Making a Difference: Universities as Living Labs and Agents of Change

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A New Social Contract?

“It is time to construct a new social contract between research universities and tier public and private partners; one that both promotes the pursuit of basic research and encourages solution-driven work.”  

(Samarasekara, 2009) in Nature

This has also been called the “Third Mission” of universities.  
(e.g. Pinheiro et al, 2015)
Campus as Sustainability Test-Bed

Universities uniquely suited for this role:

- Single (owner-) occupiers
- Public mandate
- Teaching
- Research

Develop integrated sustainability solutions:

- Demonstration and research
- Engage and train students; develop new curricula and programs
Responding to societal challenges

Two cross-cutting approaches:

Campus as Living Lab

University as Agent of Change
Institutional Culture Change

Academic

Operational

Academic

Operational
Regenerative Sustainability

Simultaneously increase human
And environmental wellbeing

(What processes? At what scale? Role of universities . . .)
CLL/AOC typology

• Different models
  – Centre-led (UBC, Chalmers)
  – Distributed (U of T)
  – Hybrid (CBS)

• Most universities in latter two categories, at least at the start
Mandate: to identify ways to advance the University’s contribution to meeting the challenge of climate change, with a particular focus on research and innovation, teaching, and University operations.
Three Subcommittees

1. **CAMPUS AS LIVING LAB**
   - Pursue campus as ‘test bed’ for environmental and sustainability research and best practices
   - new renewable energy projects
   - tri-campus clean-tech challenge
   - Utilities Reduction Revolving Fund
   - more rigorous energy efficiency standards
   - One Spadina
   - St. George Retrofit Study
   - Trinity College
   - Sussex residence
   - King’s College Circle (?)
   - Student engagement
   - Sustainability Fellows

2. **AGENT OF CHANGE IN THE COMMUNITY**
   - Identify opportunities to motivate culture change internally and externally
   - tri-campus clean-tech challenge
   - Collaboration with industry
   - Strong partnerships with the private and public sectors and civil society
   - Sussex residence
   - Student engagement
   - Sustainability Fellow

3. **CURRICULUM REFORM**
   - Inventory of courses and research
   - $750,000 for climate-change related academic initiatives
   - climate change-related themes in selected programs and curricula
   - Promote student opportunities/achievements
   - Student engagement
   - Pathways concept
   - Sustainability Fellows
Student Engagement

• Goal: thousands of students working with partners on sustainability projects
  • Both graduate and undergraduate
  • 5000 off campus/1000 on campus
• Two models
  • For pay – internships; work-study
  • For credit – community engaged learning on- and off-campus
• ATLAS grant
  • Inventory of courses and CE learning
  • Inventory of potential partners
  • Match-making!
Teaching & Learning Vision: Integration across the University

Each student, regardless of their degree program, should have access to an education in sustainability via a “sustainability learning pathway” (UBC Sustainability Academic Strategy, 2009)