1. **PROJECT TITLE:** Communicating Sustainability at the University of New Hampshire

2. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**
   This research is asking faculty, staff and students at the University of New Hampshire-Durham campus how effective they think current communications on campus about sustainability are – and what they recommend for improvements – in order to improve UNH University Office of Sustainability communications in ways that motivate and support these stakeholders to get involved with and advance sustainability on and off campus.

3. **BACKGROUND INFORMATION/STATEMENT OF THE ISSUES/PROBLEM**

   In 2008, UNH was named one of the top 11 green universities in the US by the first-ever Princeton Review “Green Honor Roll,” and was also one of 15 universities in North America to receive the highest score on the Sustainable Endowments Institute’s College Sustainability Report. Closer to home UNH received the top honor in Business New Hampshire Magazine’s first ever “Lean and Green Awards.” These and many other honors and awards reflect decades of work by UNH faculty, staff and students. In the last ten years in particular, UNH has taken this work to a new level, demonstrating a unique ability to innovate and collaborate in order to address the challenges and opportunities of sustainability.

   At the same time, sustainability has emerged as a mainstream competitive issue in higher education. Since 2004, a significant number of sustainability director and coordinator positions have been established at universities across the country. For example, Harvard’s Green Campus Initiative in 2008 became its office of sustainability. The University of Vermont has had an environmental coordinator for at least five years and in 2008 established an office of sustainability. By contrast, UNH established its Director of Sustainability position in 1997 and until 2005 was the only endowed, university-wide program in the country. Arizona State University announced a major sustainability initiative in 2005 with a $15 million gift.

   Despite these trends – and the fact that advancing sustainability demands collaboration and community engagement – no studies to date exist on how to effectively community sustainability to on-campus stakeholders in ways that meet their needs and that motivate and support their involvement in sustainability on and off campus. This research will attempt to fill this gap by asking faculty, staff and students at the University of New Hampshire Durham to provide feedback on current sustainability communications and to
share their preferences on what information they want to receive and how they want to receive it.

4. PROJECT DETAILS
   Goals and Objectives

The goal of this research is to assess the effectiveness of several sections of the University Office of Sustainability (UOS) website and the entire UOS newsletter for two main audiences -- UNH students (undergraduate and graduate) and UNH employees (faculty and staff). In the last two years, UOS has revamped its communication methods and language, often in partnership with UNH University Communications and Marketing. It is now time to assess the effectiveness of some of these efforts for internal audiences.

SPECIFIC AIMS
1. Review the literature on communicating sustainability, both general principles and theories that apply to all audiences and best practices for communicating with post-secondary students and with staff.
2. Through this literature review, determine a limited set of indicators of effectiveness for sustainability communications. Examples of possible indicators could include relevancy, ease of use/navigation, clarity, engagingness, etc.
3. Develop a focus group protocol and conduct one student-only focus group and one mixed faculty and staff focus group to ask them to provide their thoughts and feedback on the educational quality, usability, presentation/appeal, clarity, tone, etc, of UOS communications (especially online).
4. Develop a faculty interview protocol and interview faculty to ask them to provide their thoughts and feedback on the sustainability information they want to receive; how they want to receive that information (from whom, how often, and by what means); their assessment of the effectiveness of current sustainability communications on campus; and their opinions on how this communication can be improved.
5. Develop an online survey open to all UNH students and employees asking them to provide their thoughts and feedback on the above sustainability communications.
6. Use the indicators of effectiveness to develop a framework through which the results of the focus groups, interviews and online survey will be reviewed. Based on the results of this analysis, develop recommendations for how to make UOS’s sustainability communications more effective for internal audience.

Target Population/Audiences

SUBJECTS:
1. UNH faculty
2. UNH staff
3. UNH undergraduate and graduate students

COLLABORATORS:
1. UNH Communications & Marketing
2. Northeast Campus Sustainability Consortium
3. Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE)
4. Clean Air – Cool Planet

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Outreach Scholars Academy – Sara M. Cleaves, 2009, Communicating Sustainability @ the University of New Hampshire
Methods

Focus Groups: Two focus groups (one all students, one a mix of faculty and staff) were conducted in April/May 2009 on the UNH Durham campus. Each focus group had 12-15 participants, all of whom were affiliated with the UNH-Durham campus. Subjects were recruited via fliers posted in academic buildings on campus; the University Office of Sustainability website; a mention in UNH’s Campus Journal; an email sent to the UNH Administrative Office Professionals (AOP), Student Senate, PAT/OS/EE Councils, and Faculty Senate to share with members; an email sent to all faculty, staff and students with whom UOS often works; and word of mouth. Each focus group participant received a free lunch and if they choose were entered into a raffle for a sustainability gift pack. The focus groups spent time in a computer lab giving their feedback on three sections of the UOS website:

- a. “What is sustainability?” of University Office of Sustainability (UOS) website: sustainableunh.unh.edu/whatissustainability.html
- b. University Office of Sustainability newsletter: sustainableunh.unh.edu/newsletter.html
- c. Either a web page for students (sustainableunh.unh.edu/students.html) or for faculty and staff (sustainableunh.unh.edu/faculty_staff.html)

In addition, they discussed as a large group the following questions:

1. What does sustainability at UNH mean to you?
2. In what ways are you involved in sustainability on campus - or would like to be involved? How often?
3. What information about sustainability do you actively seek out or would find useful for what you do at UNH?
4. How often do you seek out or do you need this information?
5. How satisfied are you with the overall amount of information you receive on sustainability at UNH?
6. How satisfied are you with the overall quality of information you receive on sustainability at UNH?
7. What do you think of this tagline? “Sustainable YouNH: It’s Your University. Be Part of the Solution.”
8. From whom do you prefer to receive sustainability information?
9. By what means or channels do you prefer to receive sustainability information?
10. What topics under the umbrella are you most interested in getting information of any kind (news to happenings) about?
11. If sustainability communication at UNH could be changed in any way to make you more satisfied, what would you change?

Interviews: As faculty involvement in the above-mentioned focus groups was limited, 1-on-1 interviews will be conducted in June 2009 with six faculty members: one each from COLA, COLSA, CHHS, CEPS, WSBE, and Cooperative Extension. Interviews will be conducted in faculty member offices on the UNH Durham campus, and each will last approximately one hour. Interviewees will be recruited via email or phone calls, and faculty members invited to be interviewed will be chosen based on their past expressed...
interest or involvement in sustainability communications conducted by the UNH University Office of Sustainability. Questions to be asked include the following:

1. **What does sustainability at UNH mean to you?**
2. **In what ways are you involved in sustainability on campus - or would like to be involved? How often?**
3. **What information about sustainability do you actively seek out or would find useful for what you do at UNH -- especially in your teaching and in your research or creative inquiry?**
4. **How often do you seek out or do you need this information?**
5. **How satisfied are you with the overall amount of information you receive on sustainability at UNH?**
6. **How satisfied are you with the overall quality of information you receive on sustainability at UNH?**
7. **From who do you prefer to receive sustainability information?**
8. **By what means do you prefer to receive sustainability information?**
9. **What topics under the umbrella are you most interested in getting information of any kind (news to happenings) about?**
10. **If sustainability communication at UNH could be changed in any way to make you more satisfied, what would you change?**

**Online survey:** An online survey of faculty, staff and students was conducted in April and May 2009. All survey takers were be assigned a number and will remain anonymous. Subjects were be recruited via fliers posted in academic buildings on campus; the UOS website; a mention in Campus Journal (should its editor approve); an email sent to the UNH Administrative Office Professionals (AOP), Student Senate, PAT/OS/EE Councils, and Faculty Senate to share with its members; an email sent to all faculty, staff and students with whom UOS often works; and word of mouth. Each person who completes the survey and approves adding his or her name and email address at the end will be entered into a raffle for a sustainability gift pack.

Questions asked were similar to the focus group and interview questions above but much more extensive. For a copy of the survey questions, email Sara Cleaves at sara.cleaves@unh.edu.

**Evidence of External Collaboration and Partnership:** The research is being undertaken in collaboration with UNH University Communications and Marketing, which has provided literature suggestions, edited survey questions, and more. In addition, the results will be shared with not only this group but also others on and off campus, including the UNH Human Resources, the various staff councils, the Student Senate and Graduate Student Organization, the Northeast Campus Sustainability Consortium, Clean Air – Cool Planet, and Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education via conference and publication proposals and future informal discussions.

**Expected Impact:** It’s hoped that findings from this research will provide both on-campus communicators (including University Communication and Marketing,
communications specialists in colleges and institutes, and more) and off-campus stakeholders (especially other colleges and universities) with insight on how to improve the effectiveness of their on-campus sustainability communications. The final report will be shared with UNH Communications and Marketing, UNH staff councils and interested student organizations, UNH Human Resources, and external stakeholders including the Northeast Campus Sustainability Consortium, Clean Air – Cool Planet, and Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. In addition, conference and publication proposals will be submitted to the annual conferences of the Northeast Campus Sustainability Consortium and Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, and to publications like *Sustainability: The Journal of Record* and the *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, among others.

**Scholarly Connection:** This research projects brings scholarship to bear on the communications work we do in the University Office of Sustainability. It ensures that we use stakeholder involvement, appropriate data collection methodologies and analyses, program evaluation and more to bear upon our planning and project implementation. To date, while UOS has been very successful at engagement, we have not been as involved with or contributed as much to scholarship in the broad areas of sustainability and higher education as we could. This project is a first step in starting to address this overall goal. What’s more, this research contributes to the relatively new and emerging fields/areas of sustainability in higher education and to communications around sustainability.

5. **EVALUATION PLAN:** Follow-up with all of the stakeholders mentioned on how they are using the final results will be conducted, and such usage will be monitored over time. Metrics include how often the results are used and in what capacities; future collaborations and projects that results; citations in other publications or conference presentations; and more.

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