest in support systems for sustainability, such as the Urbana Sustainable Campus Initiative (USCI), to facilitate the implementation of the Sustainability Principles by providing academic and administrative units with: a clearinghouse of proven planning tools, guidelines, preferred technologies, products and design solutions; campus specific research and innovation; cost effective financial incentives; training and expertise; assistance in meeting planning and reporting requirements; and a means of facilitating broad community engagement.

**IV. Broad-based Continued Review** – Recognizing that the concepts of sustainability will evolve over time through experience, research, economic analysis, and technological advances, the University will continue the work that led to the development of the Sustainability Principles by appointing a standing sustainability advisory group consisting of members of the faculty, administration, Board of Trustees and student body. This group will be charged with advising in the development of sustainability indicators, monitoring progress and providing recommendations for improving the Sustainability Principles and Implementation Framework.

**Recent Actions Demonstrating Urbana University's Commitment to Sustainability**

Since July, 2008 (President Jones' tenure), the following, sustainability-related actions serve as examples of the University's commitment to creating a sustainable campus and infrastructure:

- We received word in November that a major international corporation will sponsor a comprehensive campus energy audit (\$40k value; scheduled for January 2009), a first step toward achieving desired standards of energy practice.

- A donor is assisting the University in designing and constructing our first “green” building, the Nancy Miller Center for the Visual Arts.
- We are applying to the National Arbor Day Foundation for Tree Campus USA designation.
- Summer storms with severe damage to campus trees stimulated instituting a “Tree Recovery Fund,” which has already enabled acquisition of more than one hundred 2-3 inch caliper landscape specimens for spring planting.
- We are seeking federal, state, and local funding to transform a center-campus storm water catchment basin to a living filter, wetlands system that can serve as laboratory, classroom, and visible expression of best practice.
- We are seeking foundation support to more fully integrate the tenets and practice of sustainability into Urbana University’s academic core.
- We are seeking funding to convert a five-acre area that is currently mowed, to an on-campus, Ohio native prairie, again providing laboratory, classroom, and demonstration on-site.

**Funding in Support of Integrating Sustainability into the Academic Core**

Urbana University submitted letters of inquiry in December 2008 to two major foundations to secure funding to enable the following:

- Establish the essential position of Campus Sustainability Director, an academic post (with administrative, teaching, and advising responsibilities) reporting to the Vice President Academic Affairs.
- Create an academic major in environmental studies and hire the necessary incremental faculty and staff support.
- Establish an MBA degree focused on sustainability; hire the requisite incremental faculty and staff support. We are currently developing an outline for a new curriculum.

- Incorporate the tenets of sustainability across the curriculum, particularly in existing areas of programmatic strength (at undergraduate and master's levels), including education, business, criminal justice, and even nursing.
- Develop recruiting, branding, and marketing materials in support of Urbana University's sustainability thrust.
- Promote Urbana University's model for achieving institutional, student, and community success through adaptation of sustainability as a focus for "turning" an institution in service to a disadvantaged region and demographic.
- Partner with progressive universities internationally to develop internships and student/faculty exchanges to strengthen all of the above.

In broad summary, Urbana University seeks a bright future that incorporates sustainability into its core mission, its brand, and its curricular and co-curricular identity. The University's International Sustainability Charter is intended to express our commitment to practicing sustainability and observing the Sustainability Principles in all that we do.