

BEYOND PRINCIPLES: IMPLEMENTING THE TALLOIRES DECLARATION

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We have reached a stage in the campus environmental movement where agreement upon the broad goal of becoming a sustainable campus is widespread. How many campus presidents or board members argue against the principles of ecological, social and economic sustainability? We are also beginning to more clearly articulate and promote the general principles of campus sustainability, in part due to gatherings such as the Greening-of-the-Campus conferences. We are even approaching consensus about what becoming a “sustainable campus” means in terms of teaching, research, outreach and operations. However, we are sorely missing guidance to move from often vague notions of sustainability into implementation practices that are applicable across organizational and cultural boundaries.

The relatively new management for sustainability in higher education field contains some theoretical work, practical advice and many “stories of transformation,” but little or no cross-initiative data, empirical testing or rigorous theoretical development. The literature contains many bold visions: scholars, practitioners and activists repeatedly call for institutions of higher education to be on the leading edge of the social transformation toward sustainability. However, as stated by Herremans & Allwright (2000, p. 169), “Even though the literature provides some excellent case studies of environmental initiatives that have been implemented throughout the world, most of the information available is in the form of examples of ‘this is what we did on our campus’.” Generally, we lack a coordinated approach to assessing campus initiatives and providing well-grounded strategies for success. This article is one attempt to begin filling this theoretical, empirical and practical gap by assessing the Talloires Declaration and its impact on developing comprehensive, institution-wide strategies for sustainability.

Talloires Declaration History

Twenty-two presidents, rectors, and vice chancellors of universities from around the world convened at the Tufts European Center in Talloires, France in October 1990 to discuss the role of universities and, in particular, the role of university presidents in environmental management and sustainable development. Recognizing the shortage of specialists in environmental management and related fields, as well as the lack of understanding by professionals in all fields of their effect on the environment and public health, this gathering defined the role of the university in the following way: “Universities educate most of the people who develop and manage society's institutions. For this reason, universities bear profound responsibilities to increase the awareness, knowledge, technologies, and tools to create an environmentally sustainable future,” (Report and Declaration of The Presidents Conference, 1990).

The conference concluded with the creation of the Talloires Declaration¹, a ten-point action plan for colleges and universities committed to promoting education for sustainability and environmental literacy in teaching, research, operations and outreach at colleges and universities. The Declaration is a consensus statement authored by 31 university leaders and international environmental experts representing 15 nations from the global North and South. Those present signed the Declaration and proposed to disseminate the document for widespread endorsement.

As of June 2003, the Talloires Declaration has been signed by 300 university presidents and chancellors at institutions in 47 countries across five continents.² Signatories are divided equally among low/middle income countries and high-income countries and represent both large and small public and private colleges and universities, community and technical colleges, and research centers. This suggests a growing recognition that academic research, teaching, and service must address the sustainability challenge.

The Campus Environmental Sustainability Survey (CESS)

Created in part to measure U.S. institutional response to Talloires, the “Campus Environmental Sustainability Survey” (CESS) mixes measures found in current assessment tools for sustainability in higher education (for a summary of this review see Shriberg 2002) with more general surveys on organizational change and transformational leadership. Therefore, the CESS combines existing instrumentation with measures created specifically for this study. Because most colleges and universities do not have environmental audit data and because we sought data on motivations and processes, the CESS relies on qualitative self-assessments of institutions, largely on a 1-5 likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree; 3=Neutral; 5=Strongly Agree). Unless otherwise noted, this is the scale used throughout this article. The CESS targeted the 59 four-year colleges and universities in the United States whose presidents signed the Talloires Declaration (as of May 2001). At each institution, we sent the survey to 9-13 individuals, including senior administrators and environmentally-oriented staff, faculty and students. The surveys were mailed in May 2001, and we conducted e-mail and phone follow-ups until September 2001. Of the 687 valid surveys sent to 59 institutions, 249 individual surveys were returned (36%) from 56 institutions (95%).

Sustainability Leadership

The CESS creates a sustainability-leadership scale/score (SLS) for each institution based on integration of sustainability into 5 areas: operations, research, curriculum, teaching and campus-wide sustainability policies and action. Individual responses in each area are aggregated for each institution, using weighting based on expertise of respondents. For example, a senior operational officer’s response on the operations section of the CESS receives a higher weighting factor (1.25) than that of the president of the faculty senate (.75). The aggregate scores for each area are averaged to obtain the final SLS (for each responding institution), which is approximately normally distributed with a mean of 3.33 (1=No efforts; 5=Comprehensive Sustainability Program) and a range of 1.70-4.63. While the responding institutions’ placement along this scale cannot be displayed due to confidentiality assurances, the institutions statistically break out into three categories when outliers are not considered: Sustainability-Leaders (18 institutions (32%): 3.6-5.0); Average Performers (19 institutions (34%): 3.1-3.6); and

¹ Full text of the Talloires Declaration is available at http://www.ulsf.org/programs_talloires_td.html

² The Talloires Declaration is the first of several similar sustainability declarations for higher education institutions. The Copernicus Charter (1994), for European universities, has been signed by over 305 presidents; the Kyoto Declaration (1993) has been endorsed by at least 650 member institutions of the International Associations of Universities.

Sustainability-Laggards (19 institutions (34%): 0-3.1). Clearly, U.S. Talloires Signatories differ greatly in their commitment to sustainability.

According to the CESS, many Talloires signatories have environmental groups and sponsor community service activities, and many institutions have individual environmental leaders, but few institutions are outspoken on sustainability, as defined by taking institutional leadership positions on issues such as global warming or overconsumption. A common environmental strength is curriculum development, although requiring basic ecological literacy is not on the agenda of most campuses. Campuses excel in traditional operational measures – such as recycling – but are reluctant to undertake more ambitious operational activities, such as promoting alternative transportation and buying renewable energy. The integration of sustainability into research varies greatly, but this variation is based on the research commitment of the institution generally as opposed to the level of ecological commitment specifically. The CESS also reveals that campus-wide environmental policies and actions are lacking at all but the most environmentally and socially advanced campuses. The vast majority of campuses have piecemeal, uncoordinated efforts. In general, the survey results and related comments demonstrate, as one respondent describes, that many Talloires signatories are “beginning to put environmental sustainability practice and policies into place.” Moreover, comments and data reflect that programs are scattered, but are moving toward increased organization and coordination.

Organizational Conditions & Barriers

The CESS identifies internal organizational conditions which are not specific to environmental issues, but which can be conducive to or present a barrier to the ascendancy of sustainability issues onto the agenda of campus stakeholders. For example, the survey found that perception of image and reputation can be a key “hook” for change agents. Institutions striving to improve their external and internal image are statistically more likely to be open to sustainability initiatives as a way to become nationally or internationally recognized (or maintain their strong images). Moreover, the CESS demonstrates the importance of collaboration. Since environmental and interrelated social issues span multiple divisions, departments and stakeholders, they are only likely to become a priority when cross-functional and interdisciplinary decision making is prevalent. Therefore, bureaucratic and hierarchical structures tend to discourage progress on sustainability. The CESS also demonstrates that progressive and liberal political orientation is a strong predictor of environmental progress. While progress on sustainability is possible at all types of four-year U.S. institutions which signed Talloires, conditions for success are slightly more favorable at small, private colleges.

The most problematic barriers to institutional environmental efforts at Talloires signatories are “higher priority of other initiatives” (mean=4.17), “lack of funding” (mean=4.08), and “lack of time” (mean=3.78). This dominant theme about lack of money and institutional attention is reflected by the following comment: “Of course money and financial concerns are always paramount. I think the administration is interested in ‘sustainability.’ However, it isn’t clear at what cost.” One respondent simply wrote “POLITICS” in many places throughout the survey. Commitment from stakeholders is more problematic at higher levels in the institutional hierarchy, with means arranged in the following decreasing order (Governing Board – Administrators – President – Staff – Faculty – Students). Lack of commitment from students (mean=2.53) and faculty (mean=2.71) as well as “fear of change” (mean=2.78) and lack of commitment from staff (mean=2.78) are the least formidable barriers to sustainability-leadership. Some respondents report that one individual or organizational level is a particularly strong barrier: “zero interest by facilities V.P.”; and “Our president and provost don’t seem to have a clue when it comes to sustainability.”

The CESS indicates that Talloires Declaration signatories are most likely to pursue sustainability because of the potential benefits to reputation (3.76), cost savings/finances (3.72), and regulatory pressures (3.68). Signatories are least likely to be motivated by benefits to stakeholder

satisfaction/happiness (3.11), strategic positioning (3.36), and stakeholder recruitment (3.39). However, when these potential reasons for sustainability action are correlated with reported sustainability outcomes (i.e., SLS), a strong correlation ($r=0.65$; $p<.01$) appears between appealing to institutional strategic/ethical interest and sustainability success. Conversely, more short-term appeals – such as finances and regulatory compliance – are not statistically correlated with reported sustainability outcomes. This finding indicates that the approach that change agents take to promoting environmental sustainability issues can have a great impact on the outcomes.

Impact of Talloires

Surprisingly, only 61 respondents report knowledge of their institutions' signing of Talloires (25%),³ while 46 respondents claim their institution has signed no declarations (18%), and 142 respondents report either “do not know” or left the question blank (57%). One respondent reports: “Our President signed the Talloires Declaration, but then has ordered a series of anti-environmental projects.” Another reports: “Our then-Provost was an original signatory of the Talloires Declaration, but that action did little to influence our campus culture as a whole.” This finding supports past studies. For example, Walton (2000) conducted a small-scale survey of Talloires Declaration signatories⁴ and reported that “general awareness of the Declaration was often low in many institutions”, “at some signatory institutions agreements are signed and forgotten” (Walton, 2000), and “the Talloires Declaration is not a crucial stimulus” (Walton et al. 2000). Wright (2001) agrees: “Analysis of these policies suggests that being a signatory to a national or international agreement is not a valid indicator of an institution's commitment to sustainability.”

Therefore, the main finding in the literature and through the CEES is that signing declarations is not a particularly strong organizational change strategy. However, while few institutions organize specifically around Talloires, this does not necessarily mean that campus sustainability declarations are useless. Walton (2000) declares: “The Declaration provides a value awareness raising mechanism both for the senior management of individual institutions and to galvanize the global Higher Education Institution sector as a whole.” For many campuses participating in the CEES, Talloires continues to be an impetus and framework for steady progress toward sustainability. Using Talloires to focus and organize efforts might be increasingly important in the future because the survey reveals the extent to which campus environmental sustainability efforts are being conducted in a piecemeal, disjointed fashion. In general, while Talloires is not often the driving force for campus sustainability, survey comments and follow-up case studies reveal that Talloires can be an important tool for advocates and serve as an indicator of commitment.⁵

Implementation Strategies

The Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (ULSF) has committed to developing a flexible “implementation strategy” for signatories looking for guidance in accomplishing

3 The survey did not reveal that each college or university had signed the Talloires Declaration, and asked “My campus has signed external Declarations on sustainability” (yes, no or don't know).

4 This survey included 21 institutions (3 in the U.S.), and obtained data through qualitative surveying at conferences, benchmarked against a single institution in the U.K. (Walton et al. 2000).

5 These “follow-up case studies” include a comparative case study of two institutions with similar demographics but very different levels of environmental success as well as an in-depth, participant observation-based study of the University of Michigan. For more information on these studies, contact the authors.

the goals of the Talloires Declaration.⁶ The Declaration's action plan is intentionally broad, covering the major areas of university activity: teaching, research, operations, outreach and service. A school's implementation plan would need to be specifically tailored to the institution, sensitive to its culture, strengths, and opportunities.

A fundamental first step in implementing sustainability at any institution is to form an official environmental or sustainability task force or committee (including faculty, students, staff and administrators), preferably appointed by the president, to develop a campus plan to realize the general goals of the Declaration and to monitor sustainability initiatives on campus. The advocacy literature asserts that creating responsibility for sustainability oversight to fulfill the goals and obligations outlined in audits, declarations or policies is a necessary step toward institutionalization of sustainability (Allen, 1999; Clugston & Calder, 1999). This responsibility is most effective when there is an employee with responsibility for sustainability coordination as well as a sustainability committee. A number of schools have created Sustainability Coordinator positions to fulfill these needs.

Moreover, the literature converges on the importance of specific institutional policies and procedures (Wright, 2001). For example, Walton et al. (2000, p. 524) report:

Where there is no micro institutional framework in terms of university policy and strategy within which internal support and guidance can be provided, and hence no institutional justification for resources, then initiatives work on a small scale for a temporary length of time and actions of enthusiastic individuals are not embedded into institutional strategy, policy, or management systems.

In other words, institutionalization of environmental policy, strategy and procedures is a key step in the organizational change process. Developing an environmental/sustainability policy as well as an environmental management system (EMS) are vitally important tasks of the sustainability committee.⁷

ULSF also recommends evaluating the current campus state of sustainability in order to create a baseline from which to measure and assess improvements in university or college operations, curriculum, research, etc. A number of tools exist to assist institutions in the sustainability assessment process.⁸ Some kind of evaluative and reporting process should be instituted to assess the progress of sustainability initiatives on a regular basis.

Ball State University offers a good example of a campus using the Talloires Declaration to "move from passive signatory to active participant on the road to sustainability" (Eflin, 2001, p.1). After becoming a signatory in 1999, a group of faculty approached the provost with a proposal to form a committee with the charge of implementing the commitments within the Declaration. "The faculty group argued that a university's sustainable practices and the overall goals of promoting campus 'greening' activities needed an organizing principle, and that such a principle is effectively contained in the ten tenets of the Talloires Declaration. Yet, adopting a principle alone will not ensure that its goals are ultimately implemented. This requires teamwork, coordination and resources," (Eflin, 2001, p. 19).

The resulting committee organized itself around the first nine tenets set forth in the Talloires Declaration, with a subcommittee for each, in addition to a Steering Committee. Each subcommittee

⁶ The "implementation strategy" will be part of a much larger project with ULSF's international partners to develop an online and print resource Toolkit for providing guidance and specific tools for deepening institutional commitment to sustainability. For more information, see <http://www.ulsf.org/toolkit>.

⁷ See Keniry, J. (2003). Environmental Management Systems: A Framework for Planning Green Campuses. *Planning for Higher Education*, 31(3), 62-69.

⁸ ULSF's Sustainability Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) is a qualitative tool that is helpful in the initial phases of the assessment process (http://www.ulsf.org/programs_saq.html). For a wide selection of assessment tools and examples, see the Campus Sustainability Assessment Project at <http://www.csap.envs.wmich.edu>.

developed objectives and action items which were summarized in a final report with ten major action items. The provost then gave support for seeking external funding to implement the action items, created two staff positions to further sustain campus greening efforts, and formed the Council on the Environment, a permanent university committee. Steady progress has been made across many dimensions of campus life to date.⁹

Several other schools have developed Talloires Declaration implementation plans, including the Australian National University (ANU) and Macalester College. The ANU website¹⁰ details how the school is satisfying each of the Declaration's components through its Environmental Management Plan and ANU's National Institute for Environment. Macalester's implementation plan¹¹ identifies key steps for the college to pursue in signing the Talloires Declaration, including designating a Campus Environmental Issues Committee to implement the Talloires principles, preparing an environmental report, adopting a new procurement policy to codify green purchasing practices, and committing human and financial resources for the implementation process. Macalester has been least successful to date in accomplishing these steps because the administration is continuing to offer little support (Ellis, 2002).

Conclusion

The ultimate goal of the CESS and subsequent qualitative research is to provide a "roadmap" for stakeholders attempting to create organizational change for sustainability as well as for scholars. While this "roadmap" is not a complete guide or set of instructions to translate potential institutional leadership (i.e., signing Talloires) into initiatives and actions, it is a starting point. The Talloires Declaration is one example of a tool that can be used to create an individualized framework for institutional transformation.

The CESS establishes the importance of non-environmental internal conditions – particularly image/reputation, decision making structures and political orientation – in providing a context for success or failure of sustainability initiatives. This research establishes that multiple, diverse stakeholders are likely to be successful when they promote sustainability in terms of institutional strategic positioning and an ethical/moral obligation and opportunity. This study establishes that competing institutional priorities and lack of integration across functional areas are major barriers to Talloires implementation.

One surprising result of this research that correlates with the experiences of ULSF in promoting the Talloires Declaration is the enthusiasm of change agents about the potential for sustainability to become a major focus of their institutions. The belief that campus sustainability efforts will succeed is based in the strong grassroots support that change agents receive as well as initially favorable (or, at a minimum, not oppositional) responses from institutional leaders. However, most institutions have pockets of environmental activities, but little or no coordination, leadership or major actions, and have yet to address the deep questions of sustainability. Using the Talloires Declaration to envision institutional sustainability, garner support, and coordinate efforts could be a powerful means of linking good intentions and concrete change.

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⁹ See the Council on the Environment website at <http://www.bsu.edu/provost/ceres/cote/>.

¹⁰ http://www.anu.edu.au/facilities/anugreen/admin/talloires_implementation.html

¹¹ <http://www.macalester.edu/%7Eenvirost/tallories.htm>

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