



# CASE STUDY: UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON, HOME OF THE HUSKIES

## CAMPUS FACTS

**LOCATION:**

Seattle, Washington

**FOUNDED:**

1861

**TYPE:**

Public

**TOTAL STUDENT POPULATION:**

42,907 (30,790 undergraduates)

**STAFF:**

21,977

**PRIMARY ATHLETICS CONFERENCE:**

Pacific 12 (Pac-12)

**PRIMARY ATHLETICS DIVISION:**

NCAA Division 1

**NUMBER OF VARSITY TEAMS:**

19 (10 women's, 9 men's)

**NUMBER OF SPORTS FACILITIES:**

17 (9 athletic, 8 recreational)

**SUSTAINABILITY OFFICE FOUNDED:**

2008

**AASHE STARS RATING:**

Gold, 2012

**SPORTS GREENING WORK STARTED:**

2010

**SPORTS FACILITY LEED CERTIFICATIONS:**

Football Operations Building & Husky Stadium LEED Silver Certification for the Core and Shell standard (pending 2013)

## THE HUSKIES' GREENING STORY: MOTIVATIONS, CHALLENGES, AND LESSONS

The University of Washington (UW) has built one of the strongest coalitions of staff and students devoted to sports greening in the nation. From their 100 percent recycled paper purchasing policy to sustainability plans and resource tracking across all athletic facilities, the Huskies are greening leaders in collegiate sports operations. Next on their agenda: LEED certification for the new Football Operations building and the renovated Husky Stadium.

## WHY IS UW GREENING SPORTS?

According to Washington athletics director Scott Woodward, preserving the natural beauty of their surroundings in Washington State has been a motivator in the Huskies' greening initiative. "We're fortunate at the University of Washington to have our athletic facilities located in a beautiful landscape. Keeping that landscape beautiful through sustainability measures is a high priority for us," he says. "My staff has worked diligently to create infrastructure and procedures that will ensure that we stay green for years to come."

Although Husky Stadium first implemented a recycling program in 2000, it took 10 more years before the athletics department launched a comprehensive environmental initiative. The leadership of Seattle's professional teams (the Seattle Mariners, Seahawks, Sounders, and Storm, all of which joined NRDC as founding members of the Green Sports Alliance) helped inspire the UW athletics department's program in sports greening. The Huskies became even more convinced of the benefits of greener operations through attending Alliance forums, where Seattle's sports teams shared details of their greening practices. "Not surprisingly, Washington was one of the first collegiate programs to join the Alliance," says Karen Baebler, assistant athletics director for sport operations and chair of the Huskies' sustainability committee. "The Alliance supports University of Washington Athletics' sustainability efforts by offering strategies to become more environmentally responsible and efficient."

**"WE'RE FORTUNATE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON TO HAVE OUR ATHLETIC FACILITIES LOCATED IN A BEAUTIFUL LANDSCAPE. KEEPING THAT LANDSCAPE BEAUTIFUL THROUGH SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES IS A HIGH PRIORITY FOR US," SAYS ATHLETICS DIRECTOR SCOTT WOODWARD. "MY STAFF HAS WORKED DILIGENTLY TO CREATE INFRASTRUCTURE AND PROCEDURES THAT WILL ENSURE THAT WE STAY GREEN FOR YEARS TO COME."**

Following the lead of Seattle's professional teams, the Huskies discovered that enhancing the sustainability of their operations not only provided resource savings but also attracted support from many campus and community partners, including corporate sponsors. "Once we started moving forward with sustainability initiatives beyond waste diversion, everything just started to snowball," recalls Baebler. "We found support from student academic programs and organizations, campus partners, and athletics department sponsors."

## HUSKY STUDENT-ATHLETE INITIATIVES

Student-athletes are represented on the athletic sustainability committee and contribute to the department's efforts with project ideas of their own. For example, students integrated sustainability into the Washington Student-Athlete Advisory Committee's annual "Dawg Bowl" competition among the school's varsity teams. Teams are awarded points for accomplishments in areas such as athletic achievement, academic achievement, community service, life skills, and, as of February 2012, sustainability. Student-athletes can now earn points for team greening efforts such as adding composting to a team lounge or environmental social media outreach.

Additionally, any UW student can gain valuable professional development experience through an Athletic Sustainability Internship or volunteer opportunities. Student volunteers can earn free admission to games when staffing Green Team education booths at Husky Stadium and the Alaska Airlines Arena, where they distribute environmental information and green-themed giveaways to fans.



Photos courtesy of University of Washington.



## WHERE DID UW START?

The UW athletics department launched its sustainability program in July 2010 by devising a strategic plan that encompasses all 17 varsity sports teams and 9 athletic facilities. The plan includes measuring success by tracking energy use and waste diversion; implementing resource conservation projects to promote energy, water, and paper-use efficiency; and working collaboratively with student groups and campus departments.

The athletics department's paper reduction strategies include switching from printed media guides to digital guides, and transitioning phone bills, monthly budget reports, and HR bookkeeping to digital systems. Additionally, athletics copiers and printers are now set to print double-sided to minimize use of copier paper.

An extremely important step in creating and maintaining a robust sustainability program was to build a strong sustainability team. As recently as 2010, no athletic department staff members had responsibility for sustainability programs or practices. Between 2010 and 2013 the Huskies developed a 35-person Athletics Department Sustainability Committee, initially with members from across the athletics department and shortly thereafter adding campus and private sector stakeholders. "Although our department is a large one and has excellent internal support," says Baebler, "the help and support from the Waste Management Office, Cedar Grove Composting Company, the Office of Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability, the College for the Environment, and the Green Sports Alliance have greatly contributed to the continued growth of the department's sustainability efforts."

As the committee grew, the athletics department staff began to take advantage of the expertise on the UW campus to advance both the athletics department's goals and campus-wide sustainability goals. "Our sustainability efforts started internally, but we quickly realized that the broader university community could provide many great resources," says Baebler. "Unlike professional sports teams, we are part of a larger organization, and we have an opportunity to access campus expertise and collaborate with campus groups."

A few simple green policies in the athletics department offices include a paper purchasing policy requiring the use of 100 percent recycled content paper products. UW prioritizes recycled paper because it helps reduce air and water pollution and its production uses less energy than paper produced using timber. Husky Athletics also donates all used tennis balls from its tennis program to local schools and small businesses for reuse.

During the fall of 2010, with paper use reduction practices under way, the Green Team turned to creating a waste diversion program for the athletics department. This included designing a new logo, adding compost bins alongside recycling bins, switching to compostable serviceware, implementing a polystyrene foam recycling program, airing video messaging about the greening program during games, launching the Green Minute campaign (see "The Huskies' Tactics for Increasing Waste Diversion" sidebar), organizing fan engagement giveaways, and participating in the Game Day Challenge.

Because fans in Seattle are familiar with recycling and composting in their homes and at Seattle's professional sports venues, UW's sustainability committee decided to focus first on waste diversion. "The main focus in the stadium and arena has been waste diversion," says Baebler. "We made the choice to start with waste diversion because we knew we could make an impact immediately, and we could engage thousands of fans. We could also measure our progress, which is crucial to success."

In October 2011, the Huskies competed in the Game Day Challenge, described as "a friendly competition for colleges and universities to promote waste reduction at their football games." UW Athletics reached a 46 percent diversion rate in 2011, earning second place in the Pac-12 conference and twelfth place nationally among NCAA Division I schools for total waste diversion. The department ranked second nationally for organics diversion and ninth for waste minimization.

During the 2011-12 and 2012-13 academic years, Husky Athletics expanded their Game Day Challenge practices to all sports by hosting a green-themed game for each varsity team. These "green games" were aimed at educating and engaging Husky sports fans while improving the athletics department's overall diversion. Sustainability-themed games will continue in the 2013-14 academic year.

## CHALLENGES: OVERCOME AND ONGOING

The Huskies' largest ongoing initiative is the major renovation of their football stadium, scheduled to re-open for the 2013 fall football season. "The vision for the renovation of Husky Stadium includes ensuring the project is beautiful, functional, and sustainable," says Baebler. "The project goals, led by athletics director Scott Woodward, include LEED certification for both the new 70,000 square foot Football Operations Building and the renovation of the existing stadium." The project includes locally sourced wood, steel and stone; an advanced energy management system; LED lighting; and recycling 95 percent of construction waste.

"Husky Stadium is integrating resource-efficient features with multi-use design that ensures the building will be used year-round," says Chris deVolder, architect with 360 Architecture and project manager for the Husky Stadium renovation. "One of the keys to the success was including athletics operations in the design process from the beginning and engaging local resources. This includes reaching out past the edge of the stadium, working with the university and local transit authorities to design a bike parking system that accommodates day to day use as well as expanding to accommodate game day use."

360 Architecture is working with Husky Athletics to design greener infrastructure for the renovation as well as advising on long-term environmentally preferable operations for the facility. Thanks to student interest, greener operations are becoming the new norm for collegiate sports venues, explains deVolder. "Students are now coming into college not asking about sustainability performance, but demanding it. It's becoming part of how they decide where to go to school," says deVolder. "Nationwide, we're really just starting to scratch the surface of sustainability performance within collegiate sports and Husky Stadium is helping to lead the way."

In August 2013, with planning was still underway for greening stadium operations, the athletics department acquired a grant of \$3,500 from the GLAD® One Bag College Waste Diversion Grant program to help enhance waste management practices. The grant was used to bring in an environmental consulting firm, Milepost Consulting, to advise on operational efficiency and goal setting. Husky Athletics worked with Milepost to establish four teams of employees to enhance stadium operations upon reopening: infrastructure, measuring and reporting, fan engagement, and stakeholder engagement. Each team has a set of goals and strategies.

## THE HUSKIES' TACTICS FOR INCREASING WASTE DIVERSION

### REVERSE SORTING

Instead of sorting recyclables from a mixed waste stream, Husky Athletics was able to increase diversion by sorting out garbage and recycling what remained.

### COMPOSTABLE PACKAGING

Close to 100 percent of concession packaging in Husky Stadium is either compostable or recyclable. This, along with a post-game sorting program, has increased the stadium's diversion rate and helped reduce contamination in the recycling and composting waste streams. In the renovated stadium, no garbage bins will be available.

### "GO PURPLE, BE GOLD & GREEN" BRAND

Husky Athletics developed a brand for its greening program to provide consistent messaging. Recycling bins throughout all athletic facilities feature the greening slogan and logo. Volunteers, student-athletes, Harry the Husky (the UW mascot) and ushers also wear T-shirts, buttons, and hats to promote the program at home sporting events.

### "GREEN MINUTE" CAMPAIGN

An in-game promotion during the second half of each football game, the "green minute" includes a fun public service announcement involving student-athletes and coaches played on the stadium's screens, encouraging fans to compost and recycle. Husky Athletics launched the campaign during the first 2010 home football game.



Photo courtesy of University of Washington.

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Photo courtesy of University of Washington.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

- Establish a two-stream waste system for fans, with bins placed only for recycling and composting, facilitated by 100 percent recyclable and compostable serviceware. Any non-recyclable or non-compostable trash will be collected in the bowl after each game by a cleanup crew managed by Husky Athletics.
- Install new color-coordinated bins with clear signage to help make use of the receptacles easier.
- Color-code serviceware products to match the bin they belong in.
- Determine the optimal number and placement of bins so fans are likely to go to the correct area to recycle and compost their waste.

## MEASURING AND REPORTING

- Set goals for waste diversion, water conservation, and energy efficiency for Husky Stadium and all Husky athletic facilities.
- Gather and analyze data to help set future goals and monitor progress.

## FAN ENGAGEMENT

- Enhance outreach to increase fan awareness of environmental issues and encourage support for the greening program.
- Create environmental messaging prior to the stadium’s reopening and during the 2013 fall season.

## STAKEHOLDERS

- Work with partners including ARAMARK, Waste Management, Cedar Grove Composting, and other stakeholders to coordinate and optimize procedures, share better practices, and create a culture of sustainability.
- Work with student groups, interns, student-athletes and the Office of Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability to expand available sports greening resources and promote community engagement.

“Husky Athletics built a successful step-by-step implementation plan by setting roles and ongoing responsibilities for each member of the diverse team of athletics, campus, supplier, and service provider representatives,” says John Silkey, senior project manager at Milepost Consulting. “This makes an intimidating program rollout more manageable and helps monitor project progress.”

An ongoing challenge the UW athletics department faces is how to devote staff time to implementing lasting operational improvements, given that the department staff is already obligated to manage their teams and more than 400 events each year. “The staff is already so busy focusing on the teams and athletes,” explains Baebler, “that it can be a challenge to simultaneously manage the department’s sustainability programs. However, greening is an ongoing priority for Husky Athletics. The department recognizes the variety of benefits it can provide for the students, staff, environment, and the bottom line.” In order to help give the sustainability program the attention it deserves, the Huskies have turned to one of the greatest assets on their college campus: the student body. The Huskies established student internships and student volunteer roles, helping students gain valuable professional experience by implementing lessons from the classroom in hands-on greening projects, and enhancing the time spent on greening by the athletics department staff.



## LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

### CAPITALIZE ON EARLY ENTHUSIASM

The Huskies advise launching several outreach initiatives in quick succession to capitalize on the enthusiastic community support for new and exciting programs. “Early success came easily for our sustainability efforts, and the feedback from fans, campus, and the community was 100 percent positive,” says Baebler. “So many people were willing to partner and share resources that Husky Athletics was able to establish a strong program rapidly.”

### ENGAGE MARKETING STUDENTS

“Over the years, it has become more difficult to be successful as goals are set higher and it’s no longer fresh and new for the community,” says Baebler. Husky Athletics engages student interns from the environmental studies and marketing programs to help prevent “messaging fatigue” by developing new and creative ways to keep fans interested.

### ESTABLISH A SPORTS GREENING BRAND TO ATTRACT SPONSORS

“The sustainability program has been a brand enhancer,” says Baebler. “It has opened up opportunities with sponsors who may have had no interest in partnering with athletics before.” For example, Cedar Grove, the largest composting company in the Northwest, is now a sponsor of Husky Athletics. It has sponsored many sports events and has its logo on the university’s “Go Green” shirts.

### USE CONCESSIONAIRE EXPERTISE

“The athletics department concluded that it was the correct move to start with waste diversion,” says Baebler. “Your concessionaires have the expertise to help grow a compost and recycling program. Using partners like these can make launching a new sustainability program more manageable.”

### PARTNER WITH STUDENT CLUBS

“The athletics department has been able to partner with student environmental clubs to come up with cost-effective new and fun ideas for grassroots education,” says Baebler. Student outreach is one of the most effective ways to involve the student body and make sports greening communications memorable for students.

### POSITIVE MEDIA COVERAGE ADDS TO THE VALUE OF GREENING

“As we keep striving to decrease our environmental impact, Husky Athletics is grateful for all of the support and cooperation we’ve received,” says Baebler. “The efforts of the past three years have led to articles in magazines and newspapers and speaking opportunities. It has been well worth the effort, something that the athletics department is proud of and that demonstrates the school’s forward thinking.”



Photos courtesy of University of Washington.