



Marketing Sustainability at Higher Education Institutions

A Case Study of the University of Michigan

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A. Abstract

The purpose of my thesis project is to research the promotion of sustainability at the University of Michigan and compare that to the top ranked sustainability schools, with the hope that the end result will be a resource for other universities to adopt the best sustainability promotion practices. Specifically, I will be comparing the means of sustainability awareness at the University of Michigan and the top 27 sustainable schools and how they specifically target students. I will look at the three areas of sustainability promotion including: engagement, education, and encouragement. I hope to show how practices such as energy efficient building, green purchasing policies, waste management, incorporating sustainability into the coursework, promotional events, and student organizations can be used as a part of an effective marketing plan.

The method I have chosen to employ as the primary way of studying sustainability marketing at the University of Michigan is a case study. This is a qualitative research method and I will be using interviews as my main source of information. I plan on speaking with students, faculty, and administrators about their views on the campuses sustainability practices and what they see as benefits and what areas they want to see improvement. I will also look at the literature the university offer to the student body as means of marketing their sustainability initiatives. This will give me a greater understanding of what marketable facets of sustainability can be best used on a campus.

Although most of my research will be qualitative, I will be using a mixed methods approach. I plan on investigating authoritative sources such as books and articles on the history of sustainability to give background to my research. I anticipate using quantitative data in the form of surveys and financial reports. I will interpret the results of the Campus Sustainability Report Card that the University has already completed. The University of Michigan has published reports on the financial

and operating activities of their sustainability initiatives. These numerical values will be an intricate part of my argument that there is a financial benefit to sustainability.

It is my hope that my research will show how integrating sustainability on college campuses is an intricate part of a student's education. There has not been extensive research done in the area of marketing sustainability, and I believe if students realize how sustainable practices can be used to save money and create a healthier environment, they will be greatly encouraged to start practicing sustainability while they are in college. By explaining the means by which the University of Michigan has successfully or unsuccessfully implemented marketing strategies, other universities can use my research as a source to understand how to be successful in their own sustainability marketing endeavors.

I believe now more than ever, we should take a greater interest in sustainability. Universities and colleges should take an especially intentional look at encouraging students to adopt sustainable practices. Students, along with other rising generations are becoming more concerned with being environmentally friendly. Even the Princeton Review now includes a section on campuses green practices as part of their ranking. To stay competitive in the marketplace universities should seriously consider adopting these practices and engage their students in a way that encourages them to adopt sustainability as well. It not only shows that they are being socially responsible, but they are also future-oriented and innovative.

Universities also have the ability to educate future generations on the issues surrounding sustainability not just through formal courses but also by informing their students through their own sustainability practices. Also as premier research institutions, they can make a great impact on developing new technologies and strategies that will improve both the financial and environmental benefit of sustainability.

The more I have investigated this area of sustainability the more passionate I have become about the possibilities this area holds. I believe I would enjoy and could excel at working as a sustainability coordinator for a corporation or a university. This project will give me a deeper understanding of the developments in the field of sustainability. I also would like to continue to conduct research at some point in my career, whether for a company or as a professor for a university. Writing this research thesis now will give me experience and I will be able to learn from the mistakes and successes I have while studying sustainability.

In conclusion, my primary goal of this research project is to create an argument as to why institutions should promote sustainability to their students. These practices include engaging students through events, student organizations, and sustainable tools; educating students through class work and research; and encouraging students by promoting the universities commitment to sustainability. By offering universities and colleges the University of Michigan as an example, my hope is that they will be encouraged to adopt these practices as well. In having universities adopt such promotional tactics, I believe the end result will be a healthier atmosphere for students, a greater awareness of environmental stewardship, and further advances within the sustainability movement as the students go out into the world instilled with these values.

B. Summary Review of Pertinent Background and Context

Sustainability is an emerging movement that has gained considerable momentum within the last decade (Edwards 2005, Hoffman 2002). While the word “sustainability” can be broadly applied, according to the United Nations’ Brundtland Commission, “Sustainable development that meets the needs of the person without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Merkel J. & Litten L.H. 2005, Hoffman 2008, Hoffman 2001). Sustainability has achieved greater publicity in the business realm as corporations begin to implement sustainable practices as a part of their corporate responsibility pledges. Many people now are beginning to expect the companies they work for and buy from to take sustainability seriously. Research has shown that the financial feasibility of environmental stewardship has become even greater within recent years as technology progresses (Esty & Winston 2006, Hitchcock & Willard 2006).

Along with businesses, many higher education institutions have begun implementing sustainable practices as well (Filho 2000). Among the top universities is the University of Michigan as they have taken large steps toward promoting sustainability on their campuses. In order to encourage other universities to take similar initiatives, I will examine through a case study the sustainability institutes at the University of Michigan and how they are marketing these programs to their campus body and the community at large.

I have come to the conclusion that sustainability is first a moral issue. As a Christian I believe that practicing sustainability is a responsibility God entrusted to human beings. Nature is a wonderful gift God has given us, and the least we can do to show our gratitude is take care of it (Sleeth 2007, Sandelands & Hoffman 2008). Sustainable practices can help us do this, and such practices include energy conservation, green purchasing, education and outreach, LEED (Leadership

in Environment and Energy Design) building, recycling, waste reduction, and alternative fuel use (Lockwood 2007). The institution that can make the greatest impact in promoting sustainability is the university (Hoffman 2000, Merkel & Litten 2007, Steiner & Posch). The university not only has the capability to educate the next generation about the importance of sustainability, but also serves as an example to society by adopting these practices themselves (Corcoran & Wals 2004).

After conducting preliminary research, I have come across the issue of whether or not promoting sustainability is a wise investment of time and money. The answer is found at this cross road of economic and environmental benefit and work involved in implementing programs. At this collision of the natural world and the human world people can see how compatible sustainability is with the university or business's mission (Hart 2007). Many in of these institutions have in the past looked at sustainability as an additional cost that is not immediately necessary and therefore they put off addressing the issue (Hawkins & Lovins 2000, Hoffman & Henn 2008, Packard & Reinhardt 2007). Though now, as energy efficiency, organic products, and waste reduction are becoming more important to consumers, universities and companies would be wise to address and market sustainability to their students. I believe once they do, they will be able to realize the benefits sustainability has to offer.

Universities not only profit by cutting costs through environmental stewardship, but also can market their innovation and ethics to their campus (Bacow & Moomaw 2007, Reinhardt 2007). Several university leaders came to this same conclusion and in 1990 created the Tallories Document, which is a statement that their university will strive to incorporate sustainability onto their campuses (University Leaders For a Sustainable Future 1990). Universities can develop and monitor sustainability programs in multiple ways, as the University of Michigan has done (Link 2007, Lash & Wellington 2007, Pittman & Wilhelm 2007, Thompson & Creighton 2007). Sustainability can apply

to any major, as it affects everyone, and therefore gives the university a wonderful opportunity to be a beacon of knowledge as future generations wrestle with this issue (Cohen 2007).

The University of Michigan has had a sustainability office since 1996 (University of Michigan Annual Environmental Report). They are consistently one of the top environmentally friendly universities in the United States. They have designated funds to research focusing on sustainability as well as faculty dedicated to teaching these practices to students (Erb Institute 2009, University of Michigan Campus Sustainability). They have several students groups active on campus that promote these ideals and they are in the process of building more LEED certified buildings on campus. They also have an eco-rep program that lets students encourage other students to adopt sustainability.

By doing a case study on the University of Michigan's sustainability program and how they bring students on board, I hope to bring to light the ways these schools market environmental stewardship. I will assess how these schools are able to interest students in such initiatives in a way that encourages them to practice sustainability after college. I believe that discovering how schools that have excelled in sustainability put this marketing to practice will allow my research to encourage other schools to implement similar programs at their academic institutions.

C. Working Bibliography

2008 Annual Environmental Report. (n.d.). Retrieved March 27, 2009, from www.oseh.umich.edu/stewardship/08_report.pdf

This report details the steps the University of Michigan has taken to integrate sustainability onto their campus. It includes the history of environmental conservation at their university as well as the projects that are currently taking place. Also, this report includes all the financial information for their green initiatives and how these funds are distributed to different projects throughout the campus.

Bacow, L., & Moomaw, W. (2007). The University Case for Sustainability. *Advancing Sustainability in Higher Education*, 134, 37-40.

Lawrence Bacow, a president at Tufts University and William Moomaw, a professor of institutional environment and resource policy at Tufts University collaborated on this article to present a business approach to sustainability on college campuses. They identify three different reasons to address environmental issues. These include economic factors, ethical issues, and fulfilling the mission of an organization. It proceeds to explain how Tufts University has looked at these three factors and put practices into place that will achieve the set goals in each of these areas.

Cohen, B. (2007). Developing Educational Indicators That Will Guide Students and Institutions Toward a Sustainable Future. *Advancing Sustainability in Higher Education*, 134, 83-94.

Bert Cohen calls for a revamping of universities and colleges sustainability initiatives, suggesting that the practices now in place are insufficient and should be addressed. He believes that as educational institutions, colleges and universities can be most instrumental in forming responsible future citizens who will make practicing sustainability a priority.

Corcoran, P., & Wals, A. (2004). *Higher Education and the Challenge of Sustainability*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

This book focuses on the need of higher education institutes to practice sustainability. Colleges and universities are known for being innovative and this gives them a great opportunity to introduce environmentally friendly practices to their students. The book is divided into three parts, the problems, promise, and the practice of sustainability. It also gives the reader tools to use when assessing sustainability on a campus.

Edwards, A. R. (2005). *The Sustainability Revolution: Portrait Of A Paradigm Shift*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.

Edwards contends that this up-and-coming sustainable revolution is not only a shift in the way we view commerce, but a worldview shift affecting all facets of society. He compares the sustainability revolution to the Industrial Revolution in how it has begun to take effect. This book looks at five major sectors of society and how sustainability has affected each of these facets. Edwards concludes his book with an explanation on how the sustainable revolution has caused a paradigm shift in our modern society.

Erb Institute - University of Michigan. (n.d.). Retrieved March 29, 2009, from

<http://www.erb.umich.edu/>

The Erb Institute at the University of Michigan is a program that integrates sustainability and commerce. Started in 1996, this institute promotes global sustainable enterprise by offering students research opportunities in the sustainable arena with faculty and funding that allow them to pursue their passion for integrating the environment into business practices.

Esty, D., & Winston, A. (2006). *Green to Gold*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Esty and Winston begin their book by explaining the context around which the corporate

environmental movement started. The following chapters explore different corporations who have begun practicing sustainability and evaluate their progress. They explain their means of implementation and how it has been successful in some areas and flawed in others. The last section of the book discusses ways companies can take action to implement these practices.

Filho, W. L. (2000). *Sustainability and University Life*. New York City, New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

This book lays out different case studies as to how colleges and universities instituted sustainable practices into their campus community. By looking at the successes and failures of the different institutions, Filho makes recommendations as to how other universities should approach environmental stewardship. Filho explains what he sees as critical dimensions of sustainable campuses and how to implement these practices in a feasible manner.

Hart, S. (2007). Beyond Greening: Strategies for a Sustainable World. *Harvard Business Review on Green Business Strategy*, 1, 99-123.

Hart is the director of the Corporate Environmental Management Program at the University of Michigan School of Business. He first addresses the root of the problem, where the industrial world and the natural world collide. He then discusses strategies to help make these two more in unison with one another. He includes a key formula to calculate the environmental burden of certain human activities.

Hawken, P., Lovins, A., & Lovins, L. H. (2000). *Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution*. New York City, New York: Little Brown and Company.

The feasibility of being environmentally responsible and profitable at the same time is the main argument of this book. It incorporates some really great ideas on how to work

through obstinate administrators who do not want to pay the upfront cost of sustainability. It also presents the idea that the environmental quality of an institution can improve the quality of the lives of their employees.

Hitchcock, D., & Willard, M. (2006). *The Business Guide to Sustainability: Practical Strategies and Tools for Organizations*. London: Earthscan Publications Ltd..

Sustainability can be very instrumental in a corporation's competitive strategy. This book helps give business professionals ideas on how to incorporate green practices in a profitable and practical way. It explains the advantage to having a green business in the areas of marketing, accounting and finance, production, and human resource departments.

Hoffman, A. J., & Henn, R. (2008). Overcoming the Social and Psychological Barriers to Green Building. *Ross School of Business Working Paper Series, 1106*, 1-45.

This paper looks at the progress green building has made during the past decade and how it has become more feasible, yet the adoption of these building practices remains low amongst corporations and institutions. Henn and Hoffman look at the psychological and social barriers that keep the decision makers from accepting green practices. They offer two strategies for overcoming these barriers including entrepreneurial opportunities and a challenge for change. Within these two categories they present seven specific strategies: issue framing, targeting the right demographic, education, structural and incentive change, indentifying the risk, green building standard improvements, and tax reform.

Hoffman, A. J. (2000). *Competitive Environmental Strategy: A Guide to the Changing Business Landscape*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.

This book is unique in that it not only addresses business professionals but also business

students. It argues that colleges and universities need to be more proactive in integrating environmental stewardship principles into their curriculum. It looks at the drivers that can motivate key business leaders to practice sustainability and how to use these to create a successful strategic plan.

Hoffman, A. J. (2002). *From Heresy to Dogma: An Institutional History of Corporate Environmentalism. Expanded Edition (Stanford Business Books)*. Stanford: Stanford Business Books.

Andrew J. Hoffman focuses on the progression of the sustainability movement from a movement viewed with skepticism to one that is a fast-growing current trend in the corporate world. He dissects both the theoretic and practical implications of this movement as he traces the change that has taken place within the framework of the corporate environment.

Lash, J., & Wellington, F. (2007). Competitive Advantage on a Warming Planet. *Harvard Business Review on Green Business Strategy, 1*, 125-148.

This article gives the reader a system with which one can approach the mapping climate change and chart the institutions response to the results. He divides risk into six categories: regulatory, products and technology, litigation, reputational, supply chain, and physical. He then proposes his solution to these risks in a four step process: quantify the institutions carbon footprint; identify the risks and opportunities the institutions face; adapt the institutions practices in response; and perform this better than the competitors.

Link, T. (2007). Social Indicators of Sustainable Progress for Higher Education. *Advancing Sustainability in Higher Education, 134*, 71-82.

A fundamental element of sustainability is the improvement of humanity. This article looks at the social factors an institution can use to evaluate their sustainability program.

He addresses the ways he feels are most beneficial for universities to develop sustainability programs and monitor their progress. Through this he hopes to steer colleges and universities in a direction that encourages students to be mindful of the environment around them.

Lockwood, C. (2007). Building the Green Way. *Harvard Business Review on Green Business Strategy*, 1, 1-20.

The goal of this article is to encourage the development of environmentally friendly buildings. It studies the financial and environmental benefits of building a LEED certified building. This is the US Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environment Design program. It gives the reader 10 rules to green building that should be considered before beginning a green project.

Merkel, J., & Litten, L. H. (2007). The Sustainability Challenge. *Advancing Sustainability in Higher Education*, 134, 26.

This article looks at the role of humanity and how we interact with the environment. It claims that when humans live in harmony with their surroundings it creates a situation that is both practical and desirable. Specifically this article looks at the role of higher education institutes and how they can foster an attitude that leads students to become more aware of how they can contribute to sustainability.

Packard, K. O., & Reinhardt, F. (2007). What Every Executive Needs To Know About Green Business Strategy. *Harvard Business Review on Green Business Strategy*, 1, 21-39.

This article investigates the hesitation institutions have in implementing sustainable programs because of the governmental regulations. It makes it more difficult for institutions to be willing to adopt environmentally friendly practices when they are confined to certain regulations. This article helps decision makers find ways to comply

with the regulations in an affordable and beneficial way.

Pittman, J., & Wilhelm, K. (2007). New Economic and Financial Indicators of Sustainability. *Advancing Sustainability in Higher Education, 134*, 55-69.

Pittman and Wilhelm look at the flaws in the economic and financial practices many universities, college, and corporations. They accuse them of not accounting for the risks/costs that can occur through unsustainable practices. They note the common belief that what is measured is also what is managed, and as a result, the lack of measuring sustainability means that there is a lack in managing sustainability. Once administrators track the progress they have made in sustainability this will improve the actual management of sustainability on a campus.

Reinhardt, F. (2007). Bringing the Environment Down to Earth. *Harvard Business Review on Green Business Strategy, 1*, 41-64.

Reinhardt urges the reader to stop looking at environmental stewardship as an all-or-nothing project. It presents five approaches that allow administrators to identify what circumstances particular kinds of environmental investments give beneficial results to shareholders. He brings a new take on the how environmental stewardship can help manage risk, and reduce the number of accidents, lawsuits, and boycotts.

Sandelands, L., & Hoffman, A. (2008). Sustainability, Faith, and the Market. *World Views: Environment, Culture, Religion, 12*(2-3), 129-145.

This article takes a faith based approach to sustainability. It claims that the modern view of sustainability is too small and does not take into account our relationship to God. Hoffman stands to say God is the core around which sustainability is based. He looks at how God calls us to take care of nature, not because nature is above man, but because our love for the environment reflects our relationship with God.

Sleeth, J. M. (2007). *Serve God Save the Planet*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Serve God, Save the Planet was written in response to a call for Christian to stop harming the environment and with a biblical view treat the earth the way God intended. God created the world to sustain all living creation, including human beings and it is our responsibility to care for what God has been so generous to give us. Sleeth looks at the scriptural indications for stewardship and how this can be applied to our modern lives.

Steiner, G., & Posch, A. (2005). Higher Education for Sustainability by Means of Transdisciplinary Case Studies: An Innovative Approach for Solving Complex, Real-World Problems. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 14(9-11), 877-890.

This article contends that because sustainability spans a range of disciplines, study of sustainability should not be limited to just biology or business. Sustainability should be integrated into a variety of disciplines because it is an issue that affects everyone. To prove their point, Steiner and Posch conduct a series of case studies on different disciplines and how their work to incorporate sustainability into their curriculum and how this benefits the students.

Thompson, G., & Creighton, S. H. (2007). Metrics and Meaning for Environmental Sustainability. *Advancing Sustainability in Higher Education*, 134, 41-54.

Indicators of environmental performance are often complicated and intricate, but the demand for this type of tool has been increasing as more colleges and universities would like to measure their sustainability efforts. Thompson and Creighton propose that educational institutions should focus on the core indicators through a collaborate effort between sustainability and institutional research offices. They support their reasoning for this collaboration as well as the main factors they should be addressing in their assessments.



ULSF | University Leaders For A Sustainable Future | PROGRAMS & SERVICES : Talloires Declaration.

(n.d.). Retrieved March 27, 2009, from http://www.ulsf.org/programs_talloires.html

The Tallories Document is a ten point action plan created at a 1990 Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future conference. The purpose of this document is to lay out ten steps colleges and universities can take to the action needed for addressing sustainability issues. Leaders from universities across the world came to together to collaborate and start this initiative. It stands as a guideline for many academic institutions as they seek to develop sustainability programs at their schools.

University of Michigan - Campus Sustainability. (n.d.). Retrieved March 29, 2009, from

<http://www.sustainable.umich.edu/>

This website is the homepage of the University of Michigan's Campus Sustainability Office. It provides visitors with information pertaining to their recent initiatives, news updates, and connects them with people associated with the university that are passionate about sustainability as well. It is a way for the University of Michigan to broadcast how they are being proactive in encouraging sustainable practices.

Best Overall Grades. (n.d.). College Sustainability Report Card. Retrieved November 10, 2009, from

<http://www.greenreportcard.org/report-card-2010/schools/search/145>

The College Sustainability Report card is a collection of data gathered through surveying multiple college's and univeristies about their sustainability programs. It then rates the schools based on an A-F scale. From this information viewers can see what school are excelling at sustainability and what areas they are focusing their resources towards.

Arizona State University Sustainability. (n.d.). Retrieved November 11, 2009, from

<http://sustainability.asu.edu/>

Arizona State University is a leader among colleges in sustainability. They are ranked in the top 27 schools on the College Sustainability report card with an A-. They feature a website that provides information about their educational programs, campus events, and ways for students to get involved.

Bardaglio, P., & Putnam, A. (2009). *Boldly Sustainable*. Washington D.C.: NACUBO.

Written to motivate colleges and universities to become more sustainable, Peter Bardaglio urges administrators, faculty, and students to adopt sustainable practices. He provides examples of universities that have been successful in implementing sustainability into their campus community.

D. Preliminary Reflections on Faith and Scholarship

The purpose of my research is to encourage institutions to integrate sustainability into their higher education experience, and I believe this is a wise expression of my scholastic vocation. As a Christian scholar, my research is conducted in a manner that is rooted in my Christian faith. I believe that only through the gifts and abilities God has given me, I am able to participate in scholarly research. Specifically, I believe that God has endowed me with the passions and beliefs that led me to choosing the topic of sustainability as the focus on my research. As a Kingdom of God scholar, it is my ultimate goal to glorify God as I conduct my research and to reflect the love of Christ for humanity and nature in my conclusions.

There are particular control beliefs that I have developed during the course of my life that combine to form a view upon which I approach my research. My faith is the base from which all my control beliefs stem. My belief that God calls humanity to love one another propels me to look at how I am called to love the generations of people that come after me. By taking care of the creation God has gifted to humanity, we can show God's love to people we might never even meet. Another control belief that shapes my research is my belief that encouragement is a driving force behind change. I have always gotten great pleasure out of motivating other to take action. Out of this comes the purpose for my research project which is to encourage higher education institutions to adopt sustainable practices. I find great joy in encouraging others, and that is why I am particularly focusing my research on increasing the sustainability initiatives in higher education institutions, because I believe they have the greatest power to encourage future generations to take sustainability seriously.

I also believe that it is our calling as Christians to care for the environment around us. God is abundantly generous in giving us this earth, and being a good steward of our environment is a way to express our gratitude for this gift. It is not just our duty, but our privilege to be able to worship God through the way we interact with His creation. I believe that caring for the environment is a way to

express our love for God, and that is why I want to encourage others to begin implementing sustainable practices.

I believe my strongest passion and most prominent gift is my ability to interact with others and care for the people around me. Specifically I have a passion for glorifying God through taking care of the health of people. My research in sustainability stems out of my belief that a more sustainable world is a healthier world for people to occupy in the present as well as in future generations. I believe it is because of these God instilled gifts and passions that I am pursuing a research project that is centered around encouraging higher education institutions to practice sustainability.



E. Grading: 25% Data Collected

25% Analysis of Data

25% Conclusion

15% Writing Quality

10% Participation (through weekly meetings and updates to the mentor)