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## SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT 18
About this plan

Virginia Commonwealth University has been a leader in sustainability since signing onto the American Colleges and Universities Presidents Climate Commitment in 2008. By signing onto this commitment, VCU is dedicated to reporting on our greenhouse gas emissions annually, reporting on our sustainability progress and creating a governing body to steer these functions.

As a result of signing onto the ACUPCC, the Office of Sustainability was formed at VCU in 2009. The Office of Sustainability assisted the VCU President with creating a university wide Sustainability Committee. This committee is co-chaired by the Provost as well as the Vice President for Finance and Administration. The Sustainability Committee is representative of faculty, staff, students and administrations from both the MCV and Monroe Park campuses of VCU.

In 2010, the Sustainability Committee focused on developing a Climate Action Plan. This plan was drafted in partnership with all members of the Sustainability Committee and the consulting firm O’Brien and Gere. This process helped VCU with drafting its greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction goals. These goals are to reduce GHG emissions 17% below 2008 levels by 2025, and to reduce GHG emissions 100% below 2008 levels by 2050.

This plan created a roadmap to carbon neutrality for VCU. The process for drafting VCU’s Climate Action Plan was housed mostly within the Sustainability Committee. Input was sought from internal experts as well as the Sustainability Committee. While this plan is extremely helpful in terms of operations, it does not cover academics, engagement or planning. As a result of this, in October 2014 the Sustainability Committee tasked the Office of Sustainability with drafting a university-wide Sustainability Plan.

The Office of Sustainability set out to make this process as transparent as possible. In February and April 2015, the Office of Sustainability held two open town hall events, open to the VCU community. These events were well attended by VCU faculty, staff, students and administrators.

The purpose of these events was to gather feedback and input from attendees in an open, fluid environment. Both events were well attended by VCU faculty, staff, students and administrators.
Simultaneously with this, the Office of Sustainability reached out to the five neighborhood associations the VCU directly impacts, for feedback. These neighborhoods are: Carver, the Fan, Jackson Ward, Oregon Hill and Randolph. VCU sought to hear what the residents wanted to see the university accomplish in the next 3-5 years in terms of sustainability, and just as importantly, what they did not want to see the university pursue or accomplish regarding sustainability in the next 3-5 years. The Office of Sustainability also issued a survey to all residents, asking for their feedback. The feedback received from the town hall events and neighborhood associations, coupled with internal expertise and budgetary constraints, informed what is within this plan.

The Office of Sustainability would also like to thank residents and chairs of the neighborhood associations residing in Carver, the Fan, Oregon Hill and Randolph. Without your support and feedback, this plan would not have been possible. We would also like to thank the city of Richmond’s Sustainability department. Your expertise and support have been extremely helpful throughout this plan.

Sustainability Team Leadership

This plan would not be possible without the tireless work of many people within and outside of VCU. The Office of Sustainability would like to acknowledge Dining Services, Housing and Residence Life, Utilities and Engineering, Physical Plant, the Wellness Resource Center, the Division of Community Engagement, the Office of Service Learning, the School of Engineering, the Center for Environmental Life Sciences, the Office of the Provost and the Office of Finance and Administration. A full listing of acknowledgments can be found in Appendix 1.
ACADEMICS + RESEARCH

The Sustainability in Academics Leadership Team was formulated in 2011. Out of that team, VCU has seen sustainability course attributes develop, a sustainability-specific denotation in the course catalogue as well as a certificate in sustainability come to fruition. This section encompasses input from Life Sciences, School of Engineering, Office of Service Learning and many other curricular and co-curricular entities.

Did you know?

VCU offers 82 courses tagged with the sustainability attribute. The attribute is used to identify courses with sustainability themes embedded into student learning. These courses are available in several disciplines from the sciences to the arts and are intended to give students an understanding of how sustainability can be incorporated into any field of study.

EDUCATION

IDENTITY SYSTEM

01

Foster a student centric sustainability education identity system.

Develop and implement an annual concept paper and repository for concept papers, by end of FY16.

Establish and administer sustainability related scholarships and project funding through federal programs, foundations, and commercial partnerships.

Promote student driven, student initiated sustainability activities on campus. Engage and mentor student sustainability organizations.

Engage Living Learning Programs (LLPs) in sustainability efforts.

Develop and publicize exemplars of sustainable behavior. Develop videos and case studies that profile multiple facets of sustainability.
LEARNING THROUGH LITERACY

02 Promote sustainability literacy through experiential learning.

Establish formal connections with VCU Community Engagement and Service Learning, by end of FY16.

Develop and maintain database of research projects in conjunction with Office of Research/Office of Sponsored Programs, by end of FY17.

Establish and develop relationships with external constituencies (e.g., companies, community organizations) to generate internship and project opportunities.

Compile and distribute information on sustainability-related community programs, both local and beyond, by end of FY18.

THE LONG TERM

03 Institutionalize sustainability as a long-term core value of VCU.

Establish a permanent position (ideally, housed within the Office of the Provost) to implement and oversee sustainability academics at VCU.

Establish a core network for transdisciplinary sustainability interactions, by designating a contact point person for each academic unit.

Engage with a communications expert to help with sustainability in academics messaging.

Develop a tiered approach to sustainability training for faculty and staff.

Establish a centralized repository with sustainability in academics resources.

Contact and benchmark existing sustainability in academics programs at other universities.

Develop and implement a financial support model for sustainability in academics.

WOW!

In 2012, VCU celebrated Arbor Day by planting 290 trees at the VCU Rice Rivers Center. This holds the record for the largest tree planting in VCU history.
STUDENT + VOLUNTEER GROUPS

01 Provide resources to better engage student groups and volunteers around sustainability.

Identify all student organizations with a sustainability focus, annually, beginning in FY16, in collaboration with University Student Commons and Activities. Meet with all student groups with a sustainability focus to educate them on university goals and provide suggested projects, beginning in FY17. Office of Sustainability will develop a system to identify projects needed for VCU, on an ongoing basis.

Create calendar/list of sustainability volunteering groups and opportunities, available to Office of Sustainability website. Collaborate with Student Affairs and Community Engagement on app-tracking system to track sustainability-focused volunteering opportunities and student group projects.

Capture the number of hours of sustainability-focused community service, on an annual basis, beginning in FY16. Increase hours by 10% on an annual basis beginning in FY17. Identify best practices to provide and track volunteer opportunities.
FACULTY + STAFF

02
Provide resources to better engage faculty and staff on sustainability within VCU and the greater Richmond community.

Determine Regional Sustainability Priorities and share that Information Publicly Via The Office Of Sustainability Website, To Faculty, Staff and Students. VCU Will Actively in city of Richmond’s Green City Commission and will have an ongoing presence to support city issues and regional priorities.

Create incentives for sustainable department habits and operations.

Have at least 5 offices/departments complete Green Office certification annually, beginning in FY16.

Develop incentives to participate in Green Office program. Identify the sustainability training needs of faculty and staff. Provide appropriate trainings to faculty and staff on sustainability and environmental issues, beginning in FY17.

STUDENT WITHIN ACADEMICS

03
Provide resources to better engage students about sustainability within academics.

Establish a baseline number of students enrolled in Service Learning courses that have a sustainability focus, by end of FY16. Increase the number of students enrolled in sustainability-focused Service Learning courses by 5% annually, based on established baseline, beginning in FY17.

Determine the number of faculty who teach sustainability focused Service Learning courses, by end of FY16. Provide resources, assistance and incentives for faculty to create Service-Learning courses as well as infuse Service-Learning principles into their existing courses, by end of FY16.

COOL PARTNERSHIPS

The VCU Office of Sustainability has partnered with Kim Guthrie, of VCU Fashion, to implement a textile recycling program. Since 2013, VCU has recycled approximately 2,000 pounds of textile scraps from the Fashion Department that would otherwise be headed to a landfill.
ENERGY USE + EFFICIENCY

01
Reduce energy use and increase energy efficiency.

Upgrade lighting to best available technology in all feasible areas as lighting systems are replaced or installed. Install motion detectors in all appropriate areas by end of FY20. Also, investigate departmental metering of electricity use to encourage increased conservation.

In partnership with the Planning and Administrative subcommittee, develop and implement education programs for faculty, staff and students to influence positive behavior change to conserve energy by 6/30/2016.

02
Increase energy efficiency education programs.

Increase utilization of building automation systems where appropriate to increase energy efficiency. Design and implement best practices for all VCU facilities to conserve energy.

WATER USEAGE

03
Reduce water consumption.

Upgrade water fixtures in all areas where appropriate to conserve water by end of FY20. In partnership with the Planning and Administrative subcommittee develop and implement education programs for faculty, staff and students to increase water conservation by end of FY16.

04
Reduce water requiring treatment from VCU facilities.

Through a feasibility study, develop a stormwater management plan that reduces the impact on the James River watershed. Investigate increase use of native plants and sustainable grounds management where feasible.

ACTION ITEMS – OPERATIONS

The Operations subcommittee is co-chaired by the Assisting Director of Facilities and Conference within University Housing as well as VCU’s Dining Services Manager. This unique pairing, allowed creativity to flow freely throughout this section of the Sustainability Plan. Expertise from Utilities and Engineering, the department of Urban Planning and Design, the Office of Sustainability as well as Library Services informed much of this section. Highlights include reductions in water consumption, energy consumption, waste generation and single occupancy vehicle usage.
**SOLID WASTE**

05 Reduce solid waste generation.

Reduce solid waste by 3% each year and increase waste diversion by 3% each calendar year from 2016 - 2020, using the 2014 diversion rate for the single stream recycling program as a baseline.

In partnership with the Planning and Administrative subcommittee, develop and implement education programs for faculty, staff and students on single stream recycling and other waste reduction programs.

06 Increase waste diversion rate.

Increase diversion rate by encouraging reuse over resale, resale over recycling and recycling over landfill disposal. Look at the feasibility of diverting pre- and post- consumer waste from dining areas on campus to increase waste diversion.

**VEHICLE USAGE**

07 Reduce single-occupancy vehicle usage.

Develop university-wide policies to reduce parking demand and single occupant vehicle usage.

Fully implement a bike share program, university-wide.

Develop parking policies that balance the parking demand throughout the campus, maximizing parking in underutilized facilities through better aligned parking facilities with transit options, creating a “park once” environment at Virginia Commonwealth.

Promote a safe corridor for alternative modes of transportation including but not limited to cyclists and pedestrians, further reducing single occupancy vehicle travel.

Promote and expand VCU’s transit network by strengthening existing partnership with GRTC as well as better integrating systems considering pending implementation of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT).

08 Reduce unnecessary vehicle usage at VCU university-wide.

Develop university-wide policies to promote the use of alternative transportation methods through intra-campus travel.

Reduce the size of the fleet and increase fuel efficiency, university-wide.

Consider more opportunities for shared vehicle utilization through the development of a motor pool with a departmental online reservation system.

Implement anti-idling policy for all VCU-owned vehicles.

Implement preventative maintenance program for university fleet, to extend vehicular life.

Continue to work to infuse alternative fuel vehicles into the university fleet.

Strengthen and expand bicycle infrastructure for bike commuters, including additional bike racks, bike lockers, and bike shelters.
In 2012, VCU celebrated Arbor Day by planting 290 trees at the VCU Rice Rivers Center. This holds the record for the largest tree planting in VCU history.
THE MORE YOU KNOW

Check out how much water, electricity, and natural gas VCU consumed during the fiscal year of 2015. Only with your help can we reduce our resource use.

Not only do we consume, but in 2014 we generated 7,671,864 pounds of waste. Of that 6,002,784 pounds of waste was landfilled and 1,700,270 pounds were recycled as part of the single stream recycling program.

EVERYDAY COMPARISONS

Charging your laptop 2,484,744 times
Charging your phone 84,355 times

PUT INTO PERSPECTIVE

Taking 13,497 showers (25 gallons/10 minute shower)
Brushing your teeth 84,355 times (2 gallons/minute brushing teeth)

WHAT THIS MEANS

Heating 46 buildings equivalent to Brandt Hall (for one whole year)
Heating + cooking in the Student Commons for 47 years
EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

01
Develop and implement education programs for the VCU community on energy and water conservation and waste reduction.

Assess and document existing educational programs and materials by the end of FY16.

Mobilize key partners such as SGA, Staff Senate, Faculty Senate and student organizations to enhance communication across the VCU community. Complete by the end of March, 2016.

Audit peer institutions as identified by AASHE to assess successful communication practices that may serve as examples for VCU. Complete by December, 2016.

Develop a digital marketing plan targeting energy and water conservation as well as waste reduction by the end of December, 2016.

Pilot test marketing plan with previously identified key partners in the spring semester of 2017.

Implement digital marketing and communication around energy, waste and water in the fall semester of 2017.

Leverage online analytics to track usage of online materials and inform where improvements or changes need to be made.
STUDENT WORKER PAY RATE

To explore the feasibility of increasing pay for student workers at VCU.

Assess worker pay for other business near VCU with high percentages of VCU student employees.

Assess student pay within VCU currently and within the past five years. Key partners include Human Resources, Career Services, Rec Sports, VCU Housing and Student Affairs.

Compile findings and make recommendations in a final report.

VCU LEARNING GARDENS

To increase student and community engagement with the VCU Learning Gardens Program to promote healthy sustainable eating habits.

Promote volunteerism at the gardens among faculty and staff through the use of community service leave.

Promote local and sustainable food options available within Richmond to the VCU community.

Serve as marketing arm for VCU Learning Gardens Program.

RAMBIKES @ VCU

Have a flat tire? Chain pop off the tracks? RamBikes can fix it! RamBikes is VCU’s student run bike shop open to all students, faculty, and staff. Whether you need free bike repair, advice on cycling in the city, recommendations for local shops, or just want to meet some bike-fanatics like yourself, you are welcome to come on by. The RamBikes staff will always be excited to see you!

WATER BOTTLE STATIONS

At VCU, 33 of the most active buildings on campus are equipped with at least one water bottle filling station. Because of these stations, and the environmentally conscious students, faculty, and staff of VCU, he university has saved over 1 million plastic water bottles each year since 2010.
LEARNING GARDENS PROGRAM

The Learning Gardens Program at VCU aims to provide fresh produce to the VCU and surrounding community as well as create learning opportunities around growing food. Through this program, VCU is committed to enriching the Richmond community by supporting access to healthy food as well as education around how healthy food can be grown and prepared.

TOTAL SERVINGS DONATED: 1,795

TOTAL POUNDS DONATED: 150
Currently, the Learning Garden Program consists of two gardens and several partners within both the VCU and Richmond communities.

The first garden was built in 2012 on the east side of the Larrick Student Center. It provides space for any student, staff, or faculty at VCU to rent their own plot and grow their own produce.

This garden supports 12 raised beds with over 1,300 square feet of combined growing space. 10 beds are divided among more than 20 garden members for growing food and flowers for personal use and two beds are managed by the Learning Garden Coordinator and dedicated to growing produce for donation to the VCU Ram Pantry (the VCU food pantry for low income staff, faculty, and students) and the Center for High Blood Pressure.

The second garden is located on the Monroe Park Campus and is focused on providing experiential learning opportunities for VCU students and Richmond community members around growing and accessing healthy food as well as growing a high volume of healthy, fresh produce for donation.

There are no plots for rent in this garden. Instead, a heavy focus is placed on maximizing it’s 1200 square foot footprint for high production of fruits and vegetables for donation to those in need. There is a heavy reliance on volunteers for this mission to succeed which provides excellent and ample opportunity for learning. This garden has been designed to utilize sustainable methods for high-output crop products and all available growing space, for maximum yield.

WOW!

From July 2015 to November 2015 our two 15’ x 8’ foot beds generated **150 pounds** of produce for donation, and almost **1,800 servings** of vegetables!