Hi Mike,

It was great to speak with you and catch-up about our sustainability reporting projects at UMass Dartmouth and other initiatives. We appreciate your willingness to help share our best practices, and we would be happy to help in any way that we can. As you know, we are in touch with other universities about replicating our reporting projects for municipalities and we have been working with Net Impact Central to develop a template to serve as a guide for other chapters when reporting using GRI standards. The City of Fall River and the Town of Dartmouth have both agreed to work with us again to annually produce sustainability reports. These opportunities, however, would not have been possible had we not begun with reporting at our own university.

In 2010, our Net Impact chapter’s Faculty Adviser, Associate Professor Adam Sulkowski (www.adamsulkowski.com), created a class project to develop a sustainability report for UMass Dartmouth. He has been researching this corporate practice since 2005. The report these students produced became the first report published by any university in the world to meet an “A” level of compliance with a GRI standard. By helping to produce this report, one of the students, within weeks, received a job offer from a Fortune 200 company. The following year, in 2011, the class, again with editorial and other support from Professor Sulkowski, prepared a sustainability report with updated statistics and expanded stakeholder opinion data. The report again qualified as meeting the A level of compliance with a GRI standard.

It is worth highlighting that, partly inspired by this annual reporting exercise, a student asked whether there was any tangible proof that having a “green reputation” boosts employee morale. This led to an honors thesis research project and ultimately a published scholarly article: “A Greener Company Makes for Happier Employees More So Than Does a More Valuable One,” which has been widely cited (including in news sources such as Inc. and MSN). In 2012, the next iteration of the report was further improved with the inclusion of stakeholder opinion-and-awareness data based on over 1,300 completed surveys, and, by having sources verified by a third party, the report was the first by a university to qualify as achieving an A+ level of compliance with a GRI standard.

In fall 2012, we (Professor Sulkowski’s class, Net Impact, and me in my capacity as both a Graduate Assistant to Professor Sulkowski and Net Impact Graduate President) expanded our efforts, generating not only an updated sustainability report for the university, but also reports for two local municipalities.

To quickly summarize the timeline of the municipal sustainability reporting projects: within a week of contacting town and city administrators, we had set dates to review our goals and motivations, what data was needed, and from where we could collect it. Students from Professor Sulkowski’s MBA class (Business Law, Corporate Responsibility, and Sustainability) and members of the UMass Dartmouth Chapter of Net Impact were assigned data to gather and sections to draft, and by the end of November, we had completed both municipal reports. City of Fall River Mayor William Flanagan and his office were delighted by the report when we met for a final editorial and fact-checking review – so much that on December 6th, 2012, a press conference was held in Fall River, MA to declare the completion of the first GRI-guided sustainability report in the USA to have been completed by a city. Weeks later, we completed the Town of Dartmouth 2012 Sustainability Report, the first by a town in the USA to be guided by a GRI standard. More recently, the Town of Dartmouth leadership discussed and approved repeating the sustainability reporting exercise on an annual basis as a means of improving efficiency and decision-making.

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As evidence that (1) such experiential learning / reporting exercises are replicable in the context of larger cities and private corporations, and that (2) we are in a leadership position of an international movement, it bears mentioning that in the summer of 2013 Professor Sulkowski produced the first report in accordance with the latest GRI standard for the City of Warsaw, Poland and mentored a team of international students in producing the first such report for the largest food product company in Poland. This City of Warsaw’s report is especially significant because there will be discussions at the upcoming COP19 UN Climate Summit in November about public sector adoption of sustainability reporting as a tangible and actionable best practice worthy of emulation.

For your reference, here are links to the reports highlighted above:
All UMass Dartmouth sustainability reports:
http://netimpact.umassd.edu
The City of Fall River 2012 Sustainability Report:
The Town of Dartmouth 2012 Sustainability Report:
http://www.town.dartmouth.ma.us/Pages/DartmouthMA_Admin/DartmouthGRI.pdf
City of Warsaw 2013 Integrated Sustainability Report:

In my personal experience, sustainability reporting has contributed to my education and career development in three ways, among many others:

- First, I owe my job primarily to working on sustainability reports; through the experience I gained from overseeing the reporting exercises, researching metrics, and editing these reports, I was able to translate that knowledge and experience into a position from which I now oversee customer sustainability and environmental impact requests to my employer, Bose, as well as create processes and strategies for reporting and creating a more sustainability-oriented corporate culture.
- Second, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the opportunities and challenges related to public sector administration, and those that arise from stakeholder/constituent engagement and producing reports as a means of communicating with them.
- Third, I learned how investments, progress, and measurement-and-reporting with respect to economics, societal impacts, and environmental performance (the three pillars of sustainability) relate to each other in the “real world.”

I cannot speak highly enough of the experience I gained, and of the opportunities presented to me, personally, and to the UMass Dartmouth Chapter of Net Impact, through producing and replicating GRI-guided sustainability reports. Again, if there is any way I can help to spread the word about our readily replicable best practices, I, other chapter members, and our Faculty Adviser, Professor Sulkowski, will be more than happy to help.

Best Regards,

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