

Interviewer1: Alright I think we're live. Would you like to just jump on in, is that okay with you?

AL: Um what do you need, I guess?

I1: Jump on into to questions.

AL: Sure, yeah.

I1: Awesome, so would you mind telling us a little bit about your role at your institution?

AL: Yeah I am USU Sustainability Coordinator. I am in the facilities planning design office. I manage a lot of the reporting that we do, like STAR, greenhouse gas emissions, like from the University. Some engagement activities, especially related to facilities aspects of sustainability and a little on the academic side.

I1: Cool, when was the present climate action plan implemented and what did it start as?

AL: Yeah so we had an initial action plan, gosh I think it started around 2007, 2008 when the University signed the president's commitment which is now the Carbon Commitment. And that initial plan wasn't very specific. So it started as sustainability council and then people were working on carbon neutrality kind of in a big sense. And it wasn't until more recently that... the faculty asked the university to move its carbon neutrality date up from 2050.

And that started a second planning process that was much more specific. And it came up with a list of things that we could do and about how much it would cost per ton of carbon to do it. And then that plan was adopted last year, like March 2020. So that's the one that we're working off of now.

I1: Cool, and then do you feel like your institution's climate action plan has been successful so far?

AL: Yeah I think we have enough buy in in facilities that the facilities aspect of the plan in

particular have been doing well in terms of energy efficiency goals, although Covid changed that up a little bit because even though it made it a lot easier to like put efficient lighting it, it made it harder to do ventilation systems that were efficient. So at this point I think it's a little hard for us to tell what's going, like what's what. What we saved in lighting because it's efficient because people didn't show up versus what we spent on ventilation so there's some of that going on.

But anyway I feel like we have a lot of buy in on the facilities side and that's helped with the efficiency. And then we've also made some progress on renewables. I think we've had a little more trouble on aspects to sustainability that require collaboration outside of facilities for the groups. There are people interested but it's just finding the right combination of people to make some of the other goals happen.

I2: Cool. And then are you... solely in charge of monitoring the process of success of the plan? Or who is kind of a part of that key role and how is your success being measured?

AL: Yeah, so what we ended up doing is since faculty senate adopted the resolution asking for this second plan, I've been reporting back to them. And there was a committee put together to develop that plan and then it's been less involved I would say in implementation but I actually do have a meeting with that group this afternoon. So they're somewhat involved I think in a more advisory capacity, whereas they were kind of directing the construction of the plan. Now it's a little bit more like going back to them every so often and progress updates or brainstorming where we should be next.

So I'd say I've been leading the accountability part, like putting together reports telling people where we are but there are other people involved. And then there are definitely other people involved in implementation. Our utility department, our energy manager, there have

been a lot of other people who are instrumental in getting some of those goals done.

II: Makes sense. I know you mentioned the neutrality of the president and signing that, but are you a part of STARS or Second Nature or those types of programs?

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AL: Yeah we do report to Second Nature and we do a STARS report every 3 years.

II: And what are some barriers that you've run into in the implementation of your climate action plan?

AL: Yeah. So obviously Covid has been a thing this year. In some ways right it's been really good because there are things we didn't even do and our greenhouse gases went down because we weren't doing things like traveling. And we do keep track of commuting and air travel. We're on a fiscal year for greenhouse gas reporting so we haven't done the fiscal year that we're currently in which will end in June.

So the most recent one we have ended last June which was 3-4 months after Covid. But at that point air travel was down 20% and I am guessing this year since it will be affecting more than 3 months we'll see a bigger drop. So there are some things like that that were good. The harder things I mentioned like ventilation and some of those things. And then I think more broadly just like what people have the bandwidth to pay attention to. I feel like when I am working with people a lot of people are kind of like one crisis at a time. I am dealing with a few other things right now but I'll get back to you next year maybe. So we've been seeing things like that.

I think that's very specific to now. And I think more broadly still just barriers to getting things done is that I am located in facilities, the energy manager for the facilities department, that's all under facilities. We don't have anybody on the academic side whose real job is to do

this. We just have interested people, you know faculty members who care. And it makes it... one, they don't necessarily have resources to dedicate it to it, other than maybe their interest or time.

And then two, the real job like what they're getting paid for is something entirely different. So they may or may not have time consistently to dedicate to it. And I think that... that kind of goes into not just the academic side but almost every other department. Just the way may be their mission is framed is that their job is to handle purchasing or travel. And it might feel like when I am asking them about sustainability issues that I am like adding to their work. And I think that's kind of a barrier to getting things done is that people are already busy and they have to kind of ration their resources.

11: That's understandable. This is kind of an odd question, so when we went back and looked at our climate action plan we had issues identifying funding, how we could raise our funding. We're curious how is your guy's climate change action plan funded? And do you feel like it's been well supported by that funding system?

AL: I think this is going to reflect some of the other answers. On the facilities side I think there are limits to funding that the University did commit to making all new buildings at least leed silver or above which helps somewhat with our new buildings and changes that could cost more being included in just the university requirement. In some cases it doesn't cost more. But I think having that commitment just makes it a baseline for new projects.

In terms of existing buildings or ventilation systems, things like that, we have a few things. Our state has I think a revolving loan budget of some sort, our utility manager and energy managers would be more familiar with it. But I think we've used that on our statewide campuses because our Logan Campus is our main campus. We are a land grant university so

we have statewide other locations. And they have sometimes different funding than the main campus. So I think they've used the state funds a little bit more. I could confirm if that was important to you.

And then on the main campus we also as part of the plan got to an agreement where savings from projects could be funneled back into new projects. So internally we can take savings and then fund new things. And that all works for energy. And then I think we've had more funding issues outside of that. I guess I should also say renewables. We did get a little bit extra from the president as a part of this process that if we were currently doing a... coalition of partners and we're going to do a RFP for a power purchase agreement. And I don't know where that's going yet, but we do have some funding in case that ends up being more costly than our alternatives. So that part is pretty good.

I think some of the other things like the academic side, trainings for faculty or students or things like that, those funding sources are a little more hit or miss. There are some that are in place. Like our student fee... for a grant program that students can apply for that exists but I don't think we have a set funding pot for stuff specifically on the academic side, not just engagement activities or student grants.

II: Gotcha, that's super interesting. And then one last question I have and then I am not sure Megan if you have any others, is... are there any parts of your plan that have been more successful than others?

AL: Um. You know the faculty senate passing the resolution and there was a corresponding one. And the student government like USUSA and that really helped with bringing sustainability to the front of people's attention, at least temporarily before Covid happened. Because I think before that, a lot of people felt like they weren't sure how technology or

something else would come along and it would become more convenient later and just wait and see. And having faculty senate and then USUSA ask the university to reexamine the issue brought resources and attention that I don't think we would've gotten otherwise.

So I think that was successful. It's not something I really orchestrated. It started with a faculty member just asking to chat with me about what we were doing because he had to present at a conference on something related. But it turned out he was in the first of a 3 year stint in the faculty senate and decided that he wanted to use his term to work on this as well as other things. So that was really helpful.

And then I think that also helped us get some of these other resources, facilities already was putting funding behind sustainability but I think by spending more time evaluating each of the options in detail. Like not just they're out there but having to go through each one and see which ones were completely not feasible but which ones maybe are. Taking time to really itemize that list and prioritize things I think helped us use our resources better. So I think that's probably the more successful part.

II: Cool. And I think you did mention in that answer student government played a role. Did you find student involvement within the plan kind of helps it be more successful? Or have you noticed any correlation between those two?

AL: Yeah in this case it really started more on the faculty side and then picked up on the student side but I could see it going either direction. Getting an advocate is really helpful. And our university our president is very student focused. And a lot of times that ends up manifesting itself in mental health or resources to support student success which is obviously the purpose of the university. But I think students can you know advocate for what they want to see. And I feel like it is really helpful. Like we've had students and USUSA, our student

government and also just students who are interested, we have a Sunrise Movement on campus as well. And at one point I think they had a petition and then they marched into the president's office. And some of those things I think support that students feel this is an important thing. If the university is considering doing it, having students show that they're interested does help.

15:05

I1: Sure. I think those were my questions, (I2) did you have any other questions?

I2: So one thing I noticed was kind of unique to Utah State is you guys have a sustainability plan. So you have your climate action plan that was written kind of in the late 2000s-ish, but you haven't really updated that. But you have a sustainability that's been going on and has been updated pretty regularly and it looks really interesting. What is the difference between that and your climate action plan?

AL: Yeah. So this is probably a good question. So I think because sustainability program got to the point that we had this like renewed interest and this second iteration of our greenhouse... we're calling it our greenhouse gas reduction plan, but it's basically climate action plan part 2.

I think some people, it was happening in the background. You know there were people and they were doing it. So people didn't necessarily even know who was working on it. So what ended up happening is we ended up with this separate steering committee that was doing the greenhouse gas reduction plan. But we also had a regularly meeting sustainability council that was from the first commitment in 2007. And that's pretty much it. Aside from a little confusion especially at the beginning, it's worked out, because the first one ended up being more like a task force with people specifically selected to temporarily be on a

committee. Where as a second one is people who were in it for the long haul. I guess what I am getting at is that the difference between those two is one, that early 2000 plan just was really vague and not actionable.

So what we ended up doing is got this job and then I submitted USU for a STARS report and after that we were trying to figure out where do we go next. So every 3 years we started looking at our STARS report and then trying to make goals. What is it we think we can do and value enough to put resources towards. And we developed those sustainability plans out of sustainability council.

Then the greenhouse gas reduction plan is more specific and like I said kind of an update to climate action plan. And it focuses entirely on... I shouldn't say entirely. There is the academic section. But one part is shadow pricing which would reduce carbon. One part is energy and renewables which is directly related to carbon. And then there's one section on just general student education. But it's much more specific versus STARS is diversity and dining and pretty broad. Some of it is carbon some of it is not. The greenhouse gas reduction action plan ended up being much more focused.

And probably honestly in a lot of ways the way it came about I think aside from possibly the academic piece it ends up being pretty actionable in a way that the sustainability plan has parts that are actionable and parts that are maybe more aspirational.

I2: This document is really impressive. I am just looking through it again, it's just so cool!

AL: It's a useful exercise. I feel like again some of it aspirational, we looked at this and we want to do it. But I am not sure if we're at the point that every next step is something that we're going to be able to do. But the process of putting it together also was nice because it makes all the people involved go through it and try to think about what is possible.

I2: Absolutely, yeah.

I1: Question regarding how long did it take you guys to create your 2nd climate action plan?

AL: A year. So the faculty senate resolution went through I want to say February 2019. The president adopted things out of it March 2020. It was the same meeting when we were discussing travel restrictions for Covid. And then I just reported to them last week the faculty senate again with updates on where we are with this year. If you're looking for that and you go to sustainability.USU.edu website I think there's something that says carbon neutral 2050, something like that, it's a box below the banner. And they're both uploaded on the left hand side. I think they have cover photos or something and they're just PDFs. We don't have anything cool and interactive yet.

I2: All my questions have been answered, how about you?

I1: You've been really great. Great information.

AL: So you're interviewing people from just other universities around the country or peer institutions? And comparing notes?

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I1: Yeah I think our process is we did a big lit review and narrowed down some questions regarding what we wanted to implement in our climate action plan. And then we identified some schools that we felt were similar to MSU. Kind of size-wise, political-wise and that kind of thing. And are trying to gather as much information as we can for the next group, I think they're coming in the summer I believe. They're going to start writing a climate action plan based off of all this information.

AL: Okay, well if you come up with anything else feel free to contact me. It's a process so I am happy to help and I'd love to see what you come up with. And if you have faculty counter

parts that would like to talk to a faculty member here, I can also make connections between other departments or whatever if that is useful later?

I1: Yeah that will be super helpful. Thank you. One of our mentors in this project is Dr. Haggerty and she's kind of our... I think you kind of mentioned how some people... I don't think it's her job per se to be a part of the sustainability council but she helps along. So I am sure she'd be very interested in that.

AL: Yeah just let me know.

I1: Thank you so much again for all the information. I really appreciate it. And for taking time out of your day. And have a great rest of your week.

AL: You too, good luck!

I1: Thanks, bye!

AL: Bye!

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