Committee Background

Sustainability in the context of higher education is a growing, and yet, imprecise concept. The Committee on Sustainability works to keep abreast of the ‘state of the art’ in campus sustainability while ensuring that UVA’s practices continue to evolve. The membership of the Committee on Sustainability reflects the diverse and collaborative input critical to properly consider UVA sustainability. The Committee’s membership includes representatives from all University constituencies: students, faculty, and staff. From July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2011, the Committee met nine times. Three new members joined the Committee during this time: representing the Vice President for Research and the Vice President and Chief Information Officer, as well as a new undergraduate student representative.

The Committee has five subcommittees (Environmental Impact, Student Liaison, Academic Integration, Policies, and Outreach) that meet on a variable schedule in response to subcommittee initiatives. The creation of the Student Liaison Subcommittee was approved this spring in response to a proposal by undergraduate representative Sheffield Hale.

Committee Accomplishments

Establishing Goals

In the Committee on Sustainability FY2010 Annual Report, the Committee stated that, “The University may find itself behind some of its peers...in establishing an institutionally-adopted set of sustainability goals. The Committee and Subcommittees are preparing a set of sustainability goals...for consideration by the President in FY 2010-11.”

At its March 3, 2011 meeting, the Committee approved a Sustainability Resolution, developed by the Environmental Impact Subcommittee, which reaffirms the University’s broad commitment to sustainability and establishes a specific reduction target for greenhouse gas emissions. Following the Committee’s approval, the Faculty Senate, Student Council, General Faculty Council, and all four Employee Councils endorsed the Resolution. On June 10, 2011, the Board of Visitors, with support from senior administrators at the University, approved the Sustainability Resolution. The Resolution offers clear evidence for University support for sustainability and establishes a measurable target for greenhouse gas reductions, as well as a framework for future sustainability goals.

2011 Sustainability Assessment

In January 2007, the Office of the Architect, Facilities Management, and Environmental Health and Safety released the 2006 Sustainability Assessment. Recognizing the significant progress made towards sustainability in the past 5 years, the Committee, working through the Office of the Architect, has supported the development of 2011 Sustainability Assessment and, at its June 2011 meeting, approved the new 87-page Assessment for release. The Assessment documents accomplishments in sustainability from across the University, organized into three categories: Governance and Culture, Academics and Learning, and Management Centers. In each category, the Assessment identifies opportunities to promote interdisciplinary synergies and further advance sustainability.

Subcommittee Accomplishments

In FY2011, the Outreach Subcommittee launched two new initiatives (Sustainability Pledge and Sustainability Partners) and continued to expand additional programs launched in previous years, such as Earth Week and the UVA Sustainability website.

UVA Sustainability Pledge

In October 2010, the Outreach Subcommittee launched the UVA Sustainability Pledge, which reads, “I pledge to consider the social, economic and environmental impacts of my habits and to explore ways to foster a sustainable environment during my time here at UVA and beyond.” The pledge is the first step in a continued dialogue to engage the University community in recognizing what personal actions they can take to advance sustainability at UVA. To promote the pledge,
the Subcommittee announced a goal of 1,000 signatures by Earth Day 2011, developed a branding mechanism (see photo) and promoted the pledge at events and through the website. The 1,000 participant target was reached with one day to spare.

**Sustainability Partners**

In February 2011, the Outreach Subcommittee kicked off Sustainability Partners, a network of employees who volunteer a small amount of their time to assist colleagues on improving sustainability in their individual departments and offices. The Sustainability Partners communicate via a listserv and a monthly lunch meeting.

**Policies Subcommittee**

In FY11, the Policies Subcommittee has focused its attention on purchasing and procurement at the University, particularly on improving guidance to department purchasers on sustainability purchasing opportunities. The Subcommittee is investigating opportunities to create a sustainable purchasing guide, improve availability of “green” product data on UVA’s online marketplace, and develop a sustainable purchasing policy.

Particular attention has been focused on office paper purchasing. Through research done by the Subcommittee, it has been established that the University purchases over $800,000 of office paper per year, and only 11% of this paper has recycled content. Somewhat counterintuitive, recycled paper may be purchased at the same or even less cost than non-recycled papers.

**Environmental Impact Subcommittee**

Building on the greenhouse gas reduction planning efforts of Environmental Footprint Reduction Plan Phase 1 (EFRP), the Environmental Impact Subcommittee reviewed the results of the Renewable and Innovative Energy Technologies Study, commissioned by the Department of Energy and Utilities to identify renewable and innovative energy technologies that would be appropriate for UVA based on availability, economics, and qualitative measures.

With the findings of the EFRP and the Study in hand, the Subcommittee drafted the Sustainability Resolution (see above) that established a target for greenhouse gas reductions and affirmed the University’s overall commitment to sustainability.

**Academic Integration Subcommittee**

The Academic Integration Subcommittee convened for just three meetings in FY11. Items under consideration at the meetings included: recommended content for the Academics and Learning chapter of the 2011 Sustainability Assessment; discussion of a Center for Sustainability; and preparation for the 3rd annual Student Sustainability Project Competition, which was held during Earth Week 2011.

**Student Liaison Subcommittee**

The Student Liaison Subcommittee was approved this spring at the recommendation of the Committee’s undergraduate representative. Rather than focus on creating new initiatives, the Student Liaison Subcommittee aims to foster collaboration between to 50+ existing student sustainability-related groups in order to represent diverse student perspectives on sustainability to the Committee; document student activities to preserve institutional memory; and facilitate collaboration among students, faculty, and administration. The subcommittee will begin meeting formally at the start of the 2011-12 school year.