

Leading by Example: UBC and Sustainability
Address to the Association of Pacific Rim Universities

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Keio University

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Thank you and good afternoon.

Congratulations to our host, President Anzai, from Keio University and his staff on the occasion of their 150th anniversary. UBC is 100 years old this year. Also, thanks to the APRU Secretariat, especially Secretary General Ken McGillivray.

I would like to extend my greetings from Canada and from UBC and to take my time to speak briefly about sustainability – about some of the initiatives that UBC is taking to contribute to the social, economic and environmental sustainability of our large region – and our small planet.

Acknowledging the complexity of the issues involved, UBC has set sustainability as a priority in what we teach, in the research that we do, and in the actions we take as an institution linking to the wider community. Our preoccupation is not new. UBC signed

on to the Talloires Declaration in 1990 and created a full-scale sustainability office shortly thereafter.

We have set up a series of centres and multidisciplinary programs that, in one way or the other, address critical sustainability questions.

For example, our Clean Energy Research Centre is Canada's only interdisciplinary facility dedicated to improving existing energy technologies and developing new sustainable energy sources. We're working on everything from renewable energies to clean burning engines, fuel cell systems and advanced hydrogen production methods.

The UBC Centre for Interactive Research on Sustainability (CIRS), still under development, will be a "living laboratory" designed to accelerate the adoption of sustainable building

technologies and urban development practices in society. CIRS is led by John Robinson, a North American leader in sustainability research and one of the members of the UN's International Panel on Climate Change.

In terms of encouraging community action, our School of Community and Regional Planning (SCARP), the first dedicated planning school in Canada, has been instrumental in making Vancouver an exemplary model for dense, but highly livable urban design. This influential school is also home to 100 graduate students from around the world and to leading sustainability researchers like Prof. William Rees – who was the first to conceive of and quantify an “ecological footprint.”

Finally, our Centre for Sustainability and Social Enterprise engages directly with the business community to refine and enhance business practices in such areas as carbon markets and

development, sustainable transportation and food security and aquaculture. The centre, led by Prof. James Tansey, builds on our Sauder School of Business' MBA specialization in Sustainability and Business.

It is, however, not enough for any research-intensive university only to seek innovations that others might use. UBC has embraced the additional challenge of trying to model sustainable behavior in our own actions and operations.

For example, through Canada's largest ever energy and water infrastructure upgrade, we have, over the past decade, retrofitted nearly 300 academic buildings on our huge Vancouver campus. This significantly improved learning conditions and reduced our greenhouse gas emission by 8,000 tonnes per year. We also reduced our energy costs by \$2.6 million Canadian – a savings that will completely pay for the retrofit in less than 12 years.

Under another program, we have been able to increase public transit ridership for students and staff by 185 per cent, again in less than a decade – dramatically reducing automobile use and congestion, and cutting GHG output by a further 16,000 tonnes per year.

In managing our solid waste, we implemented the use of a garbage composter in 2004, diverting 300 tonnes a year of waste food products which we now have available for use as enriched soil for our experimental farm and our own landscaping. In 2006, through an increase in our recycling efforts, we were able to divert a further 46 per cent of solid waste from landfills. Last year UBC fully achieved our Kyoto Protocol targets. I wish I could say the same for my country.

In our second and much-newer campus in Kelowna, we have just approved a full geo-thermal project that we hope will help make UBC Okanagan the first carbon neutral campus in Canada – perhaps the first in the world.

All of these innovations are monitored by a President's Advisory Committee on Sustainability which is mandated to identify and promote potential areas of innovation, connecting our most advanced researchers directly with the people who can implement their most promising discoveries.

But I think it bears repeating that our own experience in implementing innovative, sustainable policies has been overwhelmingly positive. We have, in our own operations, saved energy, saved water, reduced waste and – by surprising margins – saved money.

These successes leave me optimistic about the future successes to come, and ever more determined to speak up – to play an advocacy role in the community and to urge you all to join me in that effort.

We, at UBC, believe that a sustainable future is attainable, just as it is necessary. To that end, I would be delighted to speak to any of you further in person about any of our initiatives, and especially about the possibility of collaborating with you on future efforts.

Thank you.