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Recommended Citation
Cotton, Matthew B., "An Environmental and Economic Analysis of the Printing Practices of Periodicals and Publications by the University of Rhode Island and Similar Universities Nationwide" (2011). *Senior Honors Projects*. Paper 222.
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Matthew Cotton
Senior Honors Project Paper
Sponsor: Professor Thomas Husband, Natural Resources Science
Friday, May 13, 2011

An Environmental and Economic Analysis of the Printing Practices of Periodicals and Publications by the University of Rhode Island and Similar Universities Nationwide

Matthew Cotton
Faculty Sponsor: Thomas Husband, Natural Resources Science

Being environmentally-friendly, or "Going Green", is a relatively new way of thinking that provides both immediate and long term benefits for the environment and the planet while also creating new and exciting business and marketing opportunities. To tap into this movement requires a great deal of commitment, acceptance to change, and selflessness. It means altering one's perception of the world and their place in it, along with the roles and responsibilities that all humans have to keep our planet as sustainable as possible, for as long as possible.

Like many colleges and universities nationwide, the University of Rhode Island produces many publications and periodicals on an annual basis including the URI Catalog, Student Handbook, Undergraduate Admissions Viewbook and brochures, QuadAngles, and inAdvance@uri. Each of these institutions has their own views and policies on sustainability which translate into how they produce and distribute their individual publications. I have conducted an analysis of how selected colleges and universities do just that. Through numerous interviews as well as campus visits, I have become well-versed in the practices of other colleges and universities in regards to their publications and their stances on sustainability. The interviews were conducted with personnel in each institution's publications office, asking the same set of questions during each interview. The campus visits consisted of me posing as a prospective undergraduate student attending an admissions information session and tour of the campus in order to discover how specific schools market their sustainability directly to prospective students. I have done the same with the University of Rhode Island: closely examining URI's methods of producing and distributing printed materials, as well as their overall campus sustainability, in order to find out how URI compares with other institutions nationwide.

My results will paint a picture of opportunity for the University of Rhode Island. As sustainability and the "Going Green" movement become increasingly important to society and in the minds of young, college-bound individuals, there are many ways for the University of Rhode Island to capitalize both environmentally and economically. I will demonstrate these opportunities in my project and show what URI has to do in order to cement itself as a leader in the sustainability movement.

The title of my project is An Environmental and Economic Analysis of the Printing Practices of Periodicals and Publications by the University of Rhode Island and Similar Universities Nationwide and my sponsor is Professor Thomas Husband of the Department of Natural Resources Sciences. I wanted to do this project because I am extremely interested in the ever-growing field of sustainability and I wanted to explore how URI compares to other universities in specific areas of sustainability. These areas include the campus wide publications that each university produces as well as their marketing strategies geared towards a new generation of college students that value innovation in the field of sustainability.

The first part of my honors project consisted of contacting publications offices of universities nationwide and conducting interviews with the personnel in those departments to learn about their sustainability habits. I chose to interview 8 schools, including the University of Rhode Island, to hopefully obtain a large enough sample size to be able to draw results from the research. During each interview, I asked the same set of questions to the representatives:

1) What are the main functions of your office, or in other words, what is your office responsible for?

2) What are the different publications that your office produces?

3) Are any of the publications that you produce available online instead of print?

4) Are there any "green" initiatives in place to help you become more environmentally-friendly?

5) What would be something that you would like to see your office or campus in general do to become more "green"?

By asking these same questions during each interview, I hoped to gather results that could be compared from school to school. While conducting these interviews, I received some uniform responses from most of the schools that I talked to. In response to the first questions, all of the schools said that their main responsibilities included enhancing the reputation of the school, raising community awareness on current events, recruiting prospective students, and university fundraising. The publications that the

offices were responsible for were admissions materials, campus viewbooks, university catalogs, various brochures, and newsletters for faculty, students, and alumni of the university. Many of the universities I contacted said in order to become more environmentally-friendly, they wanted to see their campuses use less paper, environmentally-friendly inks, revamping the university transportation systems, and also having university administration openly embrace "green" initiatives that help make the university a more sustainable place.

The first school that I interviewed was Providence College. I found that all of Providence College's publications are available in print format, however there are some that have PDF equivalents online. Despite having all of their publications in print format, they are committed to using environmentally-friendly inks and recycled paper in all of their publications. Despite that, there was some room for improvement in their office. They currently produce proofs of all of their publications before the go to print and are simply discarded after the printing is complete. These proofs use a lot of paper and are all laminated, which uses a lot of resources as well as energy. The personnel at Providence College would like to see the proofs done away with to save those resources and energy.

The second interview I conducted was with Rhode Island College. Like Providence College, all of their publications are available in printed format, however most recruitment materials are also available online in PDF format. In addition, RIC has their undergraduate catalog available on a CD-ROM, which cuts way down on the paper and ink used to produce them. An interesting, and slightly disturbing, aspect regarding RIC is that their publication office is not required to adhere to any standards pertaining to using recycled or environmentally-friendly materials in their printing. Because they are not required to use those materials, they do not. The reason is because they are constantly competing with outside printing companies to win the printing jobs for the university, and if they can keep their costs low enough, they can beat out the competition. They would like to see some change in that regard, however. The personnel in the publications office said that they would like to see university

administration embrace green initiatives and realize that the benefits of “going green” outweigh the monetary costs of doing so.

The third school I contacted was the University of New Hampshire. UNH turned out to be one of the best schools I talked with, in regards to their sustainability. Approximately half of all campus publications at UNH are available solely online, and the half that is printed has PDF versions available online as well. In addition, there is a contagious attitude and feeling on campus at UNH among the students and faculty that it is there duty to protect and look after the environment and protect it. Because the attitude is present on campus, they actively participate in campus-wide initiatives such as powering down at night, as well as having a very intricate and well-developed public transportation system.

The same praise cannot be given to the fourth school I interviewed: the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. I found that although UMASS produces many brochures that steer readers to online resources, very few of their publications are available online in addition to print. For example, in the department of admissions they have fliers and brochures that direct people online to learn more about student testimonials and additional information, however their campus viewbook is not available online. In addition, and much like RIC, UMASS is not required to use any form of recycled papers or environmentally-friendly inks, mainly because of monetary reasons. Due to this, they do not currently use these materials. UMASS also gave me probably the most startling result of the entire project. When asked about what the department of publications or the campus in general could do in order to become a greener campus, the personnel at UMASS could not come up with any suggestions. They seemed uninterested in the whole concept of “going green” and sounded like they really had not given it much thought prior to that point. This was very troubling to me because it says that despite there being schools who are moving in the right direction, such as UNH and others, there are still schools like UMASS who are determined to drag their feet and refuse to change their wasteful ways.

I then moved on to the University of Vermont for my next interview, eager to find better results here than at UMASS. I found that the admissions materials are in print format only and not available online. Similar to UMASS, they do have testimonials and additional information online, but not PDF versions of the documents that they distribute. UVM produces a student and alumni magazine called "The Vermont Quarterly", which is printed three times per year. At the time of printing, it is also placed online for readers who would like to read it electronically also. Ever other campus newsletter or magazine at UVM is online only.

After interviewing UVM, I moved on to the University of California at Santa Barbara. UCSB turned out to be the best school that I analyzed in terms of sustainability. It is one of 18 different colleges that were named to the 2011 Green College Honor Roll by the "Princeton Review" for scoring a 99/100, the top score nationwide. This study done by the "Princeton Review" analyzed multiple aspects of the university and I was excited to talk with them to find out how they dealt with their publications. I learned that all campus-wide publications are available in PDF format online. In addition to that, the only publications that the university prints are the student newspapers, which print bi-weekly, and the alumni magazines, which are printed quarterly. All other publications at UCSB are online-only.

The seventh school I interviewed was the University of Wisconsin at Madison. After speaking with them, I discovered that approximately 75% of all publication at Wisconsin are available online as PDF's in addition to print, however they do print all campus-wide publications. That, however, will change starting in the fall of 2011. The faculty newsletter that is currently printed will be switching to solely online and more publications are due to follow in the coming semesters. Also, much like UNH, there is large support for green initiatives on campus. Recently, the university added several sustainability majors to the curriculum and there is high student involvement in the "going green" movement. I view Wisconsin as a school that is right on the cusp of becoming a major player in the

sustainability movement and they are certainly taking the right steps in establishing themselves as a leader in this field.

Finally, the eighth school I interviewed and analyzed was the University of Rhode Island. I discovered that many of our campus-wide publications are available online including the campus viewbook, URI catalog, QUAD*ANGLES*, and others. I also learned that all of publications are currently available in print format. URI is committed, however, to using recycled paper and inks whenever possible in their printed publications.

After gathering all of this information from these eight different schools, I asked myself the following question: How can URI improve? I determined that URI could make more publications online-only, such as the URI catalog, various newsletters, and admissions materials. This would follow in the model set forth by UNH and UCSB that has made them the model schools in this field. I also determined that URI could continue to support the use of recycled paper and environmentally-friendly inks in the publications that they do print, and they could expand the usage of such materials to all printed publications as opposed to only some of them. Finally, I determined that if URI has strong support and leadership from top administration regarding the sustainability movement, that would trickle down through all departments, faculty and eventually students and would create an atmosphere of sustainability and conservation that would spread all through our URI community.

The second part of my project was focused on selected universities have adopted environmentally-friendly habits on their campuses and how they market their sustainability to prospective undergraduate students. In order to find this out, I decided to pose as a potential undergraduate student, visit each campus that I decided to analyze, and go on an admissions tour to learn firsthand how these schools market their “green” initiatives. I wanted to explore these aspects of campus sustainability because I am very intrigued with the business side of everything and the opportunities created by certain situations. As part of my research, I discovered that there is quite a

substantial market for colleges that demonstrate a commitment to preserving the environment. According to a 2008 survey by the "Princeton Review", 63% of the 10,800 respondents said that information regarding a school's commitment to the environment would impact their decision to apply or attend that university, and 23% said that it would "strongly" affect their decision. In a separate 2008 survey conducted by UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute which polled 240,580 first-year full-time students at 340 different 4-year institutions, 45.3% of the respondents said that "adopting 'green' practices to protect the environment" is "essential" or "very important" to them. These results show that there is a very large market of potential freshman undergraduate students that, when looking for a school to attend and send their tuition payments to, value sustainability and a college's commitment to conserving the environment. The schools that I decided to visit for my case studies, as I called them, were Brown University, Rhode Island College, and the University of Rhode Island. The reasons why I chose these schools were because they were all in Rhode Island, all fairly easy to access, and also because they offered three separate tiers that I could compare against. Brown University is a prestigious Ivy League school that has a reputation of being very progressive. Rhode Island College is more of a school that is a public 4-year institution, however it has the feel and reputation of being between a community college and a 4-year institution. Finally, the University of Rhode Island seems to be right in the middle of the first two, being a large research university that is well-established as a 4-year institution, however lacks some of the prestige of an Ivy League school such as Brown. While visiting each school, I tried to observe various aspects of campus life and behaviors exhibited by the students. I looked at how they dealt with trash, how they traveled around campus, and finally how they marketed their sustainability to the prospective undergraduate students.

The first case study that I conducted was at Brown University. At Brown, they have very advanced, yet simple trash receptacle stations. All throughout campus, wherever there is a trash can, it is flanked by a separate can for recycling bottles and cans, and another for recycling paper. In addition,

they have BigBelly Solar Compactors in selected locations around campus that help reduce that volume of trash created by the university. While walking around and noting the trash bins, I noticed that there were bicycles everywhere on campus. I have, quite frankly, never seen so many bikes ever before. Every bike rack on campus seemed to be full of bicycles. This told me that the students at Brown really value riding bicycles to and from their classes and therefore do not drive very much around campus. This greatly reduces the amount of carbon emissions from the school and creates a very pleasant atmosphere around campus.

The second case study I conducted was at Rhode Island College, also in Providence, Rhode Island. My findings throughout my time at RIC were in stark contrast to those at Brown. In the area of trash, I discovered that RIC did not have any trash bins for recycling throughout the entire campus. Every trash bin I came across was for just that: trash. There were no sorting stations where students had the option to recycle their bottles and cans if they so desired. Everything went into the trash at RIC. Also, all of the bike racks at RIC were completely empty. In the four hours I spent walking around the campus, I found one lonesome bicycle chained to a pole. I did, however, find massive commuter parking lots that were stuffed with automobiles. This tells me that even though RIC is in the same city at Brown, the attitude pertaining to sustainability just is not present at RIC. The students drove their cars to campus every day and filled up the parking lots, only to drive home again every night.

My final case study was the University of Rhode Island. Going into the case study, I was hopeful that URI would have a better showing than RIC and would come close to what I found at Brown. I found that URI was somewhere in the middle, overall. I discovered that at our trash receptacle stations around campus, we had recycling bins for bottles and cans in addition to trash, however no bins for paper. Brown had all three types of bins, RIC only had trash, and URI had trash bins as well as bins for bottles and cans. Similar to RIC, I did not find many bikes at all on the Kingston campus of URI. I found one bike in a rack outside Chafee Hall, but other than that the campus was free of bikes. Instead, I found very

large parking lots that were full of cars from commuting students. The lots, in particular the one behind the Fine Arts Center, fill up each and every day with hundreds, if not thousands, of cars from the commuting students. One thing that URI did that the first two schools did not do was market their sustainability. This was very exciting for me because I had been waiting for one of these schools to talk about their green initiatives on the admissions tours that I went on and URI, the last school I visited, was the first to do so. They mentioned sustainability twice during the campus tour, both times in the relatively new CBLS building. The first time was in regards to the safety showers that are present in the building. These showers are to be used if someone were to spill chemicals on themselves and needed to wash the chemicals off quickly. It turns out that there are no drains underneath the showers, the reason being that there is concern the chemicals, once washed off the individual, would seep into the local watersheds and drinking water supplies. To prevent that, the tour guide explained that if there was an incident where the showers were needed, the water would be cleaned up and disposed of in a way that would not harm the surrounding environment. The second mention of sustainability was in regards to the large wall of windows in the building. The windows, spanning 4-5 stories high, act as a greenhouse in the winter time and warm the building. This reduces the need for the heat to be turned on. In the summer time, the windows are opened, creating a breeze that circulates through the building, and reduces the need for air conditioning. Both of these uses is a way for the building, and the university in general, to save on energy.

Once my case studies were completed, I again asked myself the following question: How can URI improve? I determined that URI could update their trash receptacle stations around campus to include bins for paper in addition to the bins for trash and bottles and cans. Also, I determined that URI could explore options to limit traffic on campus and increase the use of bicycles and other means of transportation to get to and from campus. I learned through my case study to Brown University that their students have free access the RIPTA bus services that travels all through Rhode Island. URI students

have to pay each time they get on the bus. If URI could strike a deal with RIPTA to allow for URI students to have free access to the buses, more students may commute to campus using the busses as opposed to driving. Also, there is a bike path that runs not too far from campus that connects to Narragansett and the surrounding communities. If that bike path was somehow connected to URI, many students may find it easier to bike to school rather than drive. Finally, I determined that URI needs to increase their marketing of sustainability beyond just one or two point in the CBLS building. As the research studies have proven, there is a large and every-expanding market for schools that show that they value green initiatives. Because Brown and RIC did not market their sustainability at all during their campus tours, that creates a huge opportunity for URI to jump in and market to those students looking for a school who does market sustainability. If URI would do those things, I believe they would make great strides in becoming a much more sustainable school and more attractive institution to potential undergraduate students.

Sources

1. **http://www.aashe.org/blog/how-do-campus-sustainability-initiatives-affect-college-admissions**

Special Thanks

1. All of the personnel in the Publications Offices of the universities contacted

2. Gigi Edwards, Office of Publications and Creative Services, URI

3. Professor Thomas Husband, Natural Resources Science, URI