

Case Study #1: Smeal College of Business



The Smeal College of Business appointed two co-chairs for their sustainability planning effort, Dr. Gerry Susman and Dr. Terry Harrison. Dr. Susman and Dr. Harrison have been longtime scholars and internal advocates of sustainability strategy, were respected among their peers, and were therefore seen as the champions to move this initiative

forward. They chose the remaining task force members, consisting of faculty and staff from a broad range of departments. Key to their work was a view that sustainability was not simply an addendum to their curriculum, but transformational of it. Therefore, they identified high-level areas to target and developed an impact matrix to help determine the most important targets. They expected, after submitting the plan to their leadership, to need to revise the plan in order to meet the constraints of the unit. They were pleasantly surprised to find that leadership chose to adopt the entire plan as is.

Key Lessons & Recommendations:

- Decide on what needles you are trying to move, the key metrics you will track and report on.
- Recognize the potential risks of engaging with sustainability (e.g. greenwashing, companies using academia for public relations) and create mechanisms to identify and avoid them.
- Keep internal councils small enough to move quickly, large enough to be representative (ours are no more than 8 people).
- Promote diversity and inclusion, as recognizing sustainability is impossible without it.

Case Study #2: Penn State Mont Alto



As one of the first forestry schools in the nation, Penn State Mont Alto has “been at the forefront of the sustainability movement as early as the turn of the twentieth century,” says Dr. Francis K. Achampong, Chancellor of Penn State Mont Alto. Their

sustainability committee was formed to create the sustainability portion of their campus strategic plan with the hope that this prominence showcase sustainability as fundamental to campus identity, applicable to all roles. Goal 6 of their plan outlines commitments to 1) increase sustainability awareness, 2) integrate sustainability into practices and 3) collaborate and innovate. Each section has goals, actions and metrics.

Key Lessons & Recommendations:

- Membership on the sustainability committee should represent the system it is trying to impact.
- Outline what is already happening under the sustainability sphere helped underscore the breath of the concept.
- Walking through a gap analysis provides background information and drives leadership support.
- Transparency is key: Their website includes the charter, metrics, representation and annual progress reports.

Case Study #3: Penn State Public Media



Penn State Outreach’s Public Media Creative Group connects people through the power of film, video, and interactive stories. To integrate sustainability strategically into its unit, Public Media created a task force of individuals with an interest in sustainability and committed to

making the Sustainability Strategic Plan actionable in their unit. Most task force members consisted of representatives from middle management, project management, and the administrative staff. They developed a matrix of possible activities, the majority of which focused—at first—on waste management and energy use. In the end, they developed a number of more strategic projects linked to their core mission and unique abilities as the Public Media Creative Group: film, video and interactive stories about sustainability at Penn State and beyond.

Key Lessons & Recommendations:

- Begin with a shared understanding of sustainability and knowledge about what is already happening on campus and in the community.
- Arriving at their unique contribution as a unit, which is creating film and video, took some time, but when they found it, the whole process was energized and accelerated.
- Leadership support and ultimate buy-in is paramount to success.
- Create a team for planning and consider creating a separate team—with some overlap—for implementation.
- Planning committee should include a representative sub-set of the unit—including people with clout to “get stuff done”—not just the “environmentally” focused people in the office.