Growing a Greek Sustainability Program

IUOS Greek Community Intern Annual Report

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Table of Contents:

- Introduction & Overview
- Greek Sustainability History
- Impetus
- Goals for Program
- Program Approach & Strategies
- Program Details
- Future Steps
- Conclusion/ Implications
- Bibliography
Introduction:

In an effort to broaden the reach and initiatives of its programming, the IU Office of Sustainability (IUOS) recently created a new internship position for IU’s Greek community. The IUOS Greek Community intern is to engage with fraternities and sororities on campus to facilitate sustainability practices and further develop a culture of care throughout individual chapters. The Greek community intern position was designed to further engage in strategic planning and determine opportunities for the Greek system to contribute to the university’s goals of reducing the campus’ environmental footprint.

As a result of the new IUOS Greek Community internships, a coalition has been formed between the IUOS, Student Life and Learning (SLL), the Panhellenic Association (PHA), the Interfraternity Council (IFC) and UNIFY. The coalition encourages all Greek chapters to appoint a Chapter Sustainability Chair (CSC) to internally manage sustainability initiatives for their organization. The CSC position provides a new and exciting leadership opportunity for chapter members and allows for further development of new and existing sustainability-related initiatives. Support and resources from IU Office of Sustainability ensure that the chairs are offered the appropriate university guidance and support.

As a microcosm of the greater campus population, the Greek community yields a great deal of opportunity to reduce waste and institute more sustainable living practices. As the IUOS’s Greek Community intern, I have created an online resource guide of potential initiatives demonstrated in other chapters on campus. Using this training manual and additional IUOS support, the CSC’s are to collaborate with their chapters and assess the feasibility of the most suitable initiatives. With a network of active and passionate sustainability chairs, the Greek community can lead the campus in reducing its environmental footprint and make an impact on the IOUS’ 2020 vision.

Greek Sustainability History:

The Office of Sustainability defines sustainability as “thriving within our means to achieve balance between environmental health, economic
prosperity, and social equity”. For IU’s Greek system, sustainability issues have included resource conservation, solid waste reduction, environmental awareness, and recycling. These topics have been troubling the Greek community in its more recent history and have slowly been emerging as a priority amongst the community’s leaders.

Established in 2009, the Greeks Go Green student organization was the only existing organized group of environmentally conscious Greek community members. As a voluntary club, Greeks Go Green was perceived to have inconsistent attendance and participation. To a certain extent, the club encouraged recycling and sustainability programs but was only somewhat effective at reducing pollution and promoting a greener, cleaner environment. Without the collaborative efforts of the Greek system’s leading bodies, IFC and PHA, an official sustainability program remained blatantly absent. After three years of slow-moving activity, the Greeks Go Green group lost traction and ceased to meet.

Impetus:

Despite past efforts to unify Greek organizations and promote better waste and energy management, the opportunity for an effective Greek sustainability program was never fully explored. In response to this shortfall, the IUOS created the Greek Community internship position to jumpstart sustainability initiatives in IU’s Greek life. As the IU Greek Community intern, it is my core mission to assemble and organize a lasting (or sustainable) program that connects all chapters through a network of Chapter Sustainability Chairs (CSCs). Governed by IUOS, IFC, and PHA, the overarching goals of the program are to reduce the community’s total environmental impact. The new position gives a revitalized focus for participating chapters to develop their own sustainability initiatives and become more involved with IUOS’ existing programs.

Goals for Program:

While the IU Office of Sustainability’s primary intention was to engage with the Greek demographic, the CSC program assists the IUOS in reaching their determined 2020 Vision. The 2020 Vision is an official IOUS document
stating 20 goals the office aspires to achieve by the year 2020. 2020 Vision goals include areas such as: ‘Academic Programs’, ‘Funding’, and ‘Environmental Quality’. In more direct relation to the Greek community, areas of focus involve: ‘Leadership’, ‘Energy, Atmosphere & the Built Environment’, ‘Food Purchasing’, and ‘Transportation’.

Integration with the Greek community allows the IUOS expand the reach of its pre-established events and initiatives. This integration will help the IUOS gain further involvement from Greek members. The CSC position is likely to enhance IUOS’ programs by raising awareness, increasing participation, and expanding the influence of initiatives. Utilizing the ability to communicate with individual chapters, the IUOS programs will be able to reach 1000’s of new students throughout the Greek system’s 52 chapters.

Program Approach & Strategies

To orchestrate an official program and a new CSC position for the Greek community’s chapters, it was essential to first connect with the community’s governing bodies. From my experience of establishing a CSC position in my own chapter, Phi Kappa Psi, I understood that a top-down approach was necessary. Involving the governing bodies safeguards the CSC position’s legitimacy and opens up opportunities for successive support. To cultivate all necessary relationships, it was essential to first identify all the associated stakeholders.

Before approaching the Interfraternity Council (IFC) and the Panhellenic Association (PHA), it was important to get the Office of Student Life and Learning (SLL) and UNIFY on board. The Office of SLL is a critical stakeholder in the Greek sustainability program because they oversee all PHA and IFC activities. UNIFY is a student organization aimed at connecting all Greek chapters towards campus involvement. With Student Life and Learning and UNIFY’s approval and encouragement, I began to reach out to executive board members of IFC and PHA.

SLL’s support allowed me the opportunity to attended joint PHA and IFC president’s gavel meetings where I introduced the IUOS’ goal of establishing a new position for each chapter. To gauge and baseline the status of existing Greek recycling initiatives, I sent out a questionnaire to all IFC & PHA presidents. The questionnaire included questions such as “Does
your chapter have a person in charge of sustainability issues?” and “Does your chapter currently offer recycling”. Of the 19 returned responses, only 7 chapters offered recycling services. Moreover, all the chapters that offered recycling were affiliated with PHA, who pale in comparison to the bottle and can consumption and waste produced by IFC’s “social” chapters.

After addressing the IFC and PHA presidents, it was clear that there was still a great opportunity to institute a Chapter Sustainability Chair for the majority of the community. The next step was to develop a job description including the reasoning for the new position, its benefits for the chapter and for the chair, and the basic qualifications necessary. In summation, the position was created to help embed sustainability into the Greek community culture and reduce its environmental footprint. The opportunity to create an impact program and gain positive publicity amongst their national organizations was the major benefits for the chapters. The chairs were able to benefit from the new position through leadership opportunities, the chance to leave a legacy, and the ability to learn relevant and marketable management and sustainability-related skills. Qualifications were minimal as the position only requires active and passionate leaders.

**Program Website & Training Manual:**

The election of CSCs is instrumental for the IUOS, as the chairs will have the unique ability to directly relay information about IUOS events and initiatives to their chapter members. Beyond their inherent role as correspondents, the basis of their position is to develop and manage their own chapter initiatives. To prepare the CSCs for this task, it was critical for the IUOS to develop the necessary resources and guidance for sustainability program development. The addition of the ‘Greek Community’ page to IUOS’ website provides Greek members with a central location to find Greek sustainability news, learn about upcoming events, and seek further support. For the CSCs, the website hosts the link for the CSC Training Manual. The training manual is compromised of foundational information and instruction on how CSCs are to spearhead new sustainability programs for their chapters.

The Site:
As mentioned, the IUOS’ website provides Greek members with a central location to find Greek sustainability news, learn about upcoming events, and seek further support. In contrast, the main Greek Community page offers advice to tips for general Greek members to live sustainably and reduce their environmental impact in areas such as waste, water and energy consumption, and bad transportation habits. The page also features a calendar, recognition of leading chapters in events such as the Greek Energy Challenge, and access to sign up for the monthly IUOS Greek newsletter. The site is an excellent resource for CSCs and general Greek members alike.

The Training Manual:

As the main website exists for the benefit of Greek community members interested in sustainability, the CSC Training Manual is designed for CSCs. The CSC Training Manual serves as the real substance for IUOS’ instruction on chapter program development. The training manual identifies six key areas where the chairs can learn to identify and target specific impactful initiatives. The six key areas are Stakeholders & Goals, Water and Energy Efficiency, Waste/Recycling, Kitchen Policies, Transportation, and Chapter Participation. Similar to the main website, each area of focus offers tips to reduce ones negative impact, but is uniquely written to direct CSCs on how to best approach each area of focus on a chapter wide basis. The areas of focus in the training manual give specific examples of initiatives and approaches, and describe how to best undertake them to achieve desired results. While the program is still new, the CSC training manual leaves opportunity for growth and expansion as new initiatives can be added after monthly CSC group meetings begin. The areas of focus are as follows:

Stakeholders:
The ‘Stakeholders & Goals’ section directs the CSCs on ways go about identifying, contacting, and managing relationships with their primary stakeholders. The chapter members, house mom, housing director, and the kitchen and maintenance staff all play an important part in the chapter’s daily functions. These key stakeholders were identified based on my personal experience as CSC for Phi Kappa Psi. Identifying these stakeholders will help the CSCs in logistically moving along their projects and initiatives. More than just identifying the stakeholders, the section also
defines their roles and advises CSCs on how to best approach them for the desired cooperation.

Other Areas of Focus:

The Chapter Efficiency (Water & Energy), Waste & Recycling, Kitchen Policies, Transportation, and Chapter Participation sections all identify the best approaches to logistically move along projects and initiatives. CSCs are offered opportunities for individual consulting with the IUOS Greek Community intern to allow for direct advice on how to set goals and institute initiatives. The Chapter Efficiency section focuses on the building’s use and misuse of energy and water. The Waste & Recycling portion offers resources to signing up for recycling services and recommendations on how to rethink, reduce, and reuse in addition to recycling. The Kitchen Policies section offers strategies to reduce disposable kitchen products, encourages the purchase of local or organic foods, and supports practices such as composting and efficient food disposal. The Transportation section is very similar to the main website’s transportation page as it offers tips on the least environmentally impactful ways to travel around campus. Similarly, the Events & Participation section aligns with the website’s offering of links to the annual Energy Challenge page, a Green Events checklist, and information about other IUOS sponsored services or events.

Other sections on the Greek Community page recognize leading chapters in sustainability and provide additional resources like the Greek Sustainability Pledge. The Greek Sustainability Pledge is a form that can be sent out to each chapter’s members that requests respondents to pledge or agree to commitments for sustainable practices. The pledge will consist of a list of commitments with checkboxes next to each available option. Greek chapter members can select one or more initiatives they plan to stick to for the upcoming year. Pledges are renewed on an annual basis to confirm commitments and have the option to add, remove and renew pledges. These pledges will be electronically signed by individual chapter managers and will be tallied for each chapter. Pledge commitments include taking shorter showers, turning off unused tights in bathrooms and hallways, recycling whenever possible. Whether the members choose to fulfill their
commitments or not, it has been proven that the simple acceptance of responsibility makes people more accountable for their actions (Fostering Sustainable Behavior).

**Future Steps/ Conclusion:**

As the election of the Chapter Sustainability Chairs is just a foundation for an expansive Greek sustainability program, there are future implications for the next Greek community intern. The program will grow as the sustainability movement begins to take hold, and the objectives and initiatives for the Greek community are also likely to evolve. New students will be coming in with new ideas for programming and many of the initiatives for the Greek houses or chapters will become outdated. It is therefore my recommendation to the IUOS to hire a new intern for the 2013-2014 school year to continue the influence of the Greek sustainability program on IU’s campus.

While I cannot determine the goals for all future Greek community interns, there are a few specific recommendations for the succeeding intern as he takes on his new role. As the CSCs begin to implement initiatives in their chapters, there will be certain houses that apply more effort to programs or make more of an impact through their changes. It suggest that an performance metric accounting point system be designed for the participating Greek chapters. Accounting for initiatives or direct data (i.e. energy & water usage) for programs is a challenging but necessary task. With the creating of a point system, the Greek chapters will become competitive by nature and look to improve their programs to “out-sustain” others. It is therefore in the IUOS’ best interest to establish and regulate (with the assistance of PHA/IFC) and designated point value for each initiative. At the years end, an award of recognition and perhaps a financial incentive can be presented to the leading chapter. With the competitive nature of Greek life, a competition such as this will surely increase interest and participation from the various Greek chapters.

In addition to creating a point oriented sustainability accounting system, the succeeding intern will need to further develop and maintain the CSC Training manual and IUOS Greek webpage. I hope that a monthly newsletter can be published and sent out to all chapters. This newsletter
would give insight into upcoming challenges, events and programs for Greeks. Furthermore, the newsletter will be a means for CSCs to stay connected with their chapters, even if they only forward the e-mail. The newsletter will be a key component for the website and CSCs so I strongly advise that it be developed.

Another suggestion for the Greek website is a link to IU Greek Sustainability social media sites. The social media sites do not currently exist so the following intern would have to devise them and update content for them. Social media is a great way to keep students informed and is a rational component for student outreach. Getting non-housed chapters involved in sustainability matters is a key focus for the IUOS and social media is a foundational approach to this issue.

Lastly, there have been a few opportunities for the diversification of the Greek intern’s role that will become more relevant in the upcoming year. As previously mentioned, finding a way to get non-housed chapters more involved will be the primary challenge for the next intern. Involvement in Greek tailgating policy is one way that the intern’s dealings can affect both housed and non-housed Greek chapters. Moreover, collaboration with new organizations like Green Rush, a Greek run nonprofit who are looking to unify Greek recycling efforts by creating an incentive-based recycling program, will continue to emerge. It is important for the following intern to understand that the Greek sustainability program is still in its infancy, which means that it is still in the process of being molded and developed. With a strong foundation and an open outlook, the Greek community has the opportunity to make a major impact on the university’s sustainability goals. With the proper direction and foresight, the program yields promise.