



## CASE STUDY » INSTITUTIONALIZING SUSTAINABILITY

### ABSTRACT

- *Governance and policy initiatives have been critical to the institutionalization of sustainability at UBC.*
  - *Stakeholders need to be engaged in order to achieve cultural change.*
  - *Establishing the business case for sustainability helps overcome resistance and fosters integration.*
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### INTRODUCTION

UBC is committed to ensuring sustainability is integrated into its strategic plans and throughout its operations, teaching and research. Since 1997, when it became the first Canadian university to adopt a sustainability policy, it has worked to embed sustainability – *meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs* – into all of its plans and decisions.

To accomplish this, the university implemented a number of initiatives and processes to guide its approach to learning, operating and knowledge development. This case study describes the steps UBC took to embed its sustainability commitment.

### CONTEXT

Leadership organizations such as UBC recognize that to fulfill their sustainability aspirations they need to foster a sustainability culture that internalizes considerations of social, economic and environmental impacts and opportunities in operational decision-making, long-term strategic planning, and their products and services. Best practice sustainability organizations set up internal processes, controls and reward systems to foster balanced decision-making and promote economic opportunity, social equity and environmental quality. As a large institution UBC understands that it is not enough to adopt a sustainability policy, it must support and enhance internal leadership and action towards a more sustainable future.

UBC's journey towards institutionalizing sustainability began in 1990 when it signed the 1990 Talloires Declaration, a 10-point action plan for incorporating sustainability into higher education. To date over 300 leading educational institutions around the world have signed the declaration. In Canada in 1991 UBC became a signatory to the Halifax Declaration, a common framework for university action on sustainable development. Signatories to the Halifax Declaration accepted responsibility for "help[ing] societies shape their present and future development policies into the sustainable and equitable forms necessary for an environmentally secure and civilized world."

This set the scene for the emergence of UBC's internal sustainability framework, described below.



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### STORY

The following steps chronicle UBC's journey towards institutionalizing sustainability within its operations, teaching and research.

#### *1. The Sustainability Policy is adopted*

In 1997, UBC became Canada's first university to adopt a "Policy on Sustainable Development", referred to as Policy 5, setting the framework for UBC's approach to sustainability and committing UBC to be "mindful of the need to balance ecological, social and economic imperatives, in an open and transparent decision-making process with the involvement of all stakeholders." Collectively, staff, students and faculty worked on the policy and actively supported it until it passed.

#### *2. A Sustainability Advisory Committee is appointed*

Policy 5 set the stage for the appointment of a "Sustainability Advisory Committee" of faculty, students and staff to advise on strategy and actions towards achievement of the broad goals set by Policy 5. The Advisory Committee also has responsibility for monitoring university-wide sustainability performance. It has been meeting over the past ten years to inform UBC's approach to sustainability.

#### *3. Accountability is defined*

Policy 5 defines the accountability infrastructure for sustainability throughout UBC, stipulating that all university vice-presidents are accountable for its implementation. Each year VPs report on their progress in implementing key responsibility areas under Policy 5 through the Sustainability Report (see 12 below).

#### *4. Sustainability Office is established and a Director of Sustainability appointed*

One year after UBC adopted its sustainability policy, it opened the doors to the development of a UBC Sustainability Office (SO) and hired a Director of Sustainability, another first for Canada.

#### **POLICY 5 (June 2005) – Role of the Director of Sustainability**

"The Director for Sustainable Development, reporting to the Associate Vice-President Land and Building Services and working with all sectors in the University, is responsible for focusing efforts on the objectives of the policy, promoting the development of sustainability target and action plans of individual units, and coordinating the many sustainable development activities, on-going and emerging, on the University's campuses. The Director is the chief contact with the external community about issues and advances in sustainability at UBC, providing linkages for campus and regional efforts. The Director coordinates reporting on all related University efforts, including recording and reporting on progress (and lack of progress) and plans for long-term development. The Director provides training and guidance to the University community and serves as the central information source about sustainability issues."



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The mission of the SO is: “*Creating a Culture of Sustainability at UBC*”, i.e. to integrate sustainability throughout the university. By 2008, the SO has grown to include ten staff members. Its programs have campus-wide reach, working towards systematically institutionalizing sustainability in every aspect of campus life, including learning, teaching, research, operations, living, working and external alliances. The office guides and supports the realization of a complete sustainable campus community and engages the campus community both on and beyond campus in the process.

#### ***5. Sustainability is integrated into operations and land development***

From 1994 to present day UBC has been integrating environmental and social considerations into its’ operations, starting with its green building program in 1994, followed by *ECOTrek*, UBC’s largest campus retrofit for energy and water conservation. Other integration programs include:

- The incorporation of sustainable design features into University Town, a significant redevelopment of UBC properties. Under sustainable building guidelines known as *REAP* (Residential Environmental Assessment Program), residential developments are required to meet higher performance standards than required under BC’s Building Code.
- The majority (two-thirds) of UBC’s supplier Request for Proposals include sustainability criteria, thereby screening suppliers for their sustainability attributes. Additionally, UBC leverages the supply chain for mutual benefit, as with the Fisher Scientific Fund. In 2001 UBC Supply Management negotiated with Fisher Scientific that the supplier would donate 2.3% of its total UBC sales to support environmental initiatives at UBC. This fund supports small one-time grants to strengthen sustainability at UBC and to benefit the UBC scientific community, the main users of Fisher Scientific products. In 2005 a pool of \$19,500 was generated, \$18,000 in 2006. Ten projects have been funded to date ranging from \$4,000 to \$10,500, a result of UBC’s active supply chain engagement approach.

#### ***6. Students, faculty and staff are engaged***

UBC understands that to institutionalize sustainability students, staff and faculty need to be engaged. Committed to providing students with sustainability leadership opportunities, UBC launched the SEEDS program (Social, Ecological, Economic Development Studies) that coordinates internships and applied research opportunities relating to sustainability. In 2006/07, SEEDS engaged 398 individuals – 45 instructors, 318 students and 45 staff – who were focused on finding solutions to sustainability issues. Over 7 years, 2,000 people have participated. In 2006/07, a further 853 students took part in Community Service Learning projects, local sustainability initiatives in Metro Vancouver.

In addition to student sustainability engagement, UBC has an employee volunteer program called Sustainability Coordinators that fosters a culture of sustainability and influences sustainable behaviours. This program recruits staff and faculty volunteers to inspire department-level sustainability initiatives. The program is primarily focused on transportation, energy conservation and waste management and saves UBC \$75,000 of electricity annually.

#### ***7. UBC communicates its sustainability commitment***

Most of UBC’s sustainability programs are launched with a unique identifier, or brand, to generate interest and awareness on and off campus. Aforementioned programs *ECOTrek*, *SEEDS*, and *REAP* are an example of this approach, as is the well-known *U-Pass*, a UBC and corporate-



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sponsored subsidized bus program for UBC students. By branding and communicating its sustainability programs, UBC is able to advance internal and external awareness of its commitment to, and action on, sustainability.

**8. Integration into course offerings and research programs**

Policy 5 committed UBC to integrate its sustainability principles into the academic enterprise. As of 2006, UBC offered more than 400 courses related to sustainability across its 12 faculties at UBC Vancouver and UBC Okanagan. In addition, in 2006 UBC had over 400 research projects addressing some aspect of sustainability.

UBC is currently developing a Mid-Level Academic Plan that will articulate how UBC's institutional aspirations are linked, unit-by-unit, to each unit's obligations, goals and ranked priorities in learning, research and service/outreach. This plan will be a primary influence on each of the University's administrative, service and support units in their development of their individual plans to advance the University's mission.

**9. Sustainability becomes a core value and is integrated into the university's vision**

By 2005, UBC had made great advances in implementing its sustainability policy and raising awareness of the importance of integrating and balancing social, economic and environmental considerations in its operations and approach. Thus, when it came to adopting its long term strategy, known as Trek 2010, UBC formally incorporated sustainability into its vision, as follows:

**Trek 2010 Vision**

"The University of BC, aspiring to be one of the world's best universities, will prepare students to become exceptional global citizens, promote the values of a civil and sustainable society, and conduct outstanding research to serve the people of BC, Canada and the world."

**10. Stakeholders are consulted and the Sustainability Strategy is adopted**

With the University's Trek 2010 framework thus adopted, the Sustainability Office turned next to developing a university-wide sustainability strategy, consistent with Trek 2010 and Policy 5. It proceeded to consult stakeholders on the creation of its first-ever sustainability strategy. In all, 20 departments, all faculties, all major student organizations and over 100 people were consulted. In 2006, the university launched its five-year campus-wide strategy, a first also for a Canadian university, setting out social, ecological and economic goals with specific targets and action commitments to sustainability in teaching, research and operations. It was called: *Inspirations and Aspirations: The Vancouver Campus Sustainability Strategy, 2006 – 2010*. It is currently in its third year of implementation.

**11. Metrics are defined**

The document was organized according to the Triple Bottom Line, with 3 broad sustainability goals (that built off of the 5 Trek 2010 sustainability goals), 9 objectives and 68 metrics. The 68 metrics are assigned to centres of responsibility across campus.

**12. Sustainability Strategy Progress Report is released**

Policy 5 requires that the UBC Director of Sustainability "coordinate reporting on all related University efforts, including progress (and lack of progress) and plans for long-term development." A year after the Sustainability Strategy was adopted, UBC produced its first report



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on strategy progress: *UBC 2006/07 Sustainability Report*. According to UBC, this was a step forward in tracking its commitment to integration of sustainability values into the University's operations and programs, in providing information to the public on numerous campus-wide achievements and in celebrating the important contributions of individuals and units across its campuses. The report noted that UBC achieved 23 of the 38 goals set for completion in 2006, with 9 completed ahead of schedule.

In addition to its Sustainability Report, UBC includes sustainability progress reports in its public annual report, consistent with best practice in sustainability reporting. The Board of Governors reviews and releases this annual progress report.

### ***13. Sustainability is elevated to the President's Office***

Early in 2008, the University President established an Advisory Council on Sustainability reporting to the President and Vice-Chancellor, which meets quarterly and whose purpose is to identify and communicate UBC's role in sustainability, with the following objectives:

- To oversee development of a sustainability strategic plan, identifying campuses as a model for sustainability
- To communicate and educate internal and external communities about the university's initiatives and successes
- To serve as a forum and source of ideas for implementation of sustainability initiatives in everyday practice [...] monitoring indicators and identifying trends
- To explore sustainability proposals and opportunities from various faculties, departments and individuals, as well as recommend appropriate action
- To liaise with potential donors and external funders, developing case statements

Membership consists of representatives from faculties, the UBC Sustainability Office, Public Affairs, Development, Research, external representatives and students. The Chair is appointed by the President and recommendations are forwarded to the President, with the Director of the Office of the President acting as the secretariat. The appointment of this advisory council provides a direct link to the President's Office on key sustainability issues and represents a new milestone in elevating sustainability within the university community.

### ***14. Developing the Sustainability Business Case***

Early in the implementation of Policy 5, UBC realized the opportunity of capturing the savings generated from many of its sustainability initiatives for the purposes of funding its sustainability operations. Thus, the Sustainability Office was initiated without specific allocated funding. The first program of the SO, *ELECTrek*, focused on energy conservation and resulted in significant utility savings. *ELECTrek* was followed by *ECOTrek*, the largest campus retrofit for energy and water conservation. The net savings (net of the retrofit costs) implemented under these programs, which accrue annually to the university are allocated to UBC's sustainability programs. For example, in 2007/08 there was an annual saving of \$5,785,000 and from the program's inception total savings (1998 to 2008) amounted to \$22,993,000. Clearly, UBC's ability to develop the business case and realize the cost-savings was instrumental to UBC's sustainability progress over the years.



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### IMPACT

The degree to which UBC has successfully institutionalized sustainability throughout the university is difficult to assess, given the lack of common standards of measurement. However, by considering student, faculty and staff awareness and behavioural change surveys and by assessing external rankings of UBC's sustainability performance, a proxy impact assessment can be distilled.

- A survey conducted in Spring 2007 reveals modest penetration (one-third) of student awareness of UBC's strategic approach to sustainability (with 493 students surveyed). However, it also revealed that the mere existence of UBC's sustainability programs of which students were more aware, influenced the behaviours of two-thirds of the student population. Roughly one-third of student responses were aware of the courses on sustainability being available in all faculties; 63 percent were not aware.
- A survey conducted of faculty/staff at the same time revealed greater awareness of UBC's strategic approach to sustainability, with about two-thirds of 140 respondents indicating awareness. This awareness translated into a greater number of faculty/staff being "greatly influenced" by UBC's sustainability programs (67 percent of faculty/staff versus 6 percent of students). However, this awareness and engagement did not translate into awareness that sustainability courses were available in all faculties.
- In 2008, UBC was rated B+ by the College Sustainability Report Card of the Sustainable Endowments Institute, up from B- in 2007. Ranked a Campus Sustainability Leader in the following categories: administration; climate change and energy; food and recycling; green building, transportation; endowment transparency; investment priorities; and shareholder engagement, UBC scored a "D" for its shareholder engagement program, while all other elements were given B or A grades.

The results reveal that UBC appears to have influenced student, faculty and staff behavioural change on campus, but there is less awareness of UBC's strategic approach to sustainability and of the integration of sustainability into the academic enterprise. UBC is considered a trend-setting Campus Sustainability Leader by third-party organizations.

### REPLICABILITY

UBC's approach to institutionalizing sustainability is entirely replicable, albeit its path is unique to its culture and its leadership. Other environments will present different starting points, opportunities and developmental paths. Essentially UBC's sustainability roadmap follows the implementation of a management system for sustainability. The more of these elements in place in an organization, the likelier the organization is to benefit from a culture and ethic of sustainability. The decision to reinvest operational savings from sustainability measures into UBC's sustainability programs was key to UBC's ability to move forward with strong and successful measures, thereby embedding a culture of sustainability mindsets, behaviours and actions amongst its key stakeholders.



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### FUTURE

While UBC has benefited from strong sustainability systems, there are a few areas where further development would be beneficial. For example, the integration of sustainability objectives into staff and faculty performance management and compensation programs is critical for the advancement of sustainability. Ongoing sustainability risk and opportunity analysis are additional elements of a strong sustainability management system. Finally the degree to which UBC's Board of Governance and Senate adopt a sustainability governance program will further move UBC towards its sustainability vision.

### CONCLUSION

As UBC's experience has shown, to progress towards integrating a sustainability culture throughout an organization, a number of elements of a sustainability management system are essential, including high-level commitment from the Board and President, a policy framework and active stakeholder engagement.

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