

Sustainability: A Context for Achieving Positive Growth and Viability

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Abstract

As new technologies emerge and advance, libraries must rapidly evolve and adapt in order to remain relevant while meeting the information needs, expectations and preferences of the millennial-born, digital, and future generations. Ithaca College has embraced sustainability education and practices as in institutional initiative. In response to this initiative, in the fall of 2003, the Ithaca College Library began a comprehensive review of its resources, services and facility through the lens of sustainability. As a result, the library has revised its organizational structure, created new positions, and achieved real savings while adding new resources and enhanced services and programs during a time of budget reduction and instability of the global economy. This paper will provide a scalable context and model for utilizing sustainability as a lens for organizational review that supports change and fosters continuous improvement in academic libraries.

The concept of sustainability achieved prominence in 1987, when The World Commission on Environ-

ment and Development, more popularly known as the *Brundtland Commission* published its report, *Our Common Future*. The Commission, established in 1983 by the United Nations, was charged to formulate a global action plan to reconcile social and economic development with resource conservation. The Commission proposed a strategy for sustainable development, defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Irvine 2004, 172). Contributors to *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia* (2004), have noted that “this is very much like the ‘seventh generation’ philosophy of the...Iroquois Confederacy, mandating that chiefs always consider the effects of their actions on their descendants through the seventh generation in the future.” In *Education for Sustainability*, Susan Santone, Executive Director of Creative Change Educational Solutions, states: “the goal of sustainable development is to increase human well-being while reducing negative human impact on the environment. The sustainability movement also seeks to democratize

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institutions, eliminate the exploitation of people and the environment, and achieve a more equitable distribution of resources and power. Sustainability education equips students to become informed, caring, and effective citizens” (Santone 2003, 61).

In August 2002, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of its formation, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) issued a *Statement on Libraries and Sustainable Development*. IFLA’s statement “declares that all human beings have the fundamental right to an environment adequate for their health and well-being; acknowledges the importance of a commitment to sustainable development to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future; asserts that library and information services promote sustainable development by ensuring freedom to access information.” IFLA further affirmed that “library and information services are helping tackle information inequality demonstrated in the growing information gap and digital divide. Through their network of services, information on research and innovation is made available to advance sustainable development and the welfare of peoples worldwide” (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions 2004).

In applying sustainability practices and principles to organizations, a practical definition and model for sustainability has evolved with a focus on the “triple bottom line,” whereby an organization’s success, constancy of purpose, and structure are considered in light of financial, social and environmental performance. John Elkington popularized the “triple bottom line” model of sustainability in his book *Cannibals with Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business* (Stony Creek, Conn.: New Society Publishers, 1998). Organizations that pursue sustainable strategic management base the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of their strategies on an analysis of the ecological issues they face, the values they hold that support sustainability, and the ecological interests of their stakeholders (Stead, Stead, and Starik 2003).

Ithaca College has defined sustainability as the intersection of three overlapping circles: one for financial resources; one for the natural environment; and one for community social needs (Ithaca College 2004). The college is located in the beautiful Finger Lakes region of New York State with Cornell University as its neighbor. Selected as the most enlightened town

by the *Utne Reader* in 1997, Ithaca is known for being a green community that is abundant in natural resources. As a comprehensive residential college with an enrollment of 6,000 FTE, Ithaca College is well known for professional programs in music, health sciences and human performance, communications, and business, as well as its strong programs in the humanities and sciences. Like other members of the Associated New American Colleges, Ithaca College is committed to civic engagement and experiential learning in the context of a curriculum that seeks to integrate liberal and professional studies. It is with this framework in mind, that Provost Peter Bardaglio has stated: “One of our major responsibilities as citizens in a democratic society is to be stewards of our natural resources, making decisions that take into account the need to balance economic growth, social justice, and environmental protection. One of our primary tasks as educators is to arm students to both dream and take action” (Bardaglio 2004).

The embracing of sustainability at Ithaca College as a formal initiative is relatively new, but the move towards sustainability as a central principle in the life of the college has been gaining ground for several years. This initiative emerged organically from grassroots conversations among all constituencies of the college that led to the creation of *The Ithaca College Institutional Plan*, completed in the spring of 2001. Some elements at the heart of the plan, which is designed to guide institutional decision making, are:

- fiscal stability and stewardship;
- the continuing importance and role of four-year residential colleges that focus on the development of intellect and character;
- full recognition of the changing world of higher education;
- sense of community;
- appreciation for and investment in our learning environment, both our physical plant and our natural surroundings.

As the college began to adopt the plan, it created initiatives, developed curricula, formed partnerships, and conceived improvements to physical space. The college’s ambitious goal is to forge a vibrant, creative, and sustainable community. A campus-wide REMP (Resource and Environmental Management Program) committee helps the college manage its resources in an environmentally sensitive manner, by promot-

ing awareness of environmental concerns, resource management, recycling, and conservation. As a result of this group's work, the college uses recycled paper, composts all food scraps, includes hybrid vehicles in the campus fleet, and subsidizes employee use of public transportation. Additional initiatives include the college's purchasing department's *Buy Green, Buy Socially Responsibly* program, the campus technology renewal program, an online internal communications tool that replaced a biweekly print newspaper, and a program to collect and redistribute reusable office supplies (OSCAR). A recent energy audit suggests additional strategies for implementing a centrally-managed energy-efficient lighting system.

A National Science Foundation grant, focusing on the application of science to sustainability, has funded a unique collaboration between the college and a local planned community, Eco-Village, dedicated to modeling innovative approaches to ecological, economic, and social sustainability. Faculty, staff, and administrators are currently reviewing options for the stewardship of significant tracks of natural acreage owned by the college. In addition, the college is currently in the planning phase for the construction a sustainably designed, cutting edge, facility for the School of Business, the first such facility in the United States. "The commitment to move in this direction arose out of Ithaca's recognition that, if we are to produce graduates who can incorporate social and environmental as well as economic factors into their day-to-day decision-making, then we need to provide students with facilities that model this process" (Bardaglio 2004).

In the spring of 2004, the college hosted a regional sustainability summit, bringing together community, government, and business leaders to discuss the development of a sustainable community, culture, and regional economy. Building on these curricular developments, campus initiatives, and community outreach efforts, the college is now considering ways in which to incorporate sustainability as a framework for campus operations, procedures, and policies. In his ground-breaking essay, *Education for Sustainability: The University as a Model of Sustainability*, Anthony D. Cortese, the President of Second Nature, (a sustainability think-tank) wrote: "if we are to achieve a sustainable future, institutions of higher education must provide the awareness, knowledge, skills, and values that equip individuals to pursue life goals in a manner that sustains

human and non-human well-being for all and current generations" (Cortese 1999).

Until 2003, the library had been organized as a traditional hierarchy—with an administrative triumvirate that included a college librarian and two associate college librarians. The staff included eleven professional librarians and seventeen library assistants. The recent, thirty year, history of the library included a succession of directors who were known for their traditional authoritarian, autocratic management styles and making decisions that appeared to the library staff to be random and arbitrary. Under the leadership of a new administration that included both a new provost and new college librarian, the library staff was eager for change, hoping to have opportunities for increased levels of participation and a greater role in decision making. In the search for the new college librarian, the college developed a recruitment document that outlined a new vision for the library as central to the academic enterprise, emphasizing leadership, outreach, and collaboration. The provost proclaimed that "it is a new day for the library."

Once on board, the new college librarian asked each library staff member to voluntarily complete an intake form in order to become familiar with current library procedures and practices. The form consisted of a series of questions relating to position responsibilities and roles, individual initiatives and developmental career plans, as well as the library's organization, policies, and practices. The staff was also offered the opportunity to schedule an appointment for an individual conversation with the college librarian if they so desired. Several common themes emerged from the information provided, including:

- strong preference for a flat organizational structure to replace the previous authoritarian and autocratic management system;
- desire for open and direct communication;
- interest in opportunities to participate in library decision making processes;
- eagerness for change;
- willingness to thoroughly examine all current practices;
- dissatisfaction with the lack of recognition of the contributions of the professional librarian staff and a related unworkable governance document/process.

After a review of the thoughtful and extensive comments, the college librarian determined that the

existing organizational structure did not promote efficient management, a commitment to service, and continuous improvement. Working with the human resources office, library reorganization was implemented, eliminating an unnecessary upper-level administrative position. As a result of this action, the library staff realized that the administration was committed to effecting tangible change. All library staff position descriptions were reviewed and revised as appropriate, resulting in several upgrades to positions in view of current responsibilities. As position vacancies occurred, the library staff reviewed each position in light of organizational needs that would support our commitment to the continuous enhancement of library resources and services, creating new positions that advance our mission. A Web services librarian and an electronic resources librarian were hired in 2004. Our new librarians brought the technical skills and knowledge required to address two of the library's long term goals—the complete redesign of our website and the efficient management of current electronic subscriptions. They also freed up other staff members to focus on other organizational initiatives relating to content development, information literacy, and faculty outreach. When the associate college librarian resigned to become the director of the Elmira College Library, it was determined after several extensive discussions with the professional librarians that the library's needs would best be served by eliminating this position, in favor of creating a new position for a communications librarian to liaison with the faculty of the Park School of Communications. As a result of these changes, the library succeeded in achieving a flatter organizational structure and realized additional salary savings that was reallocated to fund additional student positions.

It was evident from the intake form information and individual appointments that, by and large, staff members enjoyed their work. To take advantage of the expertise extant across the library staff and to realize the full return from the library's other resource investments, several cross-functional teams and work groups were formed. For example, library systems, web development, public services, multimedia, technical services, and access services staff members now meet regularly to discuss enhancements to the library's ILS modules and functionality. Additional conversations led to the implementation of a digital audio reserve service, providing 24/7 access to audio reserve mate-

rials for an unlimited number of simultaneous users. Service point supervisors reviewed library use patterns and recommended opening one-half hour earlier, as patrons were frequently clustered at the entrance when staff was already on duty. Evening hours were extended by training a small group of veteran student employees as student managers, who provided supervision in the late evening.

In order to expand library services and offer additional resources, a review of current resource expenditures, with an eye toward reallocating existing funding was organized. Literally thousands of dollars were identified during a thorough title-by-title overlap analysis of print and microform serial subscriptions, resulting in elimination of titles that were duplicated in electronic resources and by multiple formats. The identified savings was reallocated and used to purchase additional electronic content resources, such as *Annual Reviews*, *ACS Web Editions*, and *ARTSstor*, that had been previously requested by faculty, students, and librarians. The collaborative nature of the review energized the librarians and had the unexpected side benefit of demonstrating the positive aspects of teamwork. In addition, the library adopted a buy as needed policy for supplies, rather than *hoarding* through multiple fiscal years. This provided funding for other operating expenditures such as production level printers, scanners, lending laptops, and a digital camera for web developers.

In the fall of 2003, the New York State Regional Library Councils (NYS3Rs) announced an LSTA-funded workshop series: *Continuous Assessment/Continuous Improvement (CACI)* to be facilitated by Sara Laughlin, Denise Shockley, and Ray Wilson, the authors of *The Library's Continuous Improvement Field Book: 29 Ready to Use Tools*. The objective of the CACI workshops was to provide the tools and knowledge that when implemented would foster continuous assessment and continuous improvement in all library operations and services. During the eight workshops, participants learned to identify key processes and services and then to identify key success factors, methods, and outcomes for assessing their improvement and impact. The timing of the workshops coincided nicely with the college's sustainability initiative and the library's efforts to undertake a comprehensive review. Sustainability provided the lens and the focus for our review and CACI provided us with a set of practical and functional tools for assessment and decision-making.

The library utilized a variety of process improvement tools, including: affinity diagrams, brainstorming, group norms, multi-voting, pair and share, parking lots and plus/delta (Laughlin, Shockley, and Wilson 2003). We applied these tools to articulate our mission, vision, values, and goals, to develop a prioritized list with an action timeline of user recommended facility, resources, and service enhancements, and to create a system map that identified essential customers, services, essential processes, and outcomes with multiple feedback and communication opportunities.

One of the initial CACI activities was to look at our library from a systems viewpoint, applying W. Edwards Deming's theory of *profound knowledge* as expressed in his "14 points" (Massachusetts Institute of Technology 2000). Deming's systems theory provides a sustainable model for leading organizational change and continuous improvement. Deming's systems view of an organization focuses on pleasing customers and improving systems, processes, and methods by which goods and services are created and delivered to the customer. This approach differs from the traditional way of viewing an organization as a hierarchy that focuses on pleasing management and in which customers are implicit. Instead, you look at how the elements of the system interrelate as a whole, identifying essential suppliers and customers, inputs and outputs, and primary and supporting technical and social processes. A similar systems view has been expressed by Anthony D. Cortese, who wrote: "Designing a sustainable future requires a paradigm shift toward a systemic perspective which encompasses the complex interdependence of individual, social, cultural, economic and political activities and the biosphere" (Cortese 1999). Using Deming's methodology, we developed a constancy of purpose that articulated our mission, vision, values, and potential high level measures of system success:

Mission: to enhance teaching and learning;

Vision: foster continuous change and innovation through the development of library services and programs that practice sustainability with regard to the environment, institutional resources, and sense of community;

Values: collaboration, service, fiscal responsibility, mutual respect, trust, innovation, creativity, discovery, performance, global citizenship;

High Level Measures: customer satisfaction surveys, comment cards, online patron suggestion/com-

ment forum, additional services and resources realized through reallocation, circulation figures.

Recognizing that the identification and creation of opportunities for feedback from all constituencies is central to the ongoing success of the system, the library developed a patron survey instrument in the spring of 2004. Faculty and students were asked to respond to the question, "Got Ideas? We are planning for the future...what would be in your ideal library?" Print and online comments were submitted from a broad constituency of users. In addition, members of the newly formed Student Library Advisory Committee solicited comments while stationed at a central location in the campus center. All comments were tallied and posted in a prominent place on the main floor of the library. Using the affinity diagram concept/tool, users were then invited to review the comments and *vote* with press-apply dots for the ideas they thought should receive first consideration. After the votes were tallied, the library posted the numbers, provided relevant feedback information, and identified a timeline for taking action/responding to each recommendation. Whenever possible we took immediate action (rapid cycle improvement), particularly on items that were heavily requested and would surprise and delight our patrons. The single most requested item, for example, in the patron survey was a café—vending machines. We were able to install vending machines within weeks of completing the survey. The next most requested item was quiet study space. We immediately designated the top floor of the library as quiet study space and implemented a silence all cell phones policy. The student newspaper has published several positive reviews on our efforts and now routinely looks to the library for news items. In response to student feedback, a collaborative study space concept was developed and ultimately was selected by the class of 2005 as their senior class gift to Ithaca College.

Two retreats during the 2003–2004 and 2004–2005 academic years also provided opportunities to utilize several process improvement tools with the professional librarians. At the winter 2003 retreat, we conducted a values clarification exercise using affinity diagrams. First individuals wrote down their personal choices for the values they wished to see reflected in the library as an organization. Next each librarian was paired with another librarian and they shared their ideas. The librarians then worked in groups of four,

after which all ideas were posted and voted on by the entire group. The values that emerged as high priorities for the group were mutual respect, trust, innovation, creativity, discovery, performance, and collaboration. Subsequently, the librarians governance document was revised with these values and the library's mission and vision in mind. Annual evaluations evolved from a traditional assessment tool to individual learning plans that focus on continuous improvement and personal development based on mission, vision and values.

At the summer 2004 retreat, each librarian was asked to reflect on the past year and to identify our successes, less than successes, and works in progress. Next, the group was divided into pairs of two to share their reflections. Participants were then divided into small groups and asked to brainstorm about potential initiatives for the coming year and related key success factors and high level measures. In order to develop consensus and to focus our efforts, the entire group voted in order to determine our service and resource development priorities for the new academic year. An action plan related to these activities was developed. Communication channels were reviewed in terms of frequency and types of meetings, informational email updates, agenda setting, and group norms. Finally, we concluded the meeting with a plus/delta exercise, reviewing what had gone well during the retreat (plus), and how we might improve retreats in the future (delta). Following the success of the initial librarians' retreat, we now regularly schedule unit-level retreats using the same process improvement tools to develop unit goals.

To increase the visibility of the library and to connect library services to the academic mission of the college, we have initiated several faculty outreach activities. The college librarian and liaison librarians meet with departmental faculty to discuss library services and resources. We present information on budget and recommend strategies for reallocation in order to acquire additional services and resources. These presentations have resulted in an increased request for instructional sessions. We have become more proactive, using technology to push bibliographic information for potential acquisitions out to faculty. We also promote a new approach to information literacy that involves collaboration between the librarians and faculty. We are developing a *stealth* integration of cumulative skill-building activities that are linked to core courses and

departmental learning objectives. The librarians are creating standard assessment tools to document the continuous improvement in a student's information literacy skills as he/she progresses through his/her academic career. Based on very positive feedback from faculty, we believe that these activities have highlighted the value-added resource that the library represents for the college.

The library has been able to advance its mission by optimizing existing personnel and budgetary structures. The morale of the library staff has improved significantly as positive changes have occurred. Positive outcomes occurred as a result of empowering staff at all levels, while engaging in activities that fostered community and established trust, essential first steps in any organizational change process. Recognizing that good ideas can emerge at any time from anyone, it is important to provide numerous opportunities and methods for individuals to express their ideas. Idea generating activities might include brainstorming, creating lists, responding to comment cards and open-ended questionnaires, and speed show and tells, where everyone in a team presents a best practice for 1–2 minutes. Several staff suggestions have been implemented (and appropriately acknowledged) with positive results. We continue to look for opportunities within our current structure, capitalizing on the talents, interests, and skills of employees and making revisions when they align with our broader library goals.

The library has incorporated sustainability into its consumable resource use, moving to duplex printing, implementing the ILLIAD interlibrary loan functionality, participating in the LVIS (Libraries Very Interested in Sharing) reciprocal borrowing agreement, leasing current fiction, and automating patron notice services. The library has extended its sustainability practices into the area of *green* procurement, selecting more products and services that minimize environmental impacts.

As a next step, the college is considering the incorporation of sustainability as a framework for all campus operations, procedures, and policies. We are examining the feasibility of utilizing a Sustainability Management System (SMS) approach to address elements in the college's institutional plan and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education's *Characteristics of Excellence Standards* (MSCES). Focusing on the links between the maximization of economic resources, op-

timization of social capital, and effective stewardship of the natural environment, SMS provides a management framework that integrates sustainability issues into core processes and mainstream decision-making. SMS principles resonate well with MSCES Standard 2 (Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal and Standard 7 (Institutional Assessment), which includes the following text: “mission, goals, and objectives are most effective when they are part of an institution-wide effort to improve and integrate the activities and operations of all elements and aspects of the institution” (Middle States Commission on Higher Education 2002, 16). To date, SMS has primarily been employed in the corporate world where it has become an invaluable tool for exploring ways to reduce costs, manage risks, create new products, and drive fundamental internal changes in culture and structure. Given the college’s ongoing commitment to sustainability, SMS could provide an excellent vehicle for defining and addressing institutional outcomes at all levels.

Why sustainability? As R. Buckminster Fuller boldly asserted *the future is now*. “We are at one of those exciting, yet scary, moments in human history when we have an opportunity—indeed, an imperative—to reinvent the world. *Sustainability*...is the key to meeting this challenge” (Bardaglio 2004). There are several challenges to integrating sustainability thinking and practice into an organizational structure. It is not a trivial task and requires vision, commitment and leadership. It is important to examine organization and structure, resources, programs, and services from a holistic perspective. An organization pursuing sustainability “needs to implement principles, policies, and practices, including job design, recruitment and selection, budgeting and reward systems, and organizational structures and stakeholder relationships, from the standpoint of long-term ecosystem viability” (Marshall and Brown 2003, 124). This approach is highly appropriate given the internal fiscal environment for most libraries and external forces, such as changes in the scholarly communication paradigm. Challenges can be viewed as opportunities—if you want to do more, or something new, without additional resources, you will need to be creative, reallocate resources, and reorganize. To be recognized as a relevant entity and a campus change agent, a library must thoroughly review its organization and be willing to take risks, be flexible, and be open to feedback from all constituencies. For the

Ithaca College Library the risks have been well worth the effort, resulting in: continuous improvements in the environment and better performance of the library; increased interaction and engagement with students, faculty, staff and other stakeholders; strengthened economic performance of the library; improved sense of community and quality of work life; and, better stewardship of the natural environment.

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