

Sustainability in Higher-Ed Marketing

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"It is the very nature of universities – as institutions that educate students for the future – that should motivate them to implement a vision of minimal impact on the natural world. . . . By greening their own campuses, universities and colleges can teach and demonstrate the principles of awareness and stewardship of the natural world, while increasing their chances of clean and pleasant local and global environments for the future."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Creighton, Sarah Hammond, *Greening the Ivory Tower*, 271

As we begin to see elements of sustainability become integrated in various elements of life, it is obvious that it is not a trend, but a necessary movement. Logically, a major shift in our society should begin with our students and historically, we have seen many important movements evolve out of university campuses as institutions of higher education have a profound impact on their local, regional and international communities. Through research, education and outreach, students and faculty make significant advances in their fields. Universities encompass a period of learning and growth for their students amidst a pivotal time in their lives which are shaped by what they learn from their campus experience and the actions of the university's leaders. A shift to sustainability at this point would support the entire community towards being responsible citizens.

As universities actively acknowledge the need for education and practice in sustainability, it becomes equally as important to market these achievements. By projecting the transitions within a university, it helps promote the ideas and importance of sustainability in local communities as well as to attract progressive students engaged in the principles.

St. Edwards University, a private college in Austin, Texas, began utilizing recycled papers across campus and eventually evolved their admissions marketing materials to include their impact on the environment by making a transition to utilize the services of Mohawk papers, a private company which calculates information regarding sustainability for all their clients. Both the dean of admissions, Tracey Manier and director of admissions marketing, Tom Richmond, immediately began to receive positive feedback on this information including one current student who told Tracey it was a

major component of his decision to attend.

In speaking with Tracey, she also noted that the move towards recycled content had created a snowball effect on campus as well. When admissions made the transition, offices and faculty members across campus began to question her decision and what the response had been. This has now led to the creation of a sustainability initiative on campus. This program has, over the course of three years, enabled the campus to restructure its budget to allocate its savings in energy to green marketing and student programs in sustainability. Overall, they continue to see immensely positive results and institutional growth each year.

Tracey indicated that the biggest problem was transitioning the entire campus to sustainable practices which became a necessity with the marketing initiatives. This seems to be an important issue for all areas of sustainability as students and the public begin to scrutinize the term “green”.

“Saying anything is “green” is no longer enough”, Tracey explained. “People want to know why it’s green, how it’s green, how green it actually is.”

This is something we have already begun to experience at Philadelphia University as prospective students question whether we have and LEED certified buildings or if we have organic food in the cafeteria. With the addition of programs such as Environmental Sustainability and Sustainable Design as well as individual courses in the various schools touching on principles of sustainability in all fields, it is logical that these questions be asked and imperative that they can be answered, preferably with a yes, especially as other universities begin to be able to do just that.

At Middlebury College in Vermont, it was a student organization that pushed the

board of trustees to approve a plan to make the university carbon neutral by 2016. Meanwhile, the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine was the first of now over 270 universities to pledge carbon neutrality as part of the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment (ACUPCC). Like standard accreditations, this designation is likely to become a certification students look for in their choice of a university. As with green buildings, sustainability is becoming a measure of quality as much as environmental conscience. Students attending Oberlin College in Ohio, know that they will have the opportunity to learn and be part of the Adam Joseph Lewis Center for Environmental Studies, an experience which can further their knowledge and understanding of green building and a living machine more so than any other institutional facility at this point.

Another extremely strong example is Stony Brook University. In addition to a number of green initiatives on campus, a number of their professors contributed to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) which was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize along with Al Gore in October 2007. The university took advantage of this positive press by continuing to feature it on the main page of their website and through positive statements noting,

“The contributions of these Stony Brook professors demonstrate the quality of the research conducted on this critical challenge for the 21st Century.”<sup>2</sup>

The university is utilizing the success of its professors for free marketing in regards to the quality of the educational research at the university. Recognizing that the prospective students paying special attention to this fact are also the students that care most about these issues, they add,

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<sup>2</sup> David Conover, Dean of the School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences

“Stony Brook researchers in the School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences and throughout the University have long been involved in issues related to global warming, including the effects of climate change on fish and shellfish populations, the effects of coastal storm surges, and the impact of global warming on protected land areas, species, and food supplies.”<sup>3</sup>

Stoney Brook has taken complete advantage of this positive press by committing to the ACUPCC in December, 2007 while aggressively marketing their new Southampton campus which is focused specifically on environmental and sustainability issues. Since these initiatives and marketing opportunities are still new to the institution, they can not directly link the effects on admissions at this point but they are expecting a higher conversion rate for accepted students who enroll in their science programs for fall of 2008 and a larger applicant pool in the sciences in the coming years.

Universities serve students, marketing to those students and their families (who are now equally part of at least the admissions decisions) should logically start in admissions. By discussing sustainable initiatives on campus in brochures and mailings to prospective students, they will begin to recognize the university as progressive, relevant and forward thinking. Making the move to recycled papers will reinforce that these initiatives are truly of value to the university and not just a marketing ploy. Students looking for environmental or sustainability related programs are especially looking for clues that the university is wholeheartedly supporting their majors. It seems almost absurd to print information on a major such as Environmental Sustainability on anything but recycled materials through responsible production processes.

Of course, much like almost everything we consider green, there are varying levels. One company, Mohawk papers, based in Cohoes, NY recognizes this and

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<sup>3</sup> Stony Brook University press release, *Three Stony Brook Professors Share in Nobel Prize Awarded to Gore and Climate Change Panel*, October 18, 2007

provides nearly endless options for its clients. I spoke to Debbie Mease, the Business Development Manager for Mohawk's Lebanon office and she explained that the company began as a traditional paper company but began to recognize the impact of their resource intensive industry and implement green initiatives. She added, "It's simply the right thing to do", a tagline frequently seen throughout their publications.

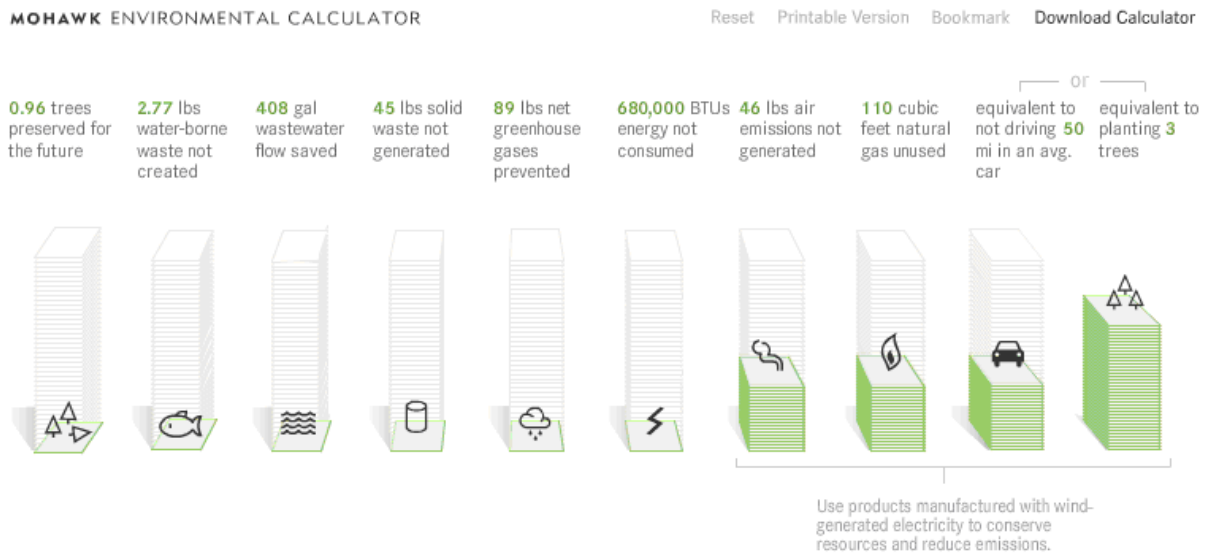
In 2003, Mohawk began to make a shift to wind power which today provides 100% of their energy. Green-e certifies that the renewable energy they are utilizing meets strict standards. Additionally, the thermal energy used in the manufacture of some of their papers is offset with Verified Emissions Reduction credits (VERs) which fund renewable, emission-free energy projects which are leading towards making papers with a net zero climate impact.

In regards to the actual fibers, Mohawk attained Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) chain-of-custody certification, which tracks products from the forests to the finished products. This allows their customers to know that the paper they are purchasing is made through the most sustainable practices available today. This applies primarily to the virgin fiber in the papers which is also elemental chlorine free (ECF). The recycled fibers are postconsumer waste (pcw) material recovered after being used by a consumer as opposed to waste from industrial processes. Using a high percentage of PCW fiber reduces the use of virgin fibers and keeps material out of landfills. These fibers are also process chlorine free (PCF).

From a financial perspective, I worked with Mohawk to price out a tri-fold brochure with similar paper and processing. When I had printed the run of this brochure with standard materials, it cost \$1, 646.00. By making the switch to almost identical

paper only 100% pcw, carbon neutral, FSC, Green Seal and Green-e certified paper made with wind power (this would be the extreme end of sustainability) Mohawk estimated a price increase of just over 10% (\$1,839.00). They consider this to be in line with what they traditionally find working with new clients.

While all these processes and procedures are becoming more and more utilized by many printing companies today, Mohawk offers the additional benefit of publishing the benefits in your marketing materials, a feature I could not find from any other company. An example of this feature for a mass mailing with a total weight of 100 pounds on 100% pcw Cool White Smooth paper is calculated here:



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Mohawk utilizes these calculations and graphics on each piece you have printed. They also the following symbols to reflect their processes:

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mohawkpaper.com/resources/resources-calcs/>



By having this information on your publications it raises awareness to issues and illustrates your commitment to sustainability. (It is also worthwhile to keep in mind that this information relates strictly to the paper. As companies, including Mohawk, begin to utilize sustainable inks and printing processes, the benefits will continue to grow.) Additionally, since Mohawk is a truly viable resource, it allows those who want to challenge your commitment extensive information on all you support through these individual organizations as well as Mohawk itself.

Additionally, these symbols and the information they provide create dialogue even if the student isn't looking for them or hadn't considered the effects of the brochures being mailed to them. It will also inevitably create competition. Do the other universities sending them things have these certifications? Are their brochures on recycled papers? This relates back to St. Edward's realization that their brochures are contributing strongly to many students' impressions of the university as well as becoming part of their eventual decision.

An additional benefit comes from the realization that the students who are targeted by this information tend to be more aware and active individuals. Once these particular students are on campus, they will inevitably continue to be involved with campus initiatives towards sustainability. It is a cause worth connecting to students on because it will only continue to benefit the campus and the community. Students at various institutions including Evergreen State College and University and Maryland voted to increase their student fees to create an ongoing sustainability fund despite the

fact that tuition is already at record highs. It is through students with this mindset that universities can continue to raise awareness and reap the benefits of having green buildings and policies.

By making a move towards a sustainable campus, a community of knowledge and cultural responsibility is created. By encouraging students to value current initiatives and challenge the system in place they will begin to participate in the evolution of the campus which is something an institute of higher education is consistently seeking. Furthermore, as students begin to embark on new understandings in this important movement, they can go on to lead more environmentally engaged lives with sustainability skills employers are already beginning to seek. After all, as those making the transition are realizing, a major part of sustainability is creating the right dialogue; a skill that comes with experience. There are unprecedented environmental challenges which current students will encounter in their future. By recognizing these concerns now, while the concepts are still young, universities can acknowledge their role, support their students and constantly further the sustainability movement while growing a positive image for the institution.

"Leading society in this effort fits squarely into the educational, research, and public service missions of higher education. No other institution in society has the influence, the critical mass and the diversity of skills needed."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment (ACUPCC)

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