A STUDENT PERSPECTIVE ON WMU’s STUDENT SUSTAINABILITY FEE

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF SUSTAINABILITY AT WMU

The WMU Student Sustainability Fee (SSF) originated with a group of students who were inspired during a 2009 trip to Ball State University’s “Greening of the Campus” conference in Muncie, Indiana. The idea of a ‘green fee’ to support campus sustainability initiatives was novel to the student group, and they wished to begin collecting a similar fee on WMU’s campus. One student, Kate Shields, began an independent study project that, by 2010, had gained so much traction it transformed into the Sustainability Fee Initiative. This initiative turned into a full-fledged student-led campaign, which resulted in a ballot initiative posed to the student body during the annual student elections. The proposal to institute a sustainability fee passed; 1664 students voted on the referendum, 60% of which were in support of the fee. The VP of Student Affairs, Diane Anderson, subsequently forwarded the proposal to the WMU Board of Trustees, where it was unanimously approved, establishing WMU as the first college or university in Michigan with a green fee. The WMU SSF has become a facet of campus culture in part because it was heralded by a student-led initiative, and the money collected from the fee primarily supports student grants, green jobs for students, an internship program, and projects. A portion of the fee supplements the Office for Sustainability (OfS) operations. This means that SSF monies are predominately focused on supporting initiatives, programs, and projects that create opportunities and improve the overall wellbeing of students during their time at WMU.

The Office for Sustainability’s immense success is due in no small part to the SSF. The OfS has been recognized multiple times for the sustainability initiatives at WMU, having received a Climate Leadership Award from Second Nature, a Planet Forward Sustainability Innovator Award, and Gold status from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) after filing its first ever STARS (Sustainability, Tracking, Assessment and Rating System) report. In addition, the Detroit Free Press awarded WMU with a Michigan Green Leader Award in 2013; the Sustainable Endowment Institute awarded their 2015 Best of GRITS “Most Carbon Emissions Saved to Date” from a large Institution to WMU; and the UI Green Metric ranking lists WMU as the 8th best Suburban Campus in the World, and the 2nd best in the US. This amount of recognition is incredible considering the OfS building opened in the fall of 2012. The OfS typically employs 25-30 student employees each semester in various capacities, along with a few graduate students and in the past, a doctoral assistant (graduate assistants have been hired when outside funding is available). The OfS provides tours, guidance, and sponsors many programs and events on campus that benefit students while also providing internship opportunities that are marketed towards every major and discipline at WMU.

WMU is known for its commitments to sustainability and education; it claims the status of the first university in the nation with a quasi-revolving fund to support energy conservation projects, we have been designated as a Tree Campus USA since 2008, and we became a Founding Circle member of the Billion Dollar Green Challenge in 2011. These commitments and responsibilities are indicative of a highly successful sustainability program, and these accolades have only increased the expectations of the OfS to produce and manage fiscally, environmentally, and socially responsible projects for campus and community improvements. Prior to having an OfS at WMU, President Dunn created the President’s Universitywide Sustainability Committee (PUSC) to advise and regularly produce updates on the sustainability initiatives on campus. This committee is composed of professors, administrators, staff, and students; by establishing this transparent entity, WMU has further emphasized its commitment to implementing sustainability practices throughout its curriculums, research, administration, operations, and outreach. The PUSC publishes the minutes from its meetings on the WMU Sustainability website as soon as they are compiled. This is keeping with the Mission
of the Office for Sustainability, the overarching goal of which is to create a robust culture of sustainability and to increase the quality of life for all.

**HOW FUNDS ARE UTILIZED**

The lion’s share of SSF monies are allocated annually to the Survey Implementation and Ongoing Project fund (SIOP). Contained within this fund is the Student Sustainability Grant (SSG): these grants are available to those who pay the fee each semester, it excludes online students and those attending satellite campuses (they are not assessed the fee). These grants have been used to fund student projects in areas ranging from dietetics, cross-disciplinary research initiatives, alternative transportation, renewable energy, campus events, and various installations on campus. To be taken into consideration for funding, proposals must be safe, legal, adequately budgeted, and possible within existing university infrastructure. The grant application process is managed by the full time staff of the Office for Sustainability as well as the undergraduate and graduate students that comprise the allocations committee (SSGAC). A blind peer review process has been utilized to preserve a democratic tradition and reduce selection bias throughout the application process. The peer review ensures that the student grants are considered fairly and approved or denied by unbiased peers, rather than by a professional or faculty group that did not contribute towards the fund.

The SSG handbook is the document that outlines the guidelines that govern the grant application process as well as the bylaws of the SSGAC. This handbook is currently under revision, although these changes have not been finalized. The Office for Sustainability’s responsibilities, in this document, fall almost entirely under the promotion and administration of the grants. This can be found under section 3, part 7:

“The Office for Sustainability will evaluate whether proposals are safe, legal, adequately budgeted, and possible within existing university infrastructure. Applicants who submit proposals that do not meet these criteria will be rejected.”

The financial home of funded and active SSG projects is contained within the domain of Student Activities and Leadership Programs (SALP). This division of responsibilities ensures a blind review and unbiased application process. Therefore, students get to decide which grants are funded with minimal administrative influence; the intention of this arrangement is to give students both control over and responsibility for a portion of the SSF—simultaneously granting leadership roles and fiduciary responsibility to those who pay the fee.

SSGs are expected to be well-managed student projects that contain some form of initiative, activity, service, research or event by the conclusion of the grant. In addition, the grantees are required to report their findings and constraints throughout their project, and to file a brief report of what was accomplished or learned at the end of the project. Historically, this reporting process has been less than substantial—and often projects are funded and occur with little documentation to trace the progression of knowledge within our institution. This lackluster follow-through reduces the possibility of effectively judging the efficacy of the SSG program; in light of the money and the people-hours spent on SSG work and advising, we would expect to see some tangible and traceable benefit to the university community. These metrics should be published regularly if we are to properly review the practices of the program and what procedures should be modified to efficiently evolve the program. Moreover, having an established venue for the publication of project briefs will provide a portal into past student work, and will easily allow future grant writers to build and expand upon previous work. A web portal similar to the OfS project page would accomplish this task quite neatly while simultaneously increasing the visibility of other small-scale projects to the larger student body. The creation of a transparent venue for this purpose would provide an answer to many student comments...
collected during a series of meetings conducted among OfS student employees and ENVS students. These comments cite poor access to past projects as a main concern regarding the effective use of SSF monies. By maintaining a list of all current projects and their leaders, and providing a venue for research publication, we would be creating a culture of collaboration that celebrates the iterative improvements realized through SSG pilots and events. This would allow new students to quickly familiarize themselves with OfS activities while simultaneously providing a stepping stone to getting involved at an individual level. The SSG handbook guidelines currently require that a project brief shall be completed after the project is over, although currently the amount of reports that have been submitted is very low. By providing a template of expectations and a library of past project briefs, we will be dissuading poorly managed ideas while increasing the accountability of good ones, ultimately providing a stepping stone for leveraging past work into new follow-up projects.

A rudimentary analysis of the money allocated to SSG proposals shows that since the program’s inception, 54 grants out of the 69 proposed have been funded, with the average award amount being $4,541 per grant. The total amount of SSG money allocated as of spring 2016 stands at $245,226.

**STUDENT POINT OF VIEW OF SSF ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

The SSF has provided funding for over 25 programs run by the OfS, not including any SSGs. These programs vary immensely in their focus, ranging from the EcoMug research going on in the OfS studio space. These program offerings expand every year, as do the responsibilities of the OfS which operates as a guide, facilitator, and manager for this wide array of programming.

Several of the successes stemming from the SSF are the WeSustain Internship and branding initiative, the weekly Bike Stable open shop, and the early initiation of the Campus Beet vegan lunch café. The WeSustain Internship is a paid, semester long internship, open to students from all majors and colleges, with the capacity for 8-12 students per semester. The cross-disciplinary nature of this internship introduces students to many core concepts of sustainability, behavior analysis, system dynamics, leadership skills, and community outreach. This program has been funded by SSF monies through the Green Jobs portion of the fee division, with supplemental funding from the SIOP account for supplies and materials. The Bike Stable open shop is a student run bicycle repair co-learning initiative, in which community members are encouraged to bring their bicycles to the studio space and receive advice, access to tools, and guidance from experienced student mechanics, free of charge. The Bike Stable open shop has assisted over 1000 community members with bicycle repair and maintenance since its inception in 2011.

The Campus Beet is an example of a striking success originally begun by a SSG that has gone through several iterations, eventually turning into a RSO. At this point in the Beet’s organizational life it secures funding by charging $3 per meal served. They have sustained this for over 5 years, and remain one of the best examples of an SSG project that has maintained a series of high quality leaders who have transitioned from using SSG funding to a self-sustaining model. This is an exemplary model of the transitionary accomplishments that would allow many other high-quality projects to maintain success and outreach over the years, rather than only flourishing while the primary authors/founders are in a leadership role during their time at WMU.

The Student Café has been championed with a massive student effort and support from the OfS and others for nearly a decade, yet it has not received the support it needs from Student Affairs to bring it into reality. This example demonstrates how some projects will not take hold without our entire campus community becoming champions of sustainability. This will require other offices and divisions becoming sustainability promoters and innovators, an organizational behavior change that would do much to advance campus greening efforts.
The EcoMug and EcoJug distribution is the largest program that the OfS operates annually. This program gives students free stainless steel drinking jugs to use on and off-campus. These jugs are the only reusable drinking container allowed for use in the campus cafeterias, and many local businesses give discounts to people using an EcoJug. This program has given away over 20,000 bottles since its inception in 2009, and was recently sponsored in part by Consumer’s Credit Union from 2013 until 2015.

The WMU Community Garden is another OfS program that blossomed into an independent entity. After two years of incubation and managerial support, the OfS was happy to return stewardship responsibilities to the students of two RSO’s: Students for a Sustainable Earth and BioClub. This community garden connects students and community members in a social learning environment that emphasizes the production of local and organic fruits and vegetables.

The SSF has also funded the installation of an early group of dual-purpose drinking fountain/water bottle fill stations that now are popping up in many campus buildings. These drinking stations have prevented over a million disposable water bottles from entering landfills during their lifespan so far. SSF money has also been utilized to enhance the role of recycling on campus: the SolidWaste Reduction program, supported in part by SSF monies, has built and maintained highly visible stainless-steel recycling bins throughout campus to encourage recycling at an institutional level.

**CHALLENGES OF OPERATING A SUCCESSFUL SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAM**

One significant and ongoing challenge is the expansion of OfS responsibilities without an increased line of funding or support from other sections of the university. This is financially unsustainable and will lead to a diminished presence of sustainable activities on campus, and/or a decline in the quality of the projects that retain funding. This goes hand in hand with the influx of unfunded mandates that the OfS attempts to fulfill. These include researching and writing annual campus GHG inventories which are to begin in 2016, performing SSG advising, and pursuing community connectivity to foster a robust culture of sustainability in the greater Kalamazoo region.

Another challenge that the OfS is facing has been the inaccurate promotion of the SSG across colleges. Some resources say it is a scholarship, while some professors use it as a class project. The nature of the program needs to be clarified regularly and shown to be a grant for projects, initiatives, or new services aimed at providing opportunities for students to advance our campus culture of sustainability. To address this, the OfS should create a packet delineating specifics about the SSG for distribution to all departments, and ask them to clarify any existing documentation that differs from the official language. A web-based FAQ page could solve these issues and would cost little to establish.

Due to the complex and interconnected nature of campus sustainability projects, multiple stakeholders are impacted and asked to pre-approve; participate in; or contribute time, resources, and facilities towards supporting student grants. While some grant writers and stakeholders have effectively communicated and collaborated in the past with great success, it is clear that in many cases the current routines governing SSG proposals do not foster a sense of cooperation between departments and stakeholders. Stakeholders feel that they are boxed into a situation and given too little time or information to make an informed decision. This is evidenced by a series of emails from SSG writers and the university stakeholders with whom they have corresponded. In several instances, students have asked landscaping services or facilities management to produce a large amount of information on costs for a project, or agree to a modification of their routines or structures with less than a day’s notice. These short-notice requests are almost always denied; stakeholders cannot be expected to take responsibility for deeply involved projects that they have not vetted without appropriate notice. The way these interactions are handled reflects poorly upon the entire SSG process and reveals a flaw in the way that the SSG handbook currently demands stakeholders are informed about
upcoming proposals. By requiring stakeholders to be informed much earlier in the proposal process, the SSG application process can create an atmosphere of mutual benefit for stakeholders, students, and the campus at large.

**SSG HANDBOOK REVISIONS**

The SSG handbook was last revised in February of 2012. Those revisions were made by Matt Hollander, Megan Walsh (at the time held the post of WSA Campus Sustainability Chair), and Chris Sligh (Director of SALP). Currently, talks are underway to make additional revisions to the SSG handbook. These talks are occurring among Derek Kanwischer (OfS), Logan Brown (WSA Sustainability Chair), and Thye Fischmann (WSA President). The common goal of this iterative process is to increase grant project quality and impact. This will improve ways students and stakeholders are informed of grant opportunities and guidelines, articulate roles and responsibilities in the grant review process, reinforce responsibilities of grant authors during and after a grant period, and strengthen communication lines among OfS, WSA, GSA, SALP, and other stakeholders involved in the grant process. Revisions to the SSG handbook and an improvement in OfS/WSA/SALP/stakeholder interaction are critical to the long term success of the SSG program. Ideally we will create a ruleset that continues to work well, long into the future.

The SSG gives students a structured opportunity to work through real-world sustainability challenges. The OfS and SSGAC evaluation process is designed to weed out ill-conceived projects and reward students who have developed a project idea that has the potential to promote a campus culture of sustainability at WMU.

WSA’s proposed revisions to the SSG handbook include an increased level of participation with stakeholders during the application process, and an avenue for the SSGAC to consult applicants to clarify information and provide assistance. This includes a reemphasis of requirements that grantees produce short reports on the progress they have made and the constraints they have faced throughout their grant.

In addition, grant projects must begin to outline a succession plan for when primary authors move on, if the SSG is not for a one-time project or initiative. The SSG handbook revisions should include this requirement for larger projects that are likely to span multiple semesters or years, although it should be noted that SSGs are intended to fund fixed-term grants for pilot programs, rather than funding programs that will persist year after year. This should also include a succession plan for materials purchased or built with SSG money. Impacted and relevant stakeholders should be identified in grant proposals and follow-through plans should be outlined if not clearly established. This will assist stakeholders like Facilities Management and Landscaping Services to more accurately evaluate any potential liabilities and impacts a project will have after the primary investigator has moved on.

**ADAPTION TECHNIQUES FOR REDUCED FUNDING**

WMU is currently under financial strain as a result of a trending decline in enrollment, and therefore many programs and departments are experiencing shrinking budgets and staff opportunities. The OfS is under similar strain; because the nature of SSF money originates with students, the amount of money being collected has been shrinking each semester. This has resulted in an 11% reduction in SSF monies over the past 6 years. In practical terms, this means that the oft lauded OfS will have less time, money and resources to address campus sustainability challenges and win awards that bring WMU national recognition. This is an example of a reinforcing feedback loop, in which a loss of money leads to a loss of human resources, which in turn leads to a further loss of recognition (the source of students and therefore money). When combined with another reinforcing feedback loop, that of the Office’s success, which lead to increased recognition, which then put increased pressure on the OfS to produce even more high quality reports and projects, we are placed in an interesting position, in which the resources to adequately support our students and staff, those
that produce these high quality products, do not exist. This cycle is unsustainable and will lead to a reduction in the amount of green initiatives on campus while hindering WMUs long term goals of maintaining a sustainable campus and building a culture of sustainability.

The SSF money has historically been divided into separate funds, with 57% going towards the SIOP fund (includes $75,000 SSG fund), 24% to OfS supplemental funding, and 19% earmarked for supporting Green Jobs for student employees. These are the divisions as initially chosen; a revision to and breakdown of these divisions would put money where it is needed without compromising the larger funding base for SSG projects. Adaptations that might be made with a reduced budget and increased responsibilities include a decrease in office productivity and availability, combined with reduced quality of the projects and reports that remain funded, due to time and fiduciary constraints. In addition to a shrinking budget, the amount of money available to SSGs could escalate from $75,000 to as high as $125,000 per fiscal year. This would take an additional $50,000 off the top of the OfS’s current budget, further reducing their ability to assist in sustainability initiatives on campus. Student Affairs was initially understood to be responsible for a periodic review of these practices, and while no revision has happened since the SSF was enacted, this is a great opportunity to evolve the fee in an effort to make it an even more positive initiative for promoting and progressing campus sustainability efforts.

Increasing the fee is a stopgap method to fix budget woes, but it doesn’t solve the larger problem of a shrinking and increasingly stratified student body, or the low levels of awareness of campus sustainability projects (see survey data section). This suggests a need to enhance the SSF for the student body that currently exists—hopeful engendering increased interest in pursuing sustainability in higher education. One additional option is to expand the SSF to satellite campuses and online students. This comes with the concession that these students will expect some service or benefit when they begin paying a fee. Optimistically, this could be a new avenue for research and projects in satellite campuses, and an influx of new SSG authors from other colleges and age groups could very well benefit the overall quality and diversity of SSG submissions, although this would likely place increased burdens on the OfS as well.

In a campus environment with increased demands and decreased funding, it may become necessary to retire programs or reduce services unless other sources of funding can be secured. The other option is to maintain funding for all these programs at a reduced rate, although the eventual quality of these services could potentially decrease due to a lack of availability of experienced staff. Outside grants could be pursued to fund certain programs, and many SSGs could be bolstered with outside support. This approach could allow students to receive pay while working on SSG projects. The current grant rules do not allow for fund 52 monies to be spent on compensating students for time worked. By combining multiple funding sources, students will secure an adequate support system during their work on SSG projects, which could lead to an increase in grant quality and impact on campus.

Business sponsors for university programs can increase visibility while reducing costs to the university. By pursuing partnerships similar to the two-year Consumer’s Credit Union sponsorship of the EcoMug, a cash strapped department can stretch every dollar and build a community that participates in and is aware of local sustainability efforts. Similarly, by partnering with other departments and encouraging them to take over some responsibilities or projects, the OfS may be able to shift select projects to appropriate locations where the proper support will be found. By merging programs and combing funding we could increase the visibility of sustainability efforts across campuses and colleges, and promote cross fertilization of ideas among colleges and majors.

Another method of managing expectations would be to monetize some OfS services. This is the least attractive idea and every alternative should be considered and attempted before this becomes an appealing course of action. The OfS could begin charging WMU for services rendered. By doing cost benefit analysis of
sustainability services, the money the university saves could be put into the OfS budget, allowing for an even further level of outreach and larger variety of services. This would essentially allow the OfS to operate as paid consultants to the university, and would most like negatively impact the manner in which OfS staff interact with students and the community.

**SURVEY DATA AND STUDENT COMMENTS**

The OfS organizes and distributes an annual survey to the student body that asks questions about their level of knowledge regarding the SSF, the OfS, and also asks some questions about general sustainability topics as part of a pilot project to collect data via literacy assessment of sustainability issues. These surveys go back to 2013, and contain valuable data on student participation and awareness of sustainability efforts. These surveys provide a venue for students to comment on topics related to the administration of sustainability efforts, and these comments are compiled by topic, and published annually along with the data from the survey on the OfS website.

Survey data reveals that in 2016, 84% of the student body was aware that the OfS exists and operates on campus with SSF money, although 35% did not know specifically how that money was spent. Increasing the levels of student interaction by focusing on raising student awareness with OfS programs could do more for campus sustainability than any new program would. The main problem with increasing sustainability participation on campus is not a lack of programs, rather, this data points to a large variety of programs, of which many are typically underutilized by the student body that funds them. A very intriguing metric for sustainability efforts is the amount of people that are in support of the fee, regardless of whether they know how the monies are spent. Only 4% of the student body is staunchly against the fee, while 37% support it and know how the money is being allocated and managed. Tellingly, 35% of survey respondents reported that they did not know how this money was being utilized. This means that over one third of the responding students reported that they are completely in the dark regarding the sustainability efforts being pursued by the OfS. One of the best ways to increase the practical efficacy of the OfS and its outreach efforts on campus will be to raise awareness and increase participation in the programs that are currently funded yet underutilized.

According to the surveys, the awareness levels of the OfS’s existence have remained stable over the past 4 years. Since 2013, the first year of the survey, the percentage of students that are aware that WMU has an OfS has remained at ~85%. This level of awareness is outstanding, although the fact that this figure has not grown is cause for question. The dilemma therefore, is, how do we reach the 15% of students that remain unaware of the OfS? Is it paradoxical to claim that we maintain a sustainable campus, when roughly 1/7th of the student body is unaware of those efforts? Will that 15% of students respond to any targeted efforts we take to raise awareness? I propose that by creating new programs or by shaping current programs so that the OfS cater heavily to the newest class of students, we will increase this level of awareness and simultaneously create a new generation of sustainability leaders that will have the skills and experience necessary for securing careers in sustainable fields.

**Selected student comments from annual survey’s**

Since 2014, the annual Sustainability Survey has included a comment section. All responses are anonymous.

**Negative comments:**

“The whole idea and fees are a waste of time, money and resources. I would have answered four for all of the items if I were allowed.” – 2016

“It is scientifically proven that anything we do on this planet, the natural course of geological evolution will forget we were ever here. Quit wasting time and, more importantly, our money on posh science that doesn’t exist. I want my tuition money to benefit things I support and green energy is NOT one of them.” – 2015
“The sustainability office does a piss-poor job of communicating what they do, what they have to offer, and what their purpose is. They seem to be hiding in the sidelines and just soaking up student money with no clear indication of a good use for this mandated fee” – 2014

Positive comments:

“You guys are doing great!” – 2016

“…An incentive to recycle all the papers saved up in book bags, binders, dorm rooms etc. at the end of each semester perhaps with an all-day event to bring all old recyclable papers. Weigh the amount being recycled and allocate a raffle ticket for each ounce donated for a chance to win prizes from the bookstore and local businesses. Use recycled paper from WMU for the New Press published books. This could be a limited edition option the Creative Writing Grad School could co-organize with the department of sustainability!” – 2016

“The silver trash/recycling cans in Sangren that identify what goes in each space and gives examples are AWESOME. I would like to see these everywhere on campus.” – 2015

“Although I have observed that many students feel the sustainability fee is unnecessary, I think one of the things that sets Western apart from many other universities is its focus on sustainability and green technologies. In my opinion, $8 is a small price to pay for an initiative that not only benefits WMU, but also the community.” – 2014

Stakeholder Comments (Facilities Management)

“The grants are a great way to keep them [students] engaged and achieve the University’s sustainability goals. Facilities Management needs to find that balance of supporting students, working within the rules, being good stewards of University resources, and following a good business model.”

“FM Staff are seeing issues and concern with the OfS grant process…The problem is the students are approaching a variety of campus staff to get permission and support for the grants. Many of the people they are approaching do not have authorization to approve these ideas or the concept may have future operating costs that are not being considered. I am suggesting the process be changed. Before the students start going around campus approaching people, their materials should be vetted by OfS professional staff.”

When taking these considerations into account, it becomes clear that student grant writers need to utilize the resources provided by the OfS while they are writing their grant application. This problem rests on the shoulders of the students involved; their success depends on their collaborative skills and adaptability to administrative barriers—these are areas in which a new SSG grant coordinator could assist students, while also providing advice on interacting with campus administrative bodies.

Conclusion

The SSF and SSG program are very influential on WMUs campus, but the current iteration of the programs seem to be poorly optimized for the shrinking and stratified student body that the university is currently experiencing. Right now, the SSF seems to function best as an incubator for student projects and as a launching point for high leverage programs that immediately provide opportunities for community members, like the Bike Stable, Community Garden, and Wsustain Internship. Several things need to happen to secure a strong future for the Office for Sustainability and other sustainability initiatives on campus. Critical changes need to be made to the SSG handbook, an organic and student-led SSF awareness campaign should be high priority, and increasing the level of dialogue with the student body to ensure their needs are being addressed will provide the best options for building and preserving the grassroots support that led to
the creation of the SSF in the first place. This is a watershed moment in WMU’s development—a strong period of growth and reflection can strengthen the mission and impact the Office for Sustainability makes on the future, whereas a fumble in the administration of these student monies could set the sustainability goals of WMU floundering for resources and leadership.

Recommendations for future success:

- Establish venue for SSG research and project reports to be published
- Establish list of current projects with contact info, up-to-date research, and a visual of project
- Establish a SSG Coordinator position to facilitate communication between OfS, Grant writers, WSA, and Stakeholders
- Revise SSF $ divisions (Cut money from SSG to fund grant coordinator position)
- Become comfortable retiring programs that don’t take off (ex. Bike Rental)
- Enhance interdepartmental collaborations (IE, CS, ISM, ENVS, GIS)
- Create packet or digital FAQ that clearly defines SSG requirements and expectations
- Create “show & tell” days for current Grant Awardees to give tours/showings of their grant project to a larger audience
- Increase follow-through with First Year students – make sustainability relevant to them beyond their exposure to it in FYS, FYE, class visits, and tours

My experience writing this report:

Performing this review was an interesting challenge; as a new employee at the OfS and past WeSustain intern, I was given a crash course introduction to all of the programs that the OfS manages, full access to all data, materials, and reports, and then subsequently assigned the task of assessing all of the literature relating to the SSF at WMU. I became an expert on the subject by reviewing the entirety of the documentation that exists on our green fee, the sustainability surveys that have been conducted since 2013, other universities’ green fee programs and implementation schemes, as well as the documentation of past SSGs and OfS student employee research. I read the SSG handbook, WMUs 2014 STARS report, email chains, and every other document that had any applicability to the topic. In doing so, I realized that much of the information about these projects is difficult to locate without assistance from someone who has been navigating these waters for several years, which is why Jeff Spoelstra became my go-to resource for questions about where to find specific information, or why some information may not exist in an accessible place.

Ultimately, my learning process and challenges are reflected in my recommendations—to ensure the successful stewardship of SSF monies, the OfS must revise some operations, retire some programs, and begin to pilot programs that target students in their first year of attending WMU, so as to hopefully create student leaders that will work with the OfS to create a campus culture of sustainability while simultaneously promoting themselves and their actions as a sustainability champion during their time on campus and in their lives after.