

## **COMMITTEE ON SUSTAINABILITY**

### **September 3, 2008**

In 2008 the College will address the challenge of campus sustainability, emphasizing a more comprehensive approach. This approach involves the creation of a new Committee on Sustainability (COS) charged with developing, planning and recommending to the President strategies for implementing the College's Sustainability Policy. The core principle guiding the creation of COS is the integration of COS and its recommended sustainability program into the fabric of the College. COS not only taps the intellectual capital of the College, but also feeds into and benefits from its teaching, research, and service missions. To be selected for membership on the COS steering committee, its subcommittees, and working groups, faculty, students, and staff should have expertise or experience relevant to the mission of COS and the implementation of the Sustainability Policy, as well as an interest in creating a sustainable campus (defined broadly to include all parts of the College). As is done with other important faculty governance responsibilities, the College will recognize the importance of the role played by those who serve on COS and its subcommittees by appropriate credit for advisory services for VIMS faculty, by recognition in merit reviews (including annual, promotion, and tenure reviews), and by other appropriate means.

### **COS STEERING COMMITTEE**

Reporting directly to the President, the Steering Committee of COS consists of:

1. Committee Chair (appointed by the President);
2. Chair of the Science and Technical Advisory Subcommittee (STAC) (a member of the faculty from any academic department or school whose interests, commitment, and experience are relevant to the STAC mission);
3. Chair of the Finance and Operations Subcommittee (FOPS) (a member of the faculty or administration whose interests, commitment, and experience are relevant to the FOPS mission);
4. Chair of the Programs and Education Subcommittee (PEDS) (a member of the faculty of any department or school whose interests, commitment, and experience are relevant to the PEDS mission);
5. Two undergraduate student representatives;

6. One graduate student representative;
7. One staff member appointed by the President;
8. Three *ex officio* members, the Vice President for Administration, the Vice President for Finance, and the Vice President for Student Affairs.

The organizational structure of COS is designed to create an interactive management process that links science- and policy-based working groups with operations and finance working groups and with participants from the academic programs, student body, and staff. Both vertical and horizontal integration is contemplated. That is, communication will flow horizontally among the different working groups to ensure the development of effective models and implementation strategies, as well as vertically along the COS structure and to the senior administration. The free flow of information, research, and ideas should establish a strong foundation of monitoring, assessment, and sound policy- and science-based advice. The goal is to develop and recommend the means for implementing a sustainability program that is based on sound principles of environmental science and policy in a way that leverages the intellectual capital and actively promotes the educational mission of the College. It is conceivable that the COS structure may, over time, evolve into an arrangement involving a designated sustainability officer. It is further hoped that, over time, the work of COS will allow the College to be recognized as a model sustainable campus.

COS is charged with furthering the implementation of the College's Sustainability Policy by recommending timetables and defining measurable goals, strategies, and tasks, monitoring compliance, managing the funds available to it for promoting campus sustainability, and creating a structure for promoting the Policy. That structure must lay the foundation for sound policymaking, ongoing assessment, and rational planning. An effective sustainability program requires a planning process that reflects the complex nature of the environmental and human systems involved. It also requires a process that assures the development of a campus consensus on the goals and objectives of the Policy.

The creation of COS does not supplant or diminish the roles and responsibilities of any existing governance bodies or administrators of the College unless explicitly stated in this or subsequent documents and subject to the approval of the President and, as relevant, the Board of Visitors.

As part of its responsibilities, the Steering Committee of COS will, at a minimum, report annually to the President and College community on the progress toward sustainability. This report will include information on what the Steering Committee and its subcommittees have accomplished and what remains to be done. To enable the Steering Committee to meet this obligation, each subcommittee and working group will give annual reports on its progress in achieving its objectives to the Steering Committee. By the end of the first bi-annual cycle of assessments from the subcommittees, the COS Steering Committee should have developed and recommended for action a preliminary sustainability plan for the College.

At the beginning of the first academic year, the COS Steering Committee will set priorities and budgets for each COS subcommittee. The priorities will include a two-year timeline of projects and activities (present and future). The budgets will reflect decisions on the allocation of student green fees and other resources based upon the recommendations of the COS subcommittees as explained in more detail below.

Annual reports and minutes of all COS Steering Committee meetings will be posted on the COS website. Agendas of all such meetings will be posted prior to the meetings. The COS Steering Committee will establish standards and rules for the timely publication of agendas for its meeting and for the introduction of new business.

## **COS SUBCOMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS**

Reporting to the COS Steering Committee are three key subcommittees: 1) the Science and Technical Advisory Subcommittee (STAC); 2) the Finance and Operations Subcommittee (FOPS); and 3) the Programs and Education Subcommittee (PEDS). Each subcommittee will be charged with developing recommendations of key components of the sustainability program. In the interests of broad engagement of and consultation with the campus community and, to the extent practical, each subcommittee and its constituent working groups will include those representatives of faculty, students, and administration who would be responsible for implementation of relevant COS recommendations.

The Science and Technical Advisory Subcommittee will develop an ecosystem plan that defines the College's ecosystem to be studied and managed, the current state of that ecosystem, and appropriate assessment

methodologies. The Finance and Operations Subcommittee will develop and recommend a financial and operations plan for promoting sustainability. This plan will identify College operations that affect the College ecosystem and that may need to be changed in order to promote a sustainable campus, as well as the financial base for change. Finally, the Programs and Education Subcommittee will develop and recommend a campus life plan that integrates sustainability into the instructional, research, service, and residential life of the College in a way that provides appropriate input for and gives due consideration to academic concerns, students life issues, staff interests, and existing governance structure. Each subcommittee also will review proposals related to their primary charge. The COS Steering Committee will then integrate the three plans and make recommendations for the College's sustainability program.

## 1. STAC

STAC is the primary assessment and monitoring arm of COS. It will work closely with the other two subcommittees to obtain inputs for its modeling, monitoring, and assessment efforts and to establish benchmarks and measure progress. After developing the ecosystem plan and subsequent to the implementation of some or all of its recommendations, STAC will provide bi-annual assessments of the College's ecosystems, including evaluations of the effectiveness of efforts to implement the Sustainability Policy. Support for STAC will be provided by two initial Working Groups whose membership will be drawn campus-wide (including VIMS) from those who have the requisite expertise and experience:

- The *Modeling Working Group* will be tasked with the development of an interactive systems model of the College's ecosystem that includes the natural environment, the built environment, energy, nutrient flux, carbon sources and sinks, and other relevant factors. This model will guide the implementation of the Sustainability Policy by identifying where the College's emissions are going, where the largest consumption of energy occurs, and where the greatest carbon reductions are possible or occurring. It is understood that development of this model will require sufficient resources and time.
- The *Assessment and Monitoring Working Group* will monitor and periodically assess the effectiveness of the College's sustainability policies. Part of this effort may include surveying and mapping the

College's natural and built environments. In addition, this group will assess the efficacy of the ecosystem model and recommend changes.

STAC also will review and prioritize research proposals relating to the scientific and technical dimensions of sustainability and then send its recommendations on the merits and ranking of the proposals to the Finance Working Group of FOPS.

## 2. FINANCE AND OPERATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE (FOPS)

The Finance and Operations Subcommittee is the primary financial and operations planning arm of COS. To develop its recommendations, FOPS will draw on the expertise of senior Facilities and Landscape personnel of the College and faculty and students with expertise related to green and sustainable business practices, resource economics, and land use and environmental policy. Support for FOPS will be provided by four initial working groups:

- The *Physical Plant, Energy and Waste Management Group* will evaluate current plant infrastructure, energy use, and waste management and recommend ways to reduce energy use, increase recycling and reuse, and otherwise promote a green and sustainable campus. Part of this effort will include a review of current facilities, new construction, renovation projects, and alternative energy strategies (including procurement practices).
- The *Landscape Working Group* will evaluate landscape plans, forestry and other natural vegetation plans, as well as current grounds management policies and practices. Among other topics, the evaluation process will consider soil and water conservation practices, storm water management, nutrient management, habitat protection and restoration efforts, and watershed protection plans.
- The *Transportation Working Group* will review current transportation patterns and systems and assess their impact on sustainability goals. It also will examine use of alternative systems and the impact of behavioral incentives on users.
- The *Finance Working Group* will evaluate the financial implications of current operations in light of the goals of the Sustainability Policy as well as proposed changes in operations to determine their budgetary impact. Part of the process of developing proposed changes in operations will include cost-benefit analysis of those proposals by

the Finance Working Group. That Group also will make recommendations concerning the use of the student green fees to FOPS, which will then consult with the other COS Subcommittees about the use of green fees before making its own recommendations concerning the use and management of the green fees fund to the Steering Committee. In addition to student green fees, the Finance Working Group will also make recommendations to the Steering Committee concerning the use of other funds made available to the Sustainability Program. Part of the recommendations of the Finance Working Group will include funding recommendations for research proposals consistent with the priorities set by STAC. The Finance Working Group may recommend against funding given its understanding of the financial implications of particular options and proposals, and also will coordinate efforts to seek external grants and Foundation support.

### 3. PROGRAMS AND EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE (PEDS)

The Programs and Education Subcommittee is the primary educational arm of COS. It will be responsible for evaluating and making recommendations to the Steering Committee on how the academic programs, student body, and staff can be integrated into the effort to promote a sustainable campus. PEDS also will be charged with reaching out to faculty, students, and staff to encourage their involvement in the sustainability program. As part of its outreach charge, PEDS will be responsible for the COS website. In addition to traditional media, PEDS should use the COS website to reach the entire College community. Three initial working groups will support this effort to further campus sustainability and support the needs of teaching, research, service, and residential life.

- The *Academic Programs Working Group* will assess the impact of academic programs on campus sustainability. It also will explore how the intellectual capital and expertise of the academic programs, particularly the Environmental Science and Policy Program and other environmentally focused programs, can be tapped to promote the Sustainability Policy. This working group will develop recommendations for stimulating and integrating faculty research and scholarship, graduate research and the mentoring of undergraduate research, and service learning projects

into the COS sustainability program. These recommendations should include ways to obtain institutional, grant, contract, and private funding for research, service, and teaching projects. Before developing its recommendations, this working group should seek input from the other COS subcommittees, from the Educational Policy Committee of Arts and Sciences, and from the appropriate curriculum committees in the schools. (The addition of any new course will follow normal policies and procedures.)

- The *Student Life Working Group* will assess residential life and food services to determine how to enhance student participation in and commitment to the COS sustainability program. In addition to monitoring sustainable practices in resident life and dining services, it will develop programs for educating students about sustainable practices. One project, for example, could involve a green or sustainable house that would test various proposals.
- The *Continuing Education and Outreach Working Group* will explore ways to promote non-traditional education programs. In addition to maintaining the COS website, it will evaluate the role of staff in promoting campus sustainability. Among other recommendations, this working group will suggest ways to train staff and administrators about sustainable practices and to enhance staff participation in the COS sustainability program.

## CONCLUSION

Implementing the College's Sustainability Policy requires the thoughtful development of a structure for ongoing assessment, monitoring, and policymaking based upon sound science-based and technical advice, a comprehensive understanding of the financial and operational implications of sustainable practices, and a healthy respect for the traditional roles of faculty, students, and staff of the College with respect to both governance and operations. By bringing the full complement of the university's intellectual strengths to bear on the question of how best to achieve sustainability, the College can develop a campus sustainability program that truly integrates teaching, research, and service into the fabric of the program, creating a self-perpetuating model of sustainable learning that will allow the College to become a leader on campus sustainability in the higher education community.

