

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Grassroots Weekly General Interest Meeting

March 26, April 2
8:00—9:00 p.m.
Ruth Merrill Center, Wilson Commons

Engineers for a Sustainable World Meeting

March 28, April 4
8:00—9:00 p.m.
Conference Room 507, Wilson Commons

Sustainability Seminar: “What do you see?”

Documenting Climate Change in Upstate New York”

March 29
12:30—1:30 p.m.
Goergen 110

Earth Fest Meeting (Grassroots)

March 30, April 6
8:00—9:00 p.m.
Ruth Merrill Center, Wilson Commons

Recyclemania Music Party Finale (Hosted by Grassroots)

March 31
8:00 p.m.
Community Learning Center

Sustainability Seminar: “Sustainability Initiatives at RIT” by Senior Sustainability Advisor to the President, RIT

April 12
12:30—1:30 p.m.
Goergen 110

Sustainability Seminar Speaker: Tom Wilber, Journalist and Author of “Under the Surface: Fracking, Fortunes, and the Fate of the Marcellus Shale”

April 24
12:30—1:30 p.m.
Hubbell Auditorium

SUSTAINABILITY SPOTLIGHT

The SolarDok: Weak Economics but Worthy Debate

For schools across the nation, efforts to achieve sustainability objectives are rising ever higher on the scale in importance in the budgeting process. Our University has historically sought to balance a commitment to sustainable operations with a fiscally conservative approach to evaluating sustainability initiatives.

This is reflected in the “Statement of Commitment and Environmental Sustainability Action Principles” in the University Council on Environmental Sustainability’s 2008 report to President Seligman, which states that “This University is committed to sustainable development and operating practices through the management of building design, construction, renovation, landscape practices, energy use, waste, emissions, transportation, and procurement while maintaining regulatory compliance and exercising fiscal responsibility.”

The report’s “Recommended Operations Priorities” lists twenty-one separate initiatives either underway, in the planning process, or under review at that time. The range of priorities includes maximization of cogeneration load; green printing practices; retro-commissioning of University buildings; optimization of laboratory airflows; utility system upgrades; the purchase of green energy; and campaigns to affect end-user behavior. Each was evaluated in terms of investment and payback period, and prioritized by cost and impact. Today, most of these initiatives have been implemented and are generating financial savings.

According to Joe Viterna, Maintenance Manager of Facilities and Services, the University also works with firms to scope out energy efficient initiatives to invest in. Viterna says that the process to evaluate investments is “tough” and that a “check and balance” exists, resulting in a meticulous, thorough decision-making process.

This steady and careful approach is paying off in ways other than economic. The College Sustainability Report Card, the only comparative evaluation of campus and endowment sustainability activities at colleges and universities in the United States and Canada, gives the University an “A-,” based on consideration of 52 separate factors. In addition to this, University Facilities & Services collaborates with the New York State Energy Research Development (NYSERDA) program and has earned rebates from the program totaling \$25,000, which have been used to purchase new, more energy-efficient equipment.

Yet balancing a budget while advancing sustainability is a complex issue, in part due to the absence of clear, immediate financial returns from some investments. The recent acquisition of a solar bench – the [SolarDok](#) located outside of Rush Rhees library – prompted [critique](#) from UR Economics Professor Michael Rizzo, who questioned the economic costs and environmental benefits of the investment.

The professor makes the point that the cost paid to produce the “free electricity” is unreasonably high, and that the manufacture of the bench may not be environmentally friendly, as harmful materials were used in its construction. Now under the University’s ownership, the

Continued on next page





CONTACTS & RESOURCES:

[Sustainability @ the University of Rochester](#)

Facilities
[The Green Dandelion](#)

Dining Services
[Team Green](#)

SA Student Sustainability
Coordinator
[Will Finnie](#)

The Environmental Sustainability
UCIS
[Karen Berger](#)

Council on Sustainability
[Karen Berger](#)
[Cam Schauf](#)

Sustainability within the
community:
[Center for Environmental Information](#)
[EnvironmentRochester.com](#)

E&E Publishing, LLC
Environment & Energy Publishing (E&E) is the leading source for comprehensive, daily coverage of environmental and energy policy and markets.

investment acts as something that produces “free” electrical, off-the-grid power with zero carbon emission. However, it is true that the benefit of using this free power will never come close to recuperating the cost of the bench. Professor Rizzo makes fair points.

In fact, the bench did not fall under the University’s payback policy spelled out in the Council’s report. Its value was assessed from a different angle, as a promotional tool that demonstrates the University’s commitment to sustainability.

Given the points about its true energy costs and environmentally unfriendly construction, the SolarDok was not the best investment. Director of Facilities Support Operations Patricia Beaumont acknowledges that perhaps this purchase offers the “lesson in that there isn’t always a right answer to everything.”

Yet sustainability is a complex and financially intricate issue. Its value and the initiatives that support it are not purely economic. In the end, sustainability is about *what* we value, what kind of world we want to live in, and what responsibility we feel toward the generations who will follow us. These are not quantitative matters.

As for the controversy over the SolarDok, value can be realized even from shaky investments when they evoke constructive dialogue and collaboration among people with different perspectives, including people who see economic value clearly and those who feel passion for a cause. This kind of partnership can create the most sound decisions and sustainable investments.

HIGHLIGHTS

Fall Semester Course Explores Environmental Literary Works

A new course for the fall 2012 semester, ENG/CAS245: “Literature & the Modern Environmental Imagination” invites students to study how, amidst social, economic, and

technological change, writers imagine relationships to place and environment. Taught by Professor Leila C. Nadir, the class will focus on a variety of issues, ranging from ecotourism to the rise of megacity to the conquest of indigenous peoples. Students will peruse a selection of American environmental literary works

as a way to discuss the modern environmental imagination across art, literature, culture, and how it applies to students’ own lives. According to the syllabus, many of the readings place emphasis on the search for a meaningful way of life in a time of mobility and flux. ENG/CAS 245 will be held on Mondays and Wednesdays from 3:25 to 4:40 p.m.

University Plunges into Innovative Chiller Modernization Project

In partnership with EOS Climate, Inc., a global producer of verified emission reductions (VERS), and Carrier, a company that provides air conditioning, heating and refrigeration solutions, the



University is working on a chiller modernization project that will deliver the most advanced, environmentally friendly cooling system to students, faculty and staff. According to the [CSR press release](#), the project will bring “advanced technology, environmental stewardship and cost savings” to the campus and URM. In its first phase, the project will prevent

emissions of 56,000 metric tons of greenhouse gases. In consultation with Carrier, the University will work to enhance the performance of one of its primary chiller systems by installing new, advanced energy-efficient components, controls and non-ozone depleting refrigerant. The chiller is one of five in a 21,000 ton chilled water plant that services 158 buildings in the University’s zone.

SUSTAINABILITY:

Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

[United Nations](#)



For information about the newsletter:
Michaela Kerem ‘15
Editor
mkerem@u.rochester.edu

