Comprehensive sustainability plan testament to university’s stewardship commitment

‘Grizzlies Healthy Planet Initiative’ calls for unprecedented collaborative effort from students, faculty and staff

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Less than a year after introducing Oakland University’s value statement, which includes a prominent reference to stewardship, President Ora Hirsch Pescovitz has assembled a diverse team of faculty, staff and students to draft the university’s first comprehensive sustainability plan.

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Coming on Earth Day, the formal announcement of Grizzlies Healthy Planet Initiative (GHPI) reflects the president’s emphasis on policies that support a more healthy and sustainable university, which includes a direct challenge to the OU community to do their part.

“We are stewards of the environment and culture, and each of us must be responsible for preserving, protecting and perpetuating our campus and communities,” said President Pescovitz. “The expansive structure of the initiative aims to educate our community on the many ways we can be more sustainable as we implement measures that set an example of responsible behavior and institutional stewardship.”

As the university administration manages the health and safety conditions of campus during the pandemic and prepares for a return to campus in the fall, the sustainability initiative offers “realistic optimism” based on the inspiring collaborative effort of the past year, she said.

“A silver lining from dealing with constant change during the COVID-19 crisis is that we can accomplish great things when we work together,” said President Pescovitz. “We need to come together for a common purpose, and that purpose is the ongoing evolution, viability and sustainability of Oakland University.”

GHPI advances the vision set forth by “Reimagining OU,” a team of faculty and staff that presents innovative approaches to improving the culture, identity, administrative processes and explores potential initiatives to support ways for OU to become “the university of choice.” The term was coined by President Pescovitz as a challenge to the OU community to make the university the best possible place to learn, live and work.

The Reimagining OU effort is led by Kevin Corcoran, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and Graeme Harper, Dean of the Honors College. The Reimagining OU team recommended the formation of a campus-wide sustainability plan guided by the sustainability tracking, assessment and rating system (STARS). That method is coordinated by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education as a technique for colleges and universities to measure their sustainability performance.

GHPI is organized into 10 committees, including academics, research, campus engagement, public engagement, environmental (operations, building maintenance, biodiversity, climate change, etc.), food and dining, investment and finance, transportation, wellbeing and work, and leadership. (NOTE: A list of committees and chairs is listed under the “Path Ahead” tab at Reimagining OU.)
Each committee has a chair or co-chairs, who determine the composition of their committee. The plan is organized based on short-, medium and long-term goals, including strategic plans for each area of the GHPI.

Concurrent to the presidential sustainability initiative, the OU Senate Campus Development and Environment Committee incorporated sustainability into its charge.

The overall GHPI effort is led by Steve Waterfield, Director of Athletics, Louay Chamra, Dean of the School of Engineering and Computer Science, John Young, Vice President of University Communications and Marketing, and Frank Provenzano, Office of the President.

“Oakland University will demonstrate through its policies and collective actions that we are fostering an innovative, engaging and sustainable 21st-century university community,” said Dean Chamra. “For our sustainability efforts to succeed, we must work together and realize how connected we are in maintaining collective obligation as stewards.”