Measuring our Sustainability Progress

In February 2016, we completed our first comprehensive assessment of campus sustainability using the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System (STARS), developed by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), the professional organization for campus sustainability educators and practitioners. At that time, we were delighted — and honestly, more than a little surprised! — to earn a STARS Silver rating. It is unusual for relatively new sustainability efforts to do so well their first time out! Out of 875 institutions participating in the STARS program, 212 schools have earned STARS Silver ratings. Other Silver rated institutions include Carnegie Mellon, Elon College, Frostburg State, Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Ithaca College, Skidmore, St. Lawrence, and Princeton. Only 123 schools have so far earned STARS Gold, the rating level to which Wells aspires this time.

Given the progress we knew Wells had made in some areas in the months since we last reviewed ourselves, we decided to again undertake the rigorous, time-consuming process of self-assessment, this time using the updated version 2.1 of the STARS rubric. There are some changes between the STARS version 2.0 we used in 2016 and the current version. There are 63 different rating areas within five core areas (Academics, Engagement, Operations, Planning & Administration, and Innovation). Responding to each of the 60+ criteria necessitates data collection and information gathering from multiple sources around campus. These STARS assessments are definitely not an activity for the faint-hearted, but the information we glean is very useful in planning for further progress. We developed our sustainability action plan based upon our 2016 STARS results.

Some of the major areas of improvement we noted in this fall’s STARS assessment:

- We earned the maximum 14 points for Academic Courses; our catalog inventory found 127 courses offering significant sustainability-related content.
- We increased 15% in the number of academic programs with Sustainability Learning Outcomes.
- We leaped ahead in the number of students participating in our Sustainability Literacy Assessment.
- Our Finger Lakes Project workshop (see page 2) earned us 2 points for Incentives for Developing Courses.
- We advanced in Staff Professional Development.
- We jumped up 80% in Community Service.
- We improved 30% in Greenhouse Gas Emissions.
- Building Energy Consumption improved by 11%.
- We posted an impressive increase in sustainable foods, assessed under Food and Beverage Purchasing. This reviews the combined food buying for the Grind Café and the Wells Dining. In 2016, the Grind’s purchase of Fair Trade coffees and local foods pulled up Dining’s numbers to net 12% overall in local/certified food purchases. This time, Dining alone spent 24% on local and/or third party certified food items, including USDA Organic, Marine Stewardship Council certified seafood, and Animal Welfare approved meats.
- Wells Dining’s good work also earned us a higher score in Low Impact Dining. A side note: our incoming dining services contractor, Hallmark, is aware of this exceptional performance and has pledged to continue and even improve on these dining results in future.
- Facilities Services’ switch to more “green” cleaners earned a 19% bump in Cleaning Product Purchasing.
- We rose in the area of Employee Compensation.
- This time, we included letters of attestation for four sustainability innovations: creating the Career Clothing Exchange program to support our students’ needs for proper attire for internships or job interviews; the development of the Wells College Seed Exchange in our library; the novel Sustain-o-Cell educational assignment (see more page 2); and Wells’ active role as the only non-public, non-municipal Participating Organization in the Regional Solar Initiative which we hope will successfully conclude in 2018 with the development of our two campus solar installations. At press time, we have provisionally earned GOLD. We are busily checking our final entry. Wish us luck!

Wells is a “Green” School

Wells is listed in the 2017 edition of the Princeton Review’s Guide to 375 Green Schools, earning a 90/99 Green Rating. This is the same score we received last year because Princeton Review drew data from our February 2016 STARS sustainability assessment. STARS assessments are “good” for up to three years, but we elected to reassess ourselves at 18 months. At press time, we are finalizing our latest STARS assessment (see more above), but we should earn an even higher Green Rating next year. We have made significant progress in many areas the Green Rating looks at, including having a formal Sustainability Committee and Sustainability academic program, publicly sharing our annual greenhouse gas emissions inventories, our spending on local/organic food, having an anti-idling policy, and support for alternative transportation like our campus shuttles and Finger Lakes Rideshare program participation.
Out and About ...

Jaclyn Schnurr, professor of Biology and Environmental Science, and the students in her 2014 Ecology and Evolution course participated in a large-scale research project investigating buildings and bird-window collisions. The research, led by professors Stephen Hager of Augustana College and Bradley Cosentino of Hobart and William Smith Colleges, involved 300 buildings on 40 different North American campuses. Researchers tracked factors such as building size, place in the landscape, number of windows, surrounding structures, and more. Professor Schnurr co-authored their article, “Continental-scale analysis of how urbanization affects bird-window collision mortality in North America”, published in Biological Conservation.

Niamh O’Leary, Environmental Science professor, attended the 4th Annual Harmful Algal Blooms Seminar at Hobart & William Smith Colleges. This event was sponsored by the U.S. Green Building Council of Upstate NY. Professor O’Leary also attended the Harmful Algal Blooms Forum, sponsored by the Community Science Institute, in Ithaca NY.

The Latin American Solidarity Committee of the Western New York Peace Center invited Laura McClusky, professor of Sociology and Anthropology, and Michael Niman, SUNY Buffalo professor of Communication, to discuss the ways the government of Belize has ignored the 2015 Caribbean Court of Justice decision securing Maya land rights in southern Belize. They gave their talk, titled Maya Struggles in Southern Belize, at Canisius College.

Different ways to learn about sustainability

The Peachtown Native American Festival had a focus on climate change. The festival led off with the ritual planting of a peach tree by members of the Cayuga Nation and our own community, followed by a Social with dancing and native foods. A festival highlight was a Climate Change panel including native speakers and government experts, joined by economics professor Kent Klitgaard and Sustainability major Jonathan Mills ’18.

The Finger Lakes Project, our sustainability curriculum development workshop offered last May, gave educators strategies and tools to create sustainability coursework. Participants could apply for minigrants as a reward for successfully creating curricula incorporating our workshop content. The Center awarded $750 each to four minigrant applicants. Susan Allen-Gil, professor of Environmental Studies and Sciences at Ithaca College, will incorporate experiential learning into Topics in Pollution: Environmental Health and Medicine. In partnership with the county Health Department, students will analyze drinking water from wells around Cayuga Lake to determine if Harmful Algal Blooms toxins are affecting water quality. Christine Bezzo, associate professor of Biology at Elmira College, will incorporate a sustainable agriculture module into her Microbiology course. She will also develop a study abroad Sustainable Agriculture in Italy class. Karleen West, assistant professor of Political Science and International Relations, and Biology assistant professor SuAnn Yang, both from SUNY Geneseo, co-developed Food Sustainability across Disciplines, a free-standing curriculum module on sustainable food systems, to use in Principles of Ecology and Global Environmental Politics. The Sustainability Center received funding from the Jephson Educational Trust to deliver the 2017 FLP workshop and fund minigrants. Jephson is supporting next year’s workshop to which these minigrant awardees will be asked to present their successful sustainability curriculum development work.

Tom Vawter, faculty emeritus, authored a white paper on possible causes of this summer’s prevalence of Harmful Algal Blooms (HAB) in the Finger Lakes. Tom presented his HAB research during a Fall Faculty Club. For Fall Weekend, the Book Arts Center and the Sustainability Center teamed to offer Maker Day, a fun opportunity for folks to come and make things. We offered materials and supplies to upcycle waste items into new “things”, make buttons or slime, throw pottery clay, or make paper under Rich Kegler’s tutelage.

Putting our alumni to work

We invited three Wells alumnae back to campus to present during our Sustainability Perspectives speaker series. We are happy to welcome Wells grads working in sustainability-related fields to share their experience with current students and our local community. Mariam Raqib ’97, executive director of Afghanistan Samsortya, spent two very full days at Wells in September, participating in classes to talk about her work to reforest areas of her war-torn homeland of Afghanistan and support her peoples’ self-reliance and food sovereignty through re-establishing gardens.

Nancy Tillinghast ’69 spoke about her work as a Master Gardener in Virginia, designing and delivering public educational programs on various gardening practices. Nancy provided us with some of her excellent educational materials to use to improve our campus gardening program. Heather Frost ’09, who spoke about her work developing outdoor education activities for her students at Ithaca Montessori School, also taped an alumni video to “speak to” prospective students about her Wells experience.
9 Ways to Fill ‘er Up

This fall, we installed another four Elkah EZH2O water bottle fill stations on campus, bringing the total (so far!) to eight. The four newest locations are: Stratton Hall 1st floor (pictured below); backstage at Phipps Auditorium; Campbell Art Studio; and Schwartz Center 1st floor. The original four locations are: Macmillan North 1st and 3rd floors; Cleveland Hall 2nd floor; and the Smith Hall/ Sommer Center entry. We have identified additional campus locations to install these water fill stations that dispense chilled, filtered water; we seek funding to purchase more of them.

Dang! That was Easy!

Based upon our purchases last fiscal year, Staples provided us with an environmental report listing how much of our spend on office supplies was for items with “eco features”, like recycled content. 8% of the labels and tags, 27% of the presentation support (binders, folders), 30% of ink writing implements, 50% of Post-It Notes and index cards, and 86% of the filing products we bought had environmental attributes. We created a list of discounted Sustainable Products available thru Staples’ online system. Examples:

100% is 30% recycled...

Laurie Turo, administrative assistant for Academic and Student Life, purchases the paper for offices and copy rooms. Again this year, Laurie purchased only paper with 30% recycled content. Laurie buys through the New York State Contract program, which offers us great prices. It’s nice when you can do the right thing and save money, too!

Note: this picture is recycled from 2015.

A really good sign!

We spotted these new club meeting date signs, posted by the Japanese Culture Club on bulletin boards across campus. Besides the lovely Japanese themed artwork that graced the background, what we really liked about these signs was that they were laminated to be reusable. Using erasable whiteboard markers, club members could easily change out the sign to show the next meeting date. This is a really smart move, one we wish more clubs would emulate. Domo arigato, Japanese Club, for this great example of waste reduction and sustainable thinking and practice.

Print Releaf Progress

Our Information Technology group continues to work with Toshiba Print Management, the company with whom they contract to provide our network printers, to implement the Print Releaf program. Based on the number of pages Wells prints, for every tree’s worth of paper consumed, the Print Releaf reforestation partner our campus community selected, U.S.-based Trees Water & People, will plant a certain number of trees. Since July, Print Releaf certificates sent to us indicate that we have printed 377,073 pages. That paper usage equates to 45 trees that our Print Releaf partner will add to their reforestation project on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

We’re Cleanin’ Up

Based upon our evaluation this summer of cleaners used on campus for our STARS assessment of Cleaning Product Purchasing, we learned that 62% of the cleaning chemicals we use were GreenSeal certified to improve human health and reduce negative environmental impacts. To further boost this percentage, Facilities agreed to evaluate some new third party certified “green” cleaners. Steve Gelsi reported that Facilities tested out and is switching to Green Seal certified Spartan Excelenté all-purpose surface cleaner. Way to go to further clean up our act, guys!

New flippin’ signage

We finally redesigned the energy conservation reminder cards for placement near light switch plates around campus. These new cards update the originals first placed in summer of 2014, when the Sustainability Center opened. These new “flip the switch” cards—and similar replacement Water Wise reminders for bathroom placement—still feature Orson the Wells Owl, who seems to be quite popular among our campus community, despite his penchant for making snarky remarks and lame jokes.

Aurora Farmers Market has a Banner Year

The 2017 season for the Aurora Farmers Market did not get off to an auspicious start. The heavy rains in late spring flooded the college softball field, where the market was held its first two years. The market was temporarily relocated to the college Boathouse, but by the time the softball field dried out (late summer!), patrons and vendors alike expressed their preference for the boathouse location, so we stayed. This location, while a little problematic due to parking pressure, the slope from parking level to the market, and less visibility from Route 90, meant that many more Wells students and campus visitors could easily cross the highway to access our market. Our student market manager, Melinda Pitman ’18, did a tremendous job with increasing our social media outreach. She offered weekly farmers market basket giveaways which proved very popular. Our market vendor base grew from 26 in 2016 to 30 this year, and the diversity of product offerings rose as well, from gourmet dog bones to homemade ice cream, pottery to potpourri. We experienced a 25% lift in patron attendance, with more than 5,000 shoppers visiting. So look for us, starting in June 2018, at our permanent Boathouse location.
**Sustainability** is a decision-making framework for continuous improvement that mindfully takes into account the social, environmental, and economic impacts of our choices.

### Different ways to teach about sustainability...

Wells was one of 34 NY schools participating in the Campus Crunch, an observance of National Food Day (Oct 24). We held our Campus Crunch starting at Tea Time in the Grind Café. In exchange for signing a pledge to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables, “Crunchers” received a free, locally-grown apple. 60 members of our campus community participated. Apples not “crunched” into during our Campus Crunch were donated to the Wells Campus Greens to use for their apple pie fundraiser to benefit the SHARE Farm in Union Springs.

A new campus club, Blend, formed to inform its members about why and how to seek beauty and personal care products made from natural materials. Blend workshops taught how to make lip balm with beeswax and skin scrubs with brown sugar and coconut oil. One club founder, Yequarah Conner ’19 (third from left), was in this fall’s Introduction to Sustainability class, where one unit examines such products. Yequarah invited Sustainability Center director Marian Brown to attend a Blend workshop to reprise her class presentation titled “Down and Dirty,” about toxic ingredients in common personal care products and how to make more informed, sustainable choices. Yequarah also studied her experience co-creating this new club and educating her peers as her final project for that sustainability class.

The Center for Sustainability and the Cayuga Lake Floating Classroom teamed to host the 7th grade class from southern Cayuga Central School for a day-long field trip. The class split into three groups rotating every 90 minutes among an art project upstairs in the Wells College Boathouse, an interactive lake cruise aboard the Floating Classroom, and a visit to the Sustainability Center, where students took part in six different activities related to water use. We were joined for part of the day by Hilary Lambert, Water Steward for the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network, whose office is on campus in Stratton Hall. Among the activities were our water challenge, pitting Wells’ drinking water against two national bottled water brands in a blind taste test, and a station to calculate how much water the students’ families use on a daily basis. These 7th graders studied two shampoos, doing the same personal care product ingredient analysis that students in this fall’s SUS 101 class performed, and which Blend club members also did in their sustainability workshop (more at left).

Sustainable Business series speaker Dan Smolen used part of his campus residency in October to record three audio interviews with President Jon Gibralter. Smolen, managing director of The Green Suit LLC, offers a podcast series titled “The Tightrope” that focuses on the hopes and dreams- and fears and anxieties- of professionals seeking success in today’s turbulent workforce and world. Smolen’s invited guests include thought-leaders from recruitment, workforce empowerment, business, media, academia, and the social good sectors. The podcasts with President Gibralter include the title shown; hear all three at https://dansmolen.wordpress.com

### Contributing to others’ sustainability learning...

During the 21st Century Leadership Award celebration, on Saturday, September 16, students accepted for this prestigious Admission program were afforded the opportunity to sit in on mock classes, two of which were related to sustainability. Economics professor Kent Kligaard presented The Economic Impacts of Fossil Fuels, Climate Change, and Lessons from the 2017 Hurricane Season. Sustainability Center director Marian Brown offered a sample unit from her Introduction to Sustainability course, focusing on enhancing the students’ knowledge of proper commingled recycling practices.

In October, director Brown was invited to guest lecture on the topic of Environmental Justice for a graduate level Environmental Health class at Ithaca College. An article Brown wrote about the Sustain-a-Cell project (see page 2) was included in the October newsletter of the New York State Association for Reduction, Reuse & Recycling (NYSAR) and Brown was invited to join the planning committee for that organization’s annual conference.

Brown consulted to a student team from the Pace University Entrepreneurship Club about their proposed enterprise project to turn fresh produce, especially so-called “ugly fruit” that would otherwise go to waste, into fresh fruit smoothies. Wells’ Bargain Basement reuse area was featured in a compendium of responses to a school representative’s query on the national RECYCL-ls system about the existence and management of year-round donation collection programs in residence halls.