Green Purchasing Annual Report 2013

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Introduction: Leaders all over the world are currently trying to thwart the consequences of Global Climate Change and environmental degradation, stemming in part from humans’ unsustainable consumption habits. As a Big Ten University with over forty-two thousand in attendance, Indiana University (IU) plays a large role in contributing to our consumption as a nation. However, this role presents IU with a unique opportunity to emerge as a leader in the struggle for more sustainable procurement among universities and other large institutions. As a university that demands excellence in all areas of academics, research, campus operations, and community development, IU has a responsibility to continue that excellence in its pursuit of a more sustainable campus.

One of the key issues this internship looked at this academic year was the lack of accessibility to information regarding the social and environmental impacts of individual university purchases. At the start of the academic year, the university did not have a very detailed system to allow faculty and staff members to fully evaluate the goods they purchase, from a social, environmental, as well as economic perspective. This internship looked at strategies that were both upstream and downstream of a purchase, to attempt to remediate this issue. The upstream strategies included initiatives that operate before user interaction and focused on the opportunities that exist in altering vendor contracts, shifting to bulk procurement strategies, acquiring data about purchase history and tracking, and working systemically before the user access stage. From the downstream perspective, where the user interacts with the system, this internship looked to create a more user-friendly purchasing process that promotes more informed choices through greater accessibility and availability of sustainable products.
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**Purchasing Process**

**Contract**
IU makes a contract with a specific company, detailing the price and other logistics involved with any purchase.

**Online Catalog**
The purchaser goes into an online catalog of available products and services that have already been predetermined in the contract.

**Order**
Once the purchaser has searched through the online catalog and found the product they were looking for, they select it and place an order.

*Contract*: The timeframe can be 60 days to 6 months, depending on complexity and scope of the contract. “Micro Contracts” that are used by few departments for specific and unusual needs (usually a research lab) can be arranged in short order. Larger, institutional contract can take months especially if IU is engaged in a consortium agreement with multiple institutions.

*Online catalog*: IU’s e-commerce partner, SciQuest, assists vendors with contract implementations and can have an online contract available in a timeframe of 1 or 2 months depending on the technological level of the vendor.

*Order*: Most orders placed via an electronic catalog are sent to the vendor on the same day they are created. A department’s fiscal officer (or delegate) must approve the expenditure and then the order is transmitted to the vendor—this can happen in a very short timeframe of just several minutes.
History of Green Purchasing:

In the summer of 2009, the Office of Sustainability and the Office of Procurement Services hired their first sustainability-focused procurement intern, Madoka Yoshino, a Fulbright Scholar from Japan. Madoka created a green purchasing resources webpage for the Office of Procurement Services.

Oral Saulters, a doctoral student at the School of Public and Environmental Affairs, served as the second intern in the summer of 2012. Oral examined the purchasing process systemically and made recommendations regarding surveys and research that would advance sustainability within Procurement Services. Specifically, he provided background on the Sustainability Tracking Assessment and Rating System (STARS) reporting process for procurement related data, and provided a suggested procedure for using STARS objectives as metrics, in conjunction with a suggested sustainability dashboard, to measure and monitor future progress. At the end of his studies, Oral acknowledged that professionals needed quality training, resources to communicate sustainable procurement policies, as well as a more user-friendly platform for sustainable procurement.

Strategies:

I have categorized the strategies utilized throughout the internship into two general categories: “Vendor Input – Data Management” and “Green Purchasing: The User End.” The first section will discuss what opportunities exist for improvement on the vendor side of procurement upstream and the strategies I utilized to pursue these opportunities. This section also breaks down the process I took to acquire data for the Campus Working Groups. The second section covers the user end of the procurement process downstream, where I detail strategies created to increase user accessibility to sustainable options in the procurement system.
Through working with vendors and the IU Office of Procurement, we have been able to foster more sustainable options for the users involved in the procurement process at Indiana University. This academic year I have met with HP Products, Gordon Food Service, Fisher Scientific, and Guy Brown to help further our goals of a green purchasing process.

### Vendor Input - Data Management

Through working with the IU Office of Procurement, I have been able to facilitate specific data acquisition for the working groups for future tracking purposes. The previous green purchasing intern Oral Saulters had sent a survey out to all of the campus working groups, requesting input regarding the status of green purchasing efforts within their focus area and methods IU can pursue to improve their purchasing process. A specific section of this

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survey asked the working groups what data requirements and information needs could be important priorities in green purchasing decision making. From the responses to this section, I have worked to obtain the data requirements for the various working groups who had requested data. The main request I worked to fulfill was a request from Victor Borden of the Sustainable Computing Working Group.

Mr. Borden suggested annual counts of the amount and types of products purchases in a set of organized categories related to sustainability, such as food, paper, toner, and computing devices. Specifically, the Sustainable Computing Working Group was looking to capture data for servers, desktop computers (Energy Star/EPEAT vs. other), laptops, printers, toner cartridges, and paper (distinguishing between those with high content recycled stock). In order to successfully acquire this information, I had to connect each specific contract manager within the Office of Procurement Services to the category of the data requested. There are different contract managers for each type of product that we were looking for. Mr. Borden and the Sustainable Computing Working Group plan to use this data to analyze our current sustainable purchasing trends, and how we can improve upon these practices in the future.

In my experience working with Karin Coopersmith, a Purchasing Contract Manager focusing in furniture purchases, we have been able to gather information on eight different furniture vendors from which IU frequently purchases. This information varies from noting the supply chain strategies and the packaging/shipping materials associated with their products, to describing any resource efficiency initiatives within their organization. A full spreadsheet was created detailing the responses for all 11 questions that were included in the Sustainability Questionnaire that was sent out to each furniture vendor. A copy of the questionnaire as well as the spreadsheet detailing the vendors’ responses can be found in the appendix of this report.

Through the success that we have found from this questionnaire with the furniture vendors, I would recommend that a future intern work to create another questionnaire. This questionnaire could be similar to this one, but would be sent out with any Request for Proposal (RFP) for the vendors we are working with. This can work as an effective way to categorize the vendor information in a more simplistic manner, highlighting what organizations excel in specific areas of interest within the larger sustainability issues. This would also allow us to gain information on a larger number of the vendors we work with without having to schedule a time for everyone to meet. One specific method that is currently being discussed is the idea of sending out this questionnaire along with the annual checklist that the IU Office of Procurement Services sends out to all of the vendors at the end of each fiscal year.
Green Purchasing: The User End

Green Purchasing Guide

As well as working with the vendors to enhance opportunities for more sustainable options, this internship also focused on enhancing the accessibility of these purchasing opportunities. One of the final products of this internship is the Green Purchasing Guide, which can be found in the appendix. The goal of this guide is to create a user-friendly resource that can aid any university community member in making more sustainable choices when using the purchasing system. The guide covers three sections in the purchasing life cycle: Purchasing Decisions, Usage, and Disposal. The below graphic serves as a framework for the rest of the guide, depicting each section and the potential for change that exists in each decision in the product life cycle. As you can see from the graphic, the amount of waste we produce can be significantly reduced based on the decisions we make. The most effective method to reducing waste is by first, examining what we purchase.

Opportunities for Making Informed Purchasing Decisions
The first section on Purchasing Decisions includes various suggestions detailing aspects of user’s current purchasing system that can be modified (e.g. coordinating with departments when making purchases to both reduce packaging and promote bulk ordering) to reduce purchasing and waste. The following sections, Usage and Disposal, both prepared by No-Waste Coordinator Mark Milby, detail what the user can do with the product and its packaging once it has been purchased. We believe that this guide will be helpful in the future to anyone looking to make more sustainable choices in the procurement process. A copy of the Green Purchasing Guide can be found in the appendix of this report.

The Green Procurement Guide, created this year by myself and Mark Milby the No-Waste Program Coordinator, is a tool that is meant to be continually updated as more information and strategies become available. One specific aspect that can be updated within the guide is to document common vendors for the users, and incorporating a brief summary of the sustainability information that I have acquired. Another future opportunity for the Green Purchasing Guide would be to include a section that describes the green flags as well as the certifications that go along with them. This would give the users a better idea of how to use these flags and better utilize the tools provided to them. Also, adding a glossary section at the end of the guide, detailing terms commonly discussed such as “approved vendor,” could be a great way to make the guide easier to read, while getting future interns acquainted with the system.

*Green-Flagging*

Along with the creation of the Green Purchasing Guide, this year I have worked toward the idea of “green flagging” in the product-purchasing phase to provide increased user access to sustainable purchasing choices. We define “green flagging” as the process of determining products or services considered green or sustainable, then flagging these products with a particular green flag or logo. From here, I would set these “green flagged” items to float to the top of a product search in the system. The logic that I am using for this initiative is that if the user has the more sustainable option as a default, meaning they would need to take action to select another product, the chances of the user making the more sustainable choice should be higher.

The main issue that I have faced with this initiative is working with the vendors to determine which of their products can be defined as our preferred green products. I have found that the various methods and certifications that each vendor uses to determine which of their products are “green” tend to be quite variable. Because of this inconsistency, it has been difficult to determine which products the vendors have available are actually “green”. Along with this issue, another barrier I have faced with green flagging is getting each vendor’s online catalog to have the function of turning on the green flags for their products, as well as allowing this function to work properly when viewed in our system.
Moving forward with green flagging, future interns will pursue the need for more information about the products available through IU's vendors. They will need to continue to meet with the vendors to attempt to mesh the vendor's updated systems into a format that is functional with green flags. As future interns continue to update resources available on the green purchasing website, another resource they can create could be training session videos for users to assist them in accessing and fully understanding how to use the green purchasing tools, such as green flagging or the Green Purchasing Guide.

Indiana University Office of Sustainability Website Update

This academic year I also worked with the No Waste Coordinator Mark Milby to update the new IU Office of Sustainability website. I created a new tab within the Resource Use and Recycling section of the website, focused on the subject of reducing consumption. The reduction section includes information on data collection for the Campus Sustainability Advisory Board's seven working groups, details on the campus reduction strategies, and a link to the Green Purchasing Guide. There is also a brief section describing how to reduce waste in an office and apartment setting, as well as from a personal purchasing perspective.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

Vendor Input – Data Management

Collaboration with our vendors to help reach more sustainable choices has been critical to the success of this internship. In the future, this internship should continue these meetings with the idea of setting down guidelines for what we will require from our vendors in the future as sustainability makes its way into the forefront of our purchasing strategies. One specific strategy that this program should continue to pursue is the future consolidation of our purchases with these vendors. Consolidating our purchases can be accomplished from both the user end in managing the frequency of orders we make, as well as the vendor end in utilizing specific shipping and order strategies that specify consolidation. Going along with the necessity of collaborating with our vendors, another important step for this internship in the future would be to sit down with the Interior Design Office and verify that they are on the same page as the vendors and their specific guidelines.

Green Purchasing – The User End

As discussed earlier in the report, the website was updated to include a Reduction tab in the No-Waste section of the site. This included some information on the role of reduction in the waste stream, as well as gave a link to the Green Purchasing Guide that was created this year. There is an opportunity for growth here as there can be an entire reduction page added to the website. I think a future intern could definitely work on putting more information about reduction onto the website for the public to have access.
An important step in pursuing local food purchasing by the university in the future is sitting down to have a conversation defining how IU is going to define local food. This is a crucial decision because once we can specifically define what we consider local food, we can begin to request this specifically from vendors, as well as report this for our records.

**Unanswered Questions**

Future interns in the Green Purchasing position should look into the specific barriers to the change that they are looking to implement. For example, what barriers exist to making the users of the purchasing system change their purchasing strategy? Ideas that I have worked with this year have been to have purchasers sorted by department, and give them some type of benefit to achieve a given percentage of green purchases. There is also an opportunity here to create a competition between departments to see who can get the highest percentage, similar to how the Energy Challenge on campus currently functions. Also, it could be beneficial to get departments to make a commitment that they are going to purchase a given percentage of sustainable products this year. This gives both our office and their department the opportunity to advertise this commitment, with the hopes of other departments looking to follow these measures long term.
Appendix:

**Green Purchasing Guide**

Prepared by: Anthony Marletta and Mark Milby

There is a secret life to the products we purchase and use every day. As consumers, we are often unaware of how a product made it to the store and what happens to it when we dispose of it. Because we often have little control over the impact of the products that we buy throughout their entire life cycle, our purchasing decisions become very important and can have a huge effect on social, economic, and environmental interactions around the globe. This guide is designed to educate Indiana University (IU) consumers about the opportunities each of us have to question the potential impacts of university product offerings, and make informed choices when working through the university's purchasing system. This ability to choose between different products is what gives us the power to make change.

This guide will cover three sections in the product life cycle:

1. Purchasing decisions,
2. Usage, and
3. Disposal

The graphic below will act as a framework for the rest of the guide, depicting each section and the potential impact of informed decisions at each of these three stages. As you can see from the graphic, the amount of waste we produce and the potential detrimental impacts of our decisions can be significantly reduced based on the decisions we make. The most effective method to reducing waste is by first, examining what we purchase.
1. Purchasing Decisions – Our purchasing habits are an integral part of the effort to reduce waste because conscious, efficient, an informed purchasing is the easiest way to have the greatest impact in reducing waste upstream. With proper purchasing strategies in place, achieving a sustainable product cycle is a much more feasible goal.
a. Re-evaluate Product Purpose –

- **Rent.** For products with seasonal or erratic usage, or intended to cope with peak demands, it may be more cost effective to rent for a short period of time.

- **Check Before You Buy.** Check if the product you are looking for is available at the IU Surplus Store or other distribution facilities first, before you purchase a new item.

- **Maximize Product Durability.** Choose a product to maximize durability and usefulness. Making the choice to purchase a product that will last longer and serves multiple purposes creates both value in the product upstream, and promotes an opportunity for continued reuse downstream.

**Make a Commitment.** At the beginning of the quarter, make a commitment as a department to purchase a certain percentage of green products. (i.e. amount of post-consumer recycled paper or green cleaning products)

- **Goal:** To reuse and recycle the products you have purchased at the end of your use for it. Don’t just look to the trash as soon as you’re done:
  
  - Check to see if someone within your department can use it.
  - Check for refills and reusable items before placing new orders.

b. Coordinate with Departments –

- **Consolidate Orders.** Bundle orders with other departments, or even other co-workers within your department to consolidate your order.

- **Share Resources.** If a similar resource is currently in part-time use elsewhere within your department, or even in an outside department, check to see whether it is available to share.

- **Plan Ahead.** Plan ahead and only order once a week

c. Reduce Packaging, Materials & Waste –

- **Minimize Packaging.** Promote re-usable packaging that is returned to the supplier. Where this is not possible, minimize the volume of packaging used.
✓ **Reuse, Don’t Dispose.** Promote the use of reusable, not disposable products. Where this is not possible, promote use of recycled materials.

✓ **Ensure Product Recycling.** Ensure that the recyclable materials within your products are actually recycled. Ask your building manager what happens to the items after they go in the bin.

**For more information on Green Purchasing**

Please visit the [Reduction page](#) on our website or for other purchasing resources:

- Green Purchasing From AASHE
- The Responsible Purchasing Network
- Personal Purchasing Guide

2. **Usage** – You have now put a great deal of thought into your purchases – so take good care of your product while you have it.

   a. **Reuse**

   ✓ **Donate to IU Surplus Store:** Reusing products requires a bit of creativity. Consider not only how your department could reuse an item, but also whether other departments, classrooms, or student groups might be able to reuse it. The IU Surplus Store is an easy donation center that will gladly take your used items and resell them to the public; they even accept small items like three-ring binders and other office supplies.

   ✓ **Create a “free shelf”:** If you have a constant stream of potential reusable products, consider creating a “free table” or “free shelf” in a common space or faculty/staff/student lounge. “Free spaces” allow anyone to freely leave and claim items. Items which are not claimed within a certain time period are brought to a community thrift store. These spaces are popular among university departments and are typically successful with minimal supervision.

3. **Disposal** - Properly disposing of purchased products once you or your department no longer needs them is an equally important step in the waste reduction process. First consider whether an item can be reused; if it cannot be reused, make sure to recycle or compost it. It’s important to keep these final steps in mind throughout the entire purchasing process, since you will have to plan for disposal by choosing reusable or recyclable materials.
a. Recycle -
If an item cannot be reused, please recycle it. IU offers an extensive recycling collection system that processes over 2 million pounds of material every year. Standard campus recycling receptacles can receive any:
- Paper and Paperboard
- Cardboard
- Magazines, Books, and Catalogs
- Mail
- Aluminum, Steel, and Tin
- Glass
- Plastics #1-7 – the numbers are printed in a symbol that looks like this:

Most departments also have receptacles for the collection of batteries and cell phones. To receive a collection bin or to schedule a pickup of these items, contact Building Services. IU Surplus Stores also has an excellent electronics recycling program – they will accept almost anything you can think of – and they will pick it up for free. Some examples of items they recycle:
- Printer and toner cartridges
- Computer equipment
- Televisions
- Classroom equipment
- Monitors
- Anything with a plug or circuit board

b. Compost -
Although IU does not currently offer a comprehensive organics recycling program, that has not stopped some campus units from composting their food waste. For most departments, catering represents a significant portion of purchases; likewise, food waste represents a large portion of IU’s total waste.
- Make arrangements with Hilltop: Several departments have coordinated with Hilltop Garden & Nature Center for the composting of their event food waste.
- Purchase a departmental bin: The Biology department purchased their own composting bin for everyday use.

For more information:
Please visit the No Waste Program website or the following partners:
- IUB Physical Plant – phyplbl@indiana.edu, 812-855-8728
- IU Surplus Stores – surplus@indiana.edu, 812-855-2475
- Hilltop Garden & Nature Center – hilltop@indiana.edu, 812-855-8808
- Please direct any waste-related questions to: nowaste@indiana.edu.