

Planning Our Investment in Academic Sustainability Programming Portland State University

On September 10, 2008, the Miller Foundation announced a generous \$25M gift to Portland State University. The gift, to be distributed over a 10-year period, will be used to support and further develop academic activities related to sustainability and to assist the university in its commitment to provide national leadership in this important area. The gift is a challenge, requiring a 1:1 match for every dollar invested, thus making this a \$50M project over 10 years. The Miller gift may not be used to support either capital construction or to develop endowments; however, the match can be used for any of these purposes if there is a direct relationship to the development of sustainability programs.

The Miller Foundation views this gift as an investment – one that can provide a significant return to the Portland Metropolitan region through the graduates of our academic programs, faculty research on topics that are both locally relevant and nationally and internationally significant, and our contributions to the community as we pursue both instructional programs and research projects as an engaged partner and leader. A consequence and intended outcome of this investment is that Portland State will become one of the premier urban research institutions in the country with emphasis on activities that support and promote the development of sustainable urban communities and sustainable practices more broadly.

A general framework for allocating funding in support of our academic work was developed in discussions with board members of the Miller Foundation. The broad elements of this plan include:

- **Enhancing the student experience** in the study of sustainability through enhancing and expanding our curricular offerings, supporting student success through student support and connections with the community, and providing financial support to students as they pursue the study of their major.
- **Expanding faculty excellence in teaching and research** by providing support for curricular development and participation in trans-disciplinary teaching activities, developing facilities to support research and engagement activities and supporting the development of research activities with emphasis on trans-disciplinary projects that are locally focused but globally relevant.
- **Enhancing excellence in community engagement** by supporting and expanding our ability to convene the community around important issues and to engage nationally and internationally on challenges of global significance.

These program elements were developed based on discussions held over the last few years with faculty on the general topic of sustainability as well as the more focused discussions held since we selected sustainability as a leadership program (2007). Although we have discussed ideas with the Board of the Miller Foundation as examples of how we might invest in particular programs and activities, decisions on the allocation

of resources will be based on an inclusive and deliberative, but timely process. The process will result in the development of a clear and compelling vision for sustainability at Portland State and a short to moderate term (1-3 year) strategic investment plan.

The vision and plan will build on the significant work of faculty as described in a report from the ad hoc Sustainability Advisory Committee. This report identifies Portland State's existing strengths and how we might proceed in the future (http://www.pdx.edu/sustainability/ap_research.html). With the report's analysis and our experience with existing academic programs as a starting point, we will invite faculty to partner with academic leadership to develop the investment plan. Faculty participants will be those who can contribute to enhancing instructional sustainability programming (through existing or potential majors, minors or certificates) and to sustainability research projects. We also plan to engage the external community in this effort and, on an annual basis, we will discuss our plan with the Miller Foundation. It is important that we move this process along and, given the work that has already been done, we intend to have a plan in place within the next three months.

A meeting to discuss the vision and investment plan has already been arranged with the ad hoc Sustainability Advisory Committee and a more general meeting is being scheduled with a larger group of faculty who have expressed interest in sustainability through their past participation in either instructional or research activities. We will begin engaging the larger community once we have developed a broad outline of the activities proposed for the next few years.