



Students' Society of McGill University
Association étudiante de l'Université McGill

Office of the Speakers
Bureau de Présidents du Conseil

Motion Regarding Adoption of a Sustainability Policy

Whereas SSMU is committed to sustainable practices and leadership on our campus, in Canada, and around the world,

Whereas SSMU has a “Five Year Plan for Sustainability”, passed in 2009,

Whereas many of the actions contained in the “Five Year Plan for Sustainability” have been completed,

Whereas the “Five Year Plan for Sustainability” is largely a to-do list of environmental actions, and does not adequately address the social and economic facets of sustainability,

Whereas the “Five Year Plan for Sustainability” does not provide adequate guidance and adaptability,

Resolved, that the following policy be adopted as the Society’s Sustainability Policy,

Resolved, that the President, in conjunction with the Environment Committee, shall present an implementation plan for this policy covering at least the next 3 years for adoption by Council no later than March 1st, 2013.

Moved by:
Maggie Knight, President

Sustainability Policy

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Introduction: Mission, Vision, and Scope

Students at McGill and across Canada have led efforts to make our campuses more sustainable. At McGill, for example, student leadership has established a Sustainability Projects Fund, conducted a major environmental sustainability assessment of the SSMU, established and revised the SSMU's Equity Policy, and led McGill to hire staff specifically to make its food system more sustainable. Students operate a huge number of important services to students, including Midnight Kitchen, the Flat Bike Collective, the Union for Gender Empowerment, the Sexual Assault Centre of the McGill Students' Society, Queer McGill, WalkSafe, Drivesafe, Nightline, Reboot McGill, the Black Students Network, and many more. (An exhaustive list of students' accomplishments would take many pages!)

Mission: Sustainability in this context is about balancing and integrating economic, social, and environmental considerations in the way we act, and having people collaborate to achieve this balance. Aspects of sustainability have been, and continue to be, integrated into governance documents of the Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU). This is evident in the Preamble of the SSMU Constitution:

“VI All Students' Society endeavours shall be undertaken with full respect for human dignity and bodily sovereignty and without discrimination on the basis of irrelevant personal characteristics that include but are not limited to race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, gender identification, age, mental or physical disability, language, sexual orientation or social class.

VII The Students' Society commits to demonstrating leadership in matters of human rights, social justice and environmental protection. The Society shall be mindful of the direct and indirect effects corporations, businesses and organizations have on their social, political, economic, and environmental surroundings.

VIII The Students' Society commits itself to groups, programs and activities that are devoted to the well-being of a group disadvantaged because of irrelevant personal characteristics that include but are not limited to race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, gender identification, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation or social class.”

Vision: As efforts for a sustainable SSMU and a sustainable campus intensify, the SSMU will not only support grassroots student initiatives, but seek to cohesively transform our student association into a leader for social, environmental, and economic sustainability.

To this end, the SSMU shall demonstrate leadership for sustainability:

- by fostering sustainability across campus and beyond through our advocacy, leadership, and all public actions;
- by engaging students and student groups, connecting people who share the same ideas of changes to bring about, and coordinating projects with multiple stakeholders;
- by promoting awareness of sustainability through its communications, informational resources and workshops, and by leading by example in the delivery of events, services, and political action;



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- within its internal operations, through creating a just, empowering community which minimizes its negative environmental impacts while using resources responsibly;
- by setting ambitious and feasible multi-year goals, drawing on best practices from other organizations to achieve them, reporting both qualitatively and quantitatively, and annually reviewing the goals to ensure that change is iterative and adaptive.

Scope: The SSMU has adopted many measures, both formally and informally, to become a more sustainable organization. This policy lays out the guiding principles upon which multi-year goals and efforts to continually improve shall be based. Crucially, this policy seeks to expand the focus of SSMU's sustainability efforts from environmental initiatives to include social equity and justice. The pursuit of a sustainable SSMU must be the joint effort of Executives, Councillors, and staff, and will be strengthened by the active participation of student groups and the student body at large.

1. Understanding Sustainability

Sustainability in this context is about balancing and integrating economic, social, and environmental considerations in the way we act, and having people collaborate to achieve this balance. Different definitions are used in this document, within in the McGill community, and in many Canadian and international scholarly articles. These definitions provide a common framework, not to be exhaustive or definitive, and can be refined in the future.



The Three Spheres of Sustainability

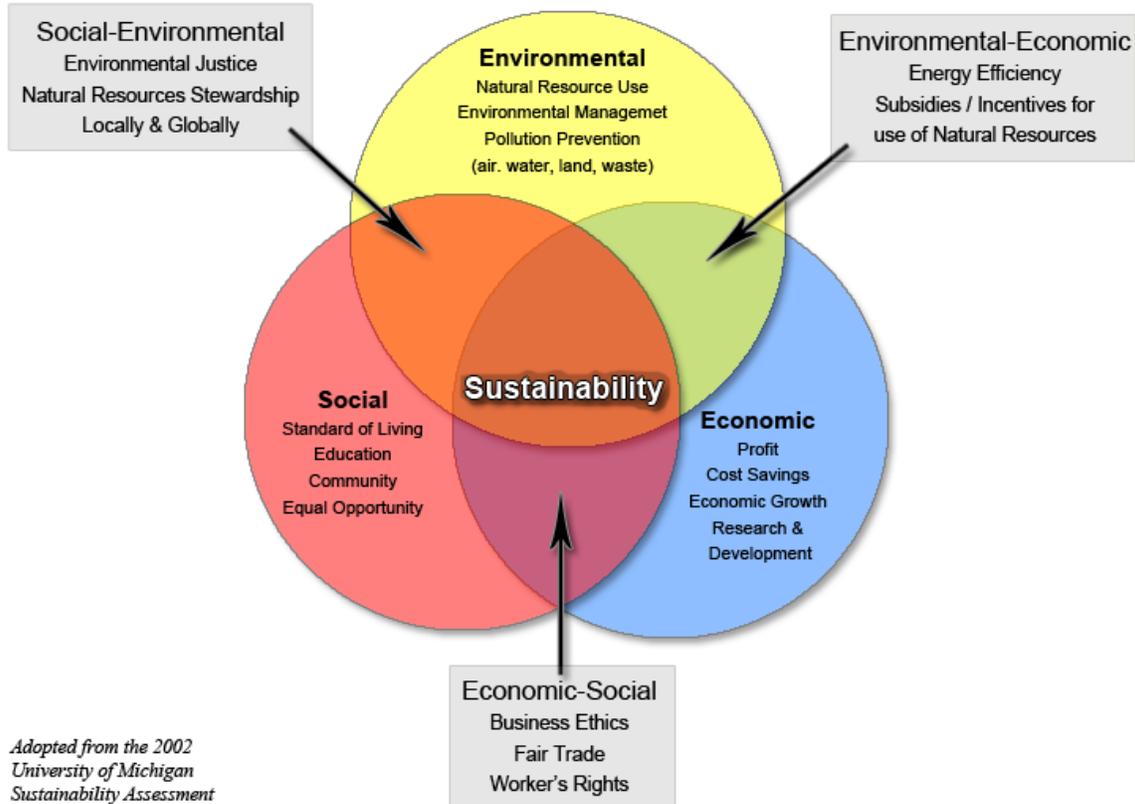


Fig 1. The important point of this illustration is that sustainability comes from the balance and integration of all three spheres. In our context, the following additions might be made to the “Social” sphere: Equity, Safety, Empowerment. From http://ext.morainevalley.edu/green/wpcontent/uploads/2011/09/sustainability_spheres1.png, accessed on 11/15/2012.

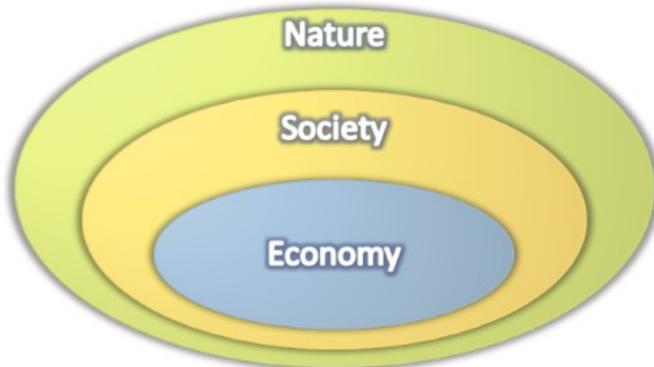


Fig 2. This image, which consists of nested spheres, illustrates a different way of looking at the 3 spheres or pillars of sustainability from the previous image. “Nature” encompasses all of the physical world we are in, commonly referred to as the “Environment” or “Planet Earth”. A sub-section of that is all of human “Society”, and “Economy” is a sub-section of human society. The two images together provide basic visuals that can help contextualize thinking about sustainability. From <http://www.project-css.eu/description/objectives.jpg> accessed March 20, 2012.

1.1. Economic



The SSMU is tasked with managing fees collected from many thousands of students. The SSMU undertakes to manage these funds in a manner which respects students and the communities of which SSMU is a part. The SSMU will strive to:

- be stewards of students' money in an ethical manner, as per the Ethical Investment Policy, the Purchasing Policy, and this Sustainability Strategy;
- be transparent, accountable, and open to student participation in budgeting students' money;
- be responsible in its long-term planning of finances to ensure year-to-year financial stability and flexibility as major expenses arise;
- work to prioritize funding to initiatives that will (a) lead to cost-savings for the SSMU in a reasonable time-frame or (b) lead to considerable social and / or environmental benefit.

1.2. Social

The SSMU will strive to promote a strong, safe, and empowering community by endeavouring to minimize systemic power imbalances within society and to foster a culture of anti-oppression. The SSMU will aim to be of service to the communities of which it is a part, in keeping with the values laid out in the Constitution and Equity Policy. To that end, the SSMU will ensure that:

- the Equity Policy is upheld and made available and promoted for use and reference by other groups on campus;
- it supports student groups in such a way as to promote social sustainability, especially as outlined in Section 6.5 of the Equity Policy.¹
- it supports student initiatives that contribute to the aims stated in this section, and will liaise with different groups to do so.

1.3. Environmental

The SSMU will strive to actively promote practices that will lead to resilient ecosystems that can support healthy life and lifestyles. To that end, the SSMU will strive to²:

- Eliminate its contribution to the progressive buildup of substances extracted from the Earth's crust (for example, heavy metals and fossil fuels);
- Eliminate its contribution to the progressive buildup of chemicals and compounds produced by society (for example, dioxins, PCBs, and DDT);
- Eliminate its contribution to the progressive physical degradation and destruction of nature and natural processes (for example, over harvesting forests and paving over critical wildlife habitat).

¹ Section 6.5 of the Equity Policy: The SSMU will actively support projects and policies that aim to end discrimination or to promote accessibility and inclusiveness in the McGill community. In accordance with this, the SSMU and its affiliated Clubs and Services will not affiliate or collaborate with organizations known to promote or engage in the previously mentioned discrimination or harassment. (Accessed on March 20, 2012 at <http://ssmu.mcgill.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/SSMU-Equity-Policy-New.pdf>)

² The following items have been adapted from "The Natural Step" framework of sustainability available at <http://www.naturalstep.org/the-system-conditions> accessed on March 21, 2012.



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2. The role of the SSMU in fostering a community of sustainability

The SSMU will, through the actions of its elected representatives, staff, committee members, clubs, and services:

- seek to be a catalyst for change in the McGill community;
- represent student interests pertaining to sustainability issues on campus to the relevant community members;
- facilitate student activities that foster a community of sustainability including reaching out to other student organizations (associations, clubs, services, independent student groups, etc.);
- work to build awareness of sustainability issues, and work to ensure that its internal practices adhere to a high standard of sustainable behaviour;
- show leadership beyond the SSMU bureaucracy and the William Shatner University Centre for the good of the student body as a whole and the broader community and society.

3. Coordination, Facilitation, and Outreach

The SSMU may act in a coordinating role to facilitate efforts on campus by reaching out to other groups to learn what is going on and informing others of what is happening with the SSMU. Staff, Executives and Councillors have a responsibility to help connect people to facilitate successful efforts (as elaborated in Appendix A).

Coordination: The SSMU is connected with many parts of the McGill community. The SSMU will use its relationships and its understanding of the community to connect members who are working on similar topics, problems, campaigns, efforts, research, etc. While the SSMU may act in a coordination capacity at times, other groups will lead many efforts.

The McGill Office of Sustainability has emerged as an entity that has filled a coordination role on many, but certainly not all, campus sustainability efforts between staff and students. It is, therefore, essential to stay in close communication with the Office of Sustainability. It is primarily the responsibility of the SSMU Sustainability Coordinator to provide two-way communication between the SSMU and the Office of Sustainability as well as the projects it helps to facilitate. At the time of writing this policy, the Office of Sustainability and potentially the Sustainability Projects Fund are developing and refining their mandates through the “Vision 2020: Creating a Sustainable McGill” process. The “Coordination” role of the SSMU in sustainability efforts on campus should be adjusted as Vision 2020 develops to allow for the most effective use of resources by the SSMU. Members of the SSMU have been involved in leading Vision 2020 and continued involvement is encouraged.

Facilitation: The SSMU will act as a resource and a facilitator for assisting and connecting members and groups who are working to create a more sustainable community. This is especially relevant to issues of social and environmental significance as clubs, services, and individual students may not be aware of many concurrent, ongoing efforts in the community.



Outreach: When the SSMU begins an internal effort that aims to create a more sustainable community, it will use its connections to reach out to relevant parts of the community to (a) look for beneficial collaborations and (b) let the community at large know what the SSMU is doing for their reference.

4. Awareness

The SSMU will work to make its members and the community more aware of how to live an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable lifestyle. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Providing structured education such as Mini-Courses and workshops that help students develop an understanding of how to live sustainably;
- Providing unstructured education such as signage in the building and showing best practices in ways of doing, such as using reusable dishes in dining areas in the building;
- Promoting other ongoing structured and unstructured education in the community;
- Promoting collaboration to increase the scope and impact of beneficial initiatives;
- Providing and compiling resources to help all members of the Society fulfill the goals and act according to the values outlined in this policy.

Responsibility for determining what issues and campaigns to focus on falls under the relevant Executive Officers along with the relevant SSMU Committee(s). For example, in the case of encouraging a new environmentally responsible behaviour in clubs offices, the President, the Vice-President (Clubs and Services), Interest Group Committee, and the Environment Committee should work together to create a plan of action then remain in communication as actions are undertaken.

The Sustainability Ambassadors program can be a very effective way of reaching out to many areas of the community and spreading awareness. Any Sustainability Ambassadors-led program should be done in consultation with the Office of Sustainability to seek collaboration and to avoid replicating efforts with limited buy-in.

5. Internal practices

The SSMU will strive to be a model of sustainability in its internal practices insofar as is possible given organizational constraints. This includes learning from peer organizations, drawing on student research capacity and innovation, and proactively engaging students in projects and decision-making processes.

5.1. Building

The SSMU will seek to make the William Shatner University Centre Building operate as sustainably as possible. This is the responsibility of the Vice-President (Clubs and Services) and the General Manager.

5.1.1 Infrastructure



The SSMU will seek to maintain the infrastructure of the building in a fashion that:

- keeps energy usage as low as possible while providing reasonable payback period if renovations are necessary to do so. The focus here may tend towards energy efficiency and undertaking efforts to inform students/staff/tenants of best practices of behaviour.
- is accessible to students of all abilities;
- provides infrastructure to assist sustainable lifestyle choices;
- ensures safety, above and beyond fire code and alcohol regulations.

5.1.2 Use of space

The SSMU will seek to ensure that the space in its jurisdiction is used in a way that:

- is a safer space for all students where discrimination, oppression, harassment, and assault are not tolerated. Safer spaces should aim to be spaces where anyone can relax and be fully self-expressed, without fear of being made to feel uncomfortable, unwelcome, or unsafe on account of sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, cultural background, age, or physical or mental ability³;
- does not lead to large amounts of waste materials being created, such as disposable cups at events;
- ensures materials enter the right waste stream;
- prioritizes student interests and services for students.

5.2 Procurement

The SSMU should adhere to the behaviours outlined in the Ethical Investment Policy and Purchasing Policy.

Material purchases should be carefully evaluated to avoid financial and material waste. Exit reports from events shall include recommendations regarding how to cut down on excess materials. In the event that surplus materials exist, every effort should be made to either repurpose them or donate them to a worthy, sustainable student or community organization.

The SSMU will work with applied student research and McGill Food & Dining Services (MFDS) to continually improve the sustainability standards of all food providers in the building. The SSMU shall use the recommendations in the MFDS report “An Appetite for Sustainability” (2011) and the Fair Trade Campus certification as a baseline for success.

5.3. Human Resource practices

³Definition adapted from Advocates for Youth

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/documents/safespace.pdf> accessed on March 21, 2012



In its efforts to act as a socially sustainable and responsible organization, the SSMU shall strive to uphold best practices regarding Human Resources. As outlined in the Human Resources Policy, this includes providing meaningful work for both students and full-time staff, nurturing a sense of empowerment for all staff members, and striving to provide a productive and pleasant work environment.

The SSMU staff has a substantial role in creating the culture of the society. To help staff to exhibit leadership in fulfilling the goals of this policy, the SSMU shall provide training both proactively and reactively regarding issues of social, environmental, and economic sustainability.

5.4 Events

All SSMU-operated events must be planned in light of the values laid out in this policy. This includes financial accountability and responsibility, ensuring that events are inclusive and equitable, and minimizing the environmental impact. Event planners should consult the Equity Commissioner and Green Events Coordinator as necessary to seek advice and to design appropriate logistical procedures.

5.5 Clubs and Services

The SSMU shall implement an annual sustainability audit for all clubs and services, incorporating social and environmental indicators into the annual financial reporting structure. Training regarding this policy will be included in annual workshops provided to clubs and services. The Vice-President (Clubs & Services) will be responsible for helping groups find the necessary informational resources and support in pursuit of this policy's goals.

6. Implementation

6.1 Leadership

While all of the SSMU decision-makers are responsible for implementing this policy, the SSMU Executives, the Sustainability Coordinator, student staff within the Environment and Equity portfolios, and the Equity and Environment Committees must champion leadership and support. Further details are included in Appendix A.

6.2 Responsibility

SSMU staff and committees carry out the day-to-day decisions and actions of the SSMU. As such:

- Staff and committees are responsible for upholding and integrating this policy into their decisions and actions;
- Staff and committees should be reporting successful innovations to executives, and briefly to Council according to the relevant reporting schedules;



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- The Sustainability Coordinator is mandated to provide support, track progress, and meet with employees and committees regarding strategy throughout the year. This includes collaborating with interested students and student staff to coordinate projects and responsibilities.

6.3 Communication and Collaboration within the SSMU

As outlined in this policy, sustainability is complex, both in theory and in practice. In order for this policy to be truly effective, its goals must be integrated across all portfolios of the SSMU. While each year's elected representatives and student staff will have their particular skills sets and interests, it is expected that all staff and decision-makers within the SSMU will act in good faith towards achieving the goals of this policy.

7. Reporting and Annual Review

With support from the Sustainability Coordinator and leadership from the President, the SSMU Executive shall report on all progress achieved within the purview of this policy to Council once each in September, January, and April. The April report shall constitute an annual report which shall include recommendations for the subsequent year.

The President, with support from the Sustainability Coordinator and student staff, shall oversee an annual review of sustainability goals and benchmarks in order to adapt the SSMU's efforts in light of changes in organizational capacity and campus and societal shifts. The Sustainability Coordinator will lead a process of developing detailed implementation plans and benchmarking rubrics to ensure measurable, effective change; this shall not be allowed to detract from the pursuit of qualitative or difficult-to-measure efforts.



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Appendix A

Role of the SSMU Executive

To be successful, the implementation of this policy must be acted on in good faith by every Executive Officer. The President is responsible for ensuring environmental leadership, while the Vice-President (University Affairs) must steward SSMU's commitment to Equity; both Executives share responsibilities for advocating for stronger sustainability policies and actions to McGill Administration. The Vice-President (Internal) has a lead role to play in minimizing the impact of the Society's events and in promoting awareness within the student body. The Vice-President (Clubs & Services) should both foster the integration of student groups' initiatives and input and collaborate with staff to implement sustainable operations and infrastructure within the Building. The Vice-President (Finance & Operations) must ensure the implementation of the Ethical Investment Plan and Purchasing Policy, overseeing all aspects of economic sustainability, and provide leadership in the integration of the values laid out in this policy within the SSMU's Operations (Gerts and MiniCourses). The Vice-President (External) is critical to connecting with community organizations, other student associations, and municipal, provincial, and federal governments in the pursuit of this policy's goals.

In these efforts, the Executive will draw on the expertise and support of SSMU's staff, Councillors, Senators, and Committees.

Pertaining to environmental issues, the President is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the values outlined in this policy are put into action, drawing particularly on the work of the two (2) Environment Commissioners, the Sustainability Ambassadors organizer(s), and the Sustainability Coordinator.

Pertaining to social issues, the Vice-President (University Affairs) is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the values outlined in this policy are put into action, drawing particularly on the work of the Equity Commissioners, Equity Committee, and the Sustainability Coordinator.

Pertaining to economic issues, the VP Finance and Operations is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the values outlined in this policy are put into action, drawing particularly on the work of the FERC Commissioner, Funding Coordinator, Gerts Manager, and Mini Courses Manager.

Role of Environment Committee and the Environment Commissioners

The Environment Committee (EC) is chaired by the Environment Commissioners. The Environment Commissioners are responsible for ensuring that campaigns of the EC are facilitated properly to raise awareness and affect the change desired by the EC. The Commissioners ensure that EC acts as:

- A gathering area and a clearing house of ideas
- An incubator for student groups whose leaders have since left the McGill community



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- A facilitator of capacity building activities and resources that help move students along the learning curve of how to achieve environmentally beneficial changes in the community.

The EC's outreach and communications strategy shall focus on building connections with 6 main groups in order to share information about each others' campaigns, services offered, events, and activities:

- Faculty associations
- Green Groups
- SSMU Equity Committee
- Downtown student body
- Involved students and student groups at the Macdonald Campus
- McGill administrative units including the Office of Sustainability (the Office of Sustainability is becoming a highly valuable resource for connecting students with the appropriate staff on campus to pursue projects, as well as for helping students develop applied student research projects)

Efforts to communicate with students shall include:

- More centralized and accessible information
- Online resources as well as physical spaces like the green corner
- Creating Strong Sense of community (building inter-personal relationships)
- Future eye towards reaching out to economic and social sustainability groups

Official volunteers of Environment Committee will assist by:

- Disseminating information to, and acting as a resource for, the faculty associations
- Utilizing the Sustainability Ambassador for campaigns and awareness raising

The Environment Committee website will be used as:

- A central source of easily accessible information for the committee
- A means of engaging students about sustainability issues on campus, especially environment-focused ones
- An interactive tool

Role of Equity Committee and Equity Commissioners

Note: The roles of the Equity Committee and Equity Commissioners have been well laid out in the Equity Policy, passed on March 1, 2012. Roles are laid out most explicitly in Equity Policy sections 7 to 16 inclusive. What follows here is a short addition connecting the Equity Committee and Equity Commissioners to the work of the Environment Committee and Environment Commissioners. This is not an exhaustive detailing of the Role of Equity Committee and Equity Commissioners.



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The Equity Committee and Equity Commissioners provide a valuable resource to SSMU and the entire student body in grappling with equity issues broadly in the community and dealing specifically with equity complaints as they come forward. Whereas those on the Equity Committee tend to be very busy and Environment Committee often has members looking for ways to get involved, it will be the role of the Environment Committee to connect with the Equity Committee, report back to Environment Committee and arrange collaborations. This will be an essential connection as Equity Committee is mainly concerned with social sustainability as described in this document and Environment Committee is mostly concerned with environmental sustainability. It will be the responsibility of the Sustainability Coordinator to ensure that communication between the typical environmental and social spheres is open and ongoing especially as pertaining to major happening of the SSMU (e.g. goings on in Building Committee, events being planned by Students' Society Programming Network, etc.).

Role of Sustainability Coordinator

The Sustainability Coordinator's role is primarily to make sure that efforts are developing in a coordinated manner, and that people working on the same issue are aware of what each other are doing and given the opportunity to collaborate. The Sustainability Coordinator also lends expertise, acts in an advisory role, supports student efforts, and helps with troubleshooting as issues arise. This is detailed more in depth, and formally dictated by, the Sustainability Coordinator job description.