

OU gets B-minus on sustainability

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On Oct. 6, Ohio University received a grade of B-minus from the College of Sustainability Report Card, with a D in transportation and an F in shareholder management.

The College of Sustainability Report Card compares 332 American and Canadian colleges and universities in their commitments to sustainability and environmental issues.

OU's sustainability coordinator, Sonia Marcus, cited Athens' rural location as a factor in the university's low grade in transportation. Part of the Report Card's criteria for transportation is whether a school is subsidizing city bus passes, but Marcus said "that is a much more relevant indicator to look at in a place where there is a proper transportation system."

Ohio State University, which has an urban campus, received an A in this category.

Marcus also noted that campus transportation systems are offered more extensively in other schools because "those programs are directly funded by parking fees." She explained that charging for faculty and staff parking passes often provides the funding for busing at other universities, while OU does not charge for this service.

Another factor in determining the transportation grade is whether the campus offers a bike-friendly environment.

OU Student Senate Vice President Emily Bacha suggested that a more comprehensive bike-share system may be the answer.

Student Senate has begun working on a bike library program, she said. The service would allow students to rent a bike for a fee, much like a book library, for anywhere from a quarter to year.

Bacha also noted that Student Senate will call for a more thorough bus system, as the current system does not travel off campus, and a more comprehensive car-pool program.

According to greenreportcard.org, the transportation grade measures "how schools promote alternative transportation options through the policies and practices of facilities management and of the administration."

OU's lowest grade on the Report Card was an F in shareholder management. This category evaluates how the university handles shareholder proxy voting and how much of OU's \$312 million endowment goes to sustainability

efforts. The site acknowledged that the average grade for this category was a D. Within Ohio, the University of Cincinnati also received an E, while Ohio State University earned a C.

Bacha believes this is an area that Student Senate can easily assist the OU President's Advisory Council on Sustainable Planning in improving. "I would like to see some options for donors within the endowment system so they will be able to contribute to green funds on campus," she said. "Ohio University is a leader of sustainability amongst the state and the nation, so why not make that another option?" She predicted that the opportunity to donate directly to green funds on campus would draw even more attention.

Marcus maintained that the weight of the endowment grade is too heavy, as there are three categories on the Report Card dedicated solely to the investment of money.

The low Report Card grade stems from OU is lacking an advisory committee to provide input to shareholder proxy voters, barring students, faculty and alumni from actively participating in the distribution of the endowment toward green projects.

Both Marcus and Bacha expressed pride that OU got an A in the student-involvement category. Marcus said student involvement is the "basis for the movement on the campus."

Some of the organizations contributing to the sustainability effort on campus that were noted on the site were Greeks Going Green, Campus Climate Change and the Sierra Student Coalition. OU also holds challenges and competitions, such as the Residence Challenge, in which dorm residents compete to reduce energy consumption.

OU's grades in climate change and energy, food and recycling, and green building all rose from the 2008 report card. This change is due in part to the university's pledge to reduce campus greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent by the year 2014. OU also makes an effort to actively visit local farmers markets and produce auctions. The university is requiring that all new construction projects meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards.

The study is published by the Sustainable Endowments Institute and focuses on nine categories: administration, climate change and energy, food and recycling, green building, student involvement, transportation, endowment transparency, investment priorities, and shareholder engagement.