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Green initiatives gain steam

Budget crunch won't stop plans to make the U. more sustainable

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Leaders of Climate Action Plan initiatives and officials from Facilities Management are continuing their goals to make Brown more sustainable, despite the University's budget squeeze. Since the release of the 2007 Energy and Environmental Advisory Council report, Brown has reduced its carbon dioxide emissions footprint by 7.7 percent.

The report showed that Brown's total greenhouse gas footprint is 82,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents, with 46,000 tons emitted from on-site burning of fossil fuels and 36,000 tons from electricity.

"Those findings two years ago really jumpstarted a big student movement centered on carbon neutrality," said Michael Glassman '09, a member of Community Carbon Use Reduction at Brown.

CCURB started as a pilot program in 2007 funded by a \$350,000 pledge by the Office of President Ruth Simmons and the Sidney E. Frank Foundation, as well as an additional \$50,000 from Wal-Mart. As a result of the various CCURB initiatives, Brown was able to reduce its carbon dioxide emissions footprint.

The 7.7 percent reduction is the first step in reaching a total reduction of 42 percent by 2020, said Kurt Teichert, manager of environmental stewardship initiatives.

Teichert said CCURB's effort to make Brown a more energy-efficient university is a continuation of the environmentally friendly trends that have been a part of the campus culture for decades.

"Since the early '90s, Brown has had the Brown is Green initiative - as a result, we've always used less energy than our peer institutions," Teichert said. "Throughout the years we had an Energy and Government Advisory Committee, an Energy Task Force - all of those early initiatives all led to the mindset of, 'What can we do to establish long-term goals?'"

CCURB engaged in several student-run projects, such as Project 20/20, where students and faculty installed high-efficiency lightbulbs in 5,000 low-income Providence homes, Teichert said.

"We know there are more than 5,000 households, but there's always more for us to do. We're still in the early phase of what CCURB will accomplish," Teichert said.

Besides student-led efforts to make Brown and the surrounding community more energy-efficient, officials at Facilities Management have been working to make buildings across campus energy-sustainable.

"At Brown we've always paid attention to the need to be more sustainable and energy-efficient," said

Vice President for Facilities Management Stephen Maiorisi. "Energy conservation increases with the cost of fuels. It forces you to look harder and more strategically at how to conserve energy."

This past year, Facilities instituted an energy efficiency program, taking an initial loan of \$5 million to reach targeted emissions reductions each fiscal year and to support new design standards to ensure energy efficiency in future construction and renovation projects, Maiorisi said.

Facilities has been working to reduce University-wide carbon emissions by installing energy-efficient lighting throughout all University buildings as part of a \$2-million lighting efficiency program and by applying a "Retro-Commissioning program" to certain buildings, said Director of Sustainable Energy and Environmental Initiatives Christopher Powell.

"With Retro-Commissioning, we deal with heating, ventilation, air conditioning - we take existing buildings and try to bring them back to more energy-efficient standards," Powell said.

While the economic recession has been affecting other University initiatives, Maiorisi and Powell both said they have not encountered many obstacles in terms of reaching their energy efficiency goals.

"Since we are now doing mostly renovations, rather than building new structures, it is much easier," Maiorisi said.

Powell agreed. "Twenty-five to 50 percent of the buildings are up to these efficiency standards," he said. "It makes it more efficient and a better use of space to renovate these old structures and bring up to the new standards."

Powell said the economic climate has also altered the procurement of cleaner fuel, the price of which has dropped in recent months.

All of these initiatives will work to make Brown even more of an example of energy efficiency to its peer institutions than it already is, Teichert said.

"Brown in general has always been more progressive than its peers, especially in the '70s and '80s - it's due to the students that we bring in here to this university," he said.

But no matter how environmentally friendly Brown becomes, Teichert said, there is still much more that can be done.

"There is certainly more that can always be done in terms of making Brown a more energy-efficient school," he said. "For instance, we've got a lot more that we can do with water. How many gallons of water do we use? It costs more for the outside treatment of water than to bring in fresh water."

Glassman said that in order to ensure that advocacy for energy efficiency on campus continues, students have to remain active, whether in emPOWER, CCURB or in other venues.

"There are some great underclassmen who come to emPOWER meetings with great ideas," he said. "However, it takes a lot of work and there is a high learning curve. The question is, 'How do we bring people up to the curve so that they can start their own initiatives in the future?'"

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