

2023 - 2024 Annual Report



UW
SUSTAINABILITY

Overview

The 2023-2024 academic year for UWL Sustainability built on the successes of 2022-2023. Building on the momentum from the first year, we saw continued development of our programming, initiatives, and intern team.

Highlights of the year included the inaugural “Car Free Week,” hosting the Universities of Wisconsin Sustainability Annual Meeting, Robin Wall Kimmerer’s visit and keynote address, and the end-of-year Reduce, Reuse, Reimagine Dumpster Diversion program.

These successes were made possible by our dedicated colleagues and an outstanding intern group, including Cass Ziegler, Hillary Haarstad, Keila Kittelson, Travis Key, and Grace Lopez Johnson. Many others also deserve thanks for their efforts in keeping the campus and community moving forward.

With new leadership, UWL is well-positioned to seize upcoming opportunities, and that is an excellent feeling.

-Andrew Ericson, Sustainability Program Manager

UWL Sustainability Mission and Vision

Mission:

The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse will provide students, faculty, staff, and the community with the knowledge and skills to be environmentally responsible and involved citizens who understand and consider the global effects of their actions and the actions of others. The University will strive to use and implement sustainable best practices while minimizing its carbon footprint.

Vision:

- The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse is a campus where:
 - Education and research prepare students, faculty, staff, and surrounding communities to engage in dialogue and positive action around sustainability.
 - University leadership is committed to sustainability and will direct adequate resources toward the development of sustainability expertise and best practices on campus.
 - Minimizing the adverse social, economic, and environmental impacts of university operations is a priority.
 - Understanding and concern for sustainability issues provides the foundation for dynamic campus collaboration and community for students, faculty, and staff.

Mission and vision prepared and approved by the UW-La Crosse Joint Committee on Environmental Sustainability on December 6, 2013. Also approved by the UWL Student Association (December 11, 2013), Academic Staff Council (December 10, 2013), and Faculty Senate (February 13, 2014).

Highlights

A significant highlight of the 2023-2024 academic year was the development of the 2024 Climate Implementation Plan by the Joint Committee on Environmental Sustainability. This marks a unique step for our campus, as it is the first time a comprehensive strategy has been formulated to address climate change at UWL. The creation of this plan was spurred by the City of La Crosse Climate Action Plan passed in January 2023 and a subsequent letter of support from UWL in June 2023.



One student who has been very involved in sustainability during their time at UWL, Grace Lopez Johnson, demonstrated true leadership on December 8th, 2023, when she spoke to the Board of Regents. She discussed the importance of sustainability in driving her toward a degree and how it will define her future job search. Below are two photos from that experience.



Photos on the left includes (left to right): Hayden Hendersen (UWSA Sustainability Coordinator), Grace Lopez Johnson (UWL Student), Liz Davey (UWSA Sustainability Coordinator, Sean Nelson (UWSA Vice President for Admin and Finance)



Robin Wall Kimmerer, author of the national bestseller *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants*, visited UWL on March 20th and 21st, 2024. Her visit was made possible by Prairie Springs: The Paul Fleckenstein Trust, along with 17 campus departments and student organizations. Her two-day visit provided numerous opportunities for the campus community to interact with her and culminated in a keynote address attended by over 1,000 people. Her wisdom will undoubtedly have a lasting impact on campus for years to come.



Photos on the left includes (left to right): Travis Key, Andrew Ericson, Keila Kittelson, Cass Ziegler, Grace Lopez Johnson, Hillary Haarstad

The 2024-2025 academic year saw growth in the UWL Sustainability Team, with the number of interns increasing from two the previous year to five this year. New internships created opportunities to expand the UWL Sustainability Instagram account, implement a new food waste monitoring and education campaign within the Whitney Dining Center, analyze the 2024 Transportation and Commuting Survey, and much more.

ENVIRONMENT, HIGHER EDUCATION, NEWS

New La Crosse program aims to save reusable household items from landfills

A lot of microwaves, mini fridges and of course, ramen noodles,' said Kaitlyn Wiehe from the Habitat for Humanity of the Greater La Crosse Region



In partnership with Habitat for Humanity of the Greater La Crosse Region, a new campus move-out program called “Reduce, Reuse, Reimagine” was established. The program aimed to divert usable goods typically thrown away during on-campus move-out from the landfill. Over 18,000 pounds of usable goods were diverted, exceeding initial expectations. This initiative received extensive coverage, with over 30 mentions in the months leading up to its conclusion, providing excellent publicity for the university.



UWL Sustainability hosted the 2023 Universities of Wisconsin Sustainability Annual Meeting on October 12 and 13, 2023. The event attracted 80 participants, including students, staff, and faculty from all 13 UW campuses, for a two-day gathering. Attendees came together to learn, share, and strategize to advance sustainability goals and initiatives across the universities.



Blythe Pollard (left) and Dr. Niti Mishra (right) were honored with the annual Prairie Springs Environmental Leadership Award. This award is designed to encourage UWL instructors, undergraduate students, and graduate students to continue the environmental education and conservation work that was the passion of the late trustee, Paul Fleckenstein, and to inspire others to do the same. You can read more about them and past winners here: [Prairie Springs Excellence Award](#).



Keila Kittelson, a 2024 Public Health graduate, completed her undergraduate career with a preceptorship at UWL Sustainability. A preceptorship is a full-time, 15-credit service learning course for Public Health and Community Health Education majors. During the spring of 2024, Keila became an instrumental part of the team, providing leadership and assistance on numerous projects. Her primary initiative was a food waste diversion program in the Whitney Dining Center, which involved educating students about the significant environmental impact of food waste and tracking waste generated throughout the semester. The program was so successful that it has been adopted by Chartwells and will continue as an ongoing initiative.

Additional Success

- The Green Fund was reauthorized through a referendum of the UWL student body. 75% of those who voted, voted in favor of reauthorizing the Green Fund.
- Facilities Management began using brine on campus during the 2023-24 academic year. Brine is a more environmentally friendly option compared to rock salt for winter maintenance.
- The Department of Geography and Earth Science introduced a new Environmental Science major.
- Throughout the 2023-24 academic year, Andrew Ericson (Sustainability Program Manager) made 18 guest visits to classes, including First Year Seminars and courses in Environmental Studies, Public Health, and Sociology.
- The @uwlsustainability Instagram account saw a roughly 25% increase in followers over the 2023-24 academic year. This success was driven by Hillary Haarstad, UWL Sustainability's Marketing Intern, who created engaging and educational content that supported UWL's sustainability mission.
- UWL completed a Fleet Electrification Study in collaboration with Xcel Energy and Sawatch Labs. The study highlighted that transitioning 20 of UWL's vehicles to electric could result in \$171,000 in operational cost savings and a 75% reduction in GHG emissions from those vehicles.
- UWL Sustainability created and distributed the 2024 Transportation and Commuting Survey, which was completed by over 1,800 members of the campus community. The survey aimed to track emissions from commuting and gain insights into opportunities and barriers to more sustainable transportation options. The results are available on the UWL Sustainability website.
- The following Green Fund grants were awarded this academic year:
 - Robin Wall Kimmerer Mini Grant – \$1,500
 - Wentz Hall Steam Traps – \$18,000
 - Sustainable Supplies for Students – \$3,079
 - Sustainability Social Media and Marketing Manager (Student Position) – \$2,500
 - Dumpster Diversion – \$11,500
 - Childcare Center LED – \$20,916
 - REC Climbing Wall LED – \$14,061
 - Earthapalooza Mini Grant – \$1,500
- UWL Sustainability was present at all START resource fairs, providing information on both general sustainability initiatives and sustainable transportation options available to students in La Crosse.
- Andrew Ericson was awarded the Outstanding New Academic Staff honor at the end-of-year Student Affairs and Diversity & Inclusion celebration and was also nominated for the Sustainability Institute's 2023 Inspiring Sustainability Award.
- UWL Sustainability hosted its first Car Free Week, a week-long celebration offering educational and engagement opportunities around non-car transportation options. This initiative was conducted in partnership with It Makes Cents and Health and Wellness.

Coming Next

The 2024-25 academic year promises to be an exciting time for sustainability at UWL. With new leadership and fresh perspectives, there is a great opportunity to accelerate climate action. Through a strategic approach during the 2024-25 academic year, UWL can continue to lead in climate action and sustainability. Here are some high-level objectives for the upcoming year:

- Review and recommend a specific campus greenhouse gas reduction goal.
- Implement the action steps outlined in the 2024 UWL Climate Implementation Plan.
- Expand the range and scope of internships available through UWL Sustainability.
- Sustain and promote existing programs, including those initiated during the 2023-24 year, ensuring their long-term viability.
- Advocate for stable funding for the Sustainability Program Manager position to enhance progress on campus sustainability efforts.
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This is not a comprehensive list and may evolve as the 2024-25 year progresses. To stay updated, consider attending a JCES meeting, reaching out to aericson@uwlax.edu with ideas or questions, or following us on Instagram [@uwlsustainability](https://www.instagram.com/uwlsustainability).