

Undergraduate pathways to sustainability

With UBC recognized as a leader in sustainability, UBC Reports charts how two hypothetical new students, Jack and Jill, might learn about the topic in their academic journey that begins this fall. BY MEG WALKER

YEAR 1

Jack (commuter) and Jill (in residence) meet at UBC Vancouver's Orientation week, IMAGINE. They learn about campus sustainability programs: recycling, the reusable food container program and more. All students receive a travel mug that gives 15 cents off at all Food Services outlets. New UBC Okanagan students at the CREATE orientation hear about recycling, composting and other eco-options. Students at both campuses are eligible for the U-Pass, the universal transit access pass.

Jack takes the Nature and Society course (Coordinated Arts Program) on how sustainable societies have been imagined over time. It starts with a 100 Mile Diet lunch.

Jack volunteers at Sprouts. This student-run café in the SUB (also home to the UBC Natural Foods co-op) serves local and organic foods (www.ams.ubc.ca/clubs/nfc).

Jack and Jill meet for fish and chips. Having read Prof. Daniel Pauly's research about decline in global fish stocks (www.fisheries.ubc.ca/members/dpauly) they're relieved that UBC Food Services's Sustainable Seafood Project works to procure appropriate fish such as snapper (www.food.ubc.ca/about/initiatives.html).

Jack and Jill prep for 2nd year and beyond by choosing from UBC's 400+ eco-conscious courses (www.sustain.ubc.ca/reports/curriculum/)

Jill takes Earth and Ocean Sciences 110 and learns about climate change by studying natural processes that shape the earth.

Jill joins the Student Environment Centre, an Alma Mater Society resource group where people can learn about environmental and sustainability topics.

YEAR 2

Jack does a Community Service Learning project at UBC Farm during Reading Week. He learns about the UBC Food System project, which aims to give students a solid understanding of the ecological, social and economic sustainability of food systems.

Jack and Jill evaluate a stormwater management system as part of SEEDS, Western Canada's only program that allows students to earn academic credit by working with faculty to solve real-life sustainability issues on campus (sustain.ubc.ca/seeds).

Jack writes for a UBC blog called Terry (www.terry.ubc.ca), a site that cross-fertilizes science and arts students' understanding of each others' fields in relation to global issues.

Jack does Arts Co-Op with a company that has an eco-focus. Examples of summer 2008 placements: research for City of Vancouver water conservation project; and promoting B.C. Hydro's PowerSmart program.

Jill's microbiology course is in the Life Sciences Building, which is LEED (Leadership in Energy and Design) Gold certified. Curious about green buildings, she reads www.sustain.ubc.ca/greenbuilding.html and tracks energy use of select buildings at dashboard.smallenergygroup.com.

Jill becomes a Resident Sustainability Advisor. She sets up info nights and coordinates with the Sustainability Office to create fun projects like a contest to see which residence can compost the most.

Jill takes a term in Mexico through the UBC-wide Go Global program (www.students.ubc.ca/goglobal). Eco-focused placements in many disciplines are available.

YEAR 3

Jack and Jill meet for fair trade coffee (available at every Food Services location at UBC Vancouver and UBC Okanagan). Jack has heard Prof. Bill Rees (School of Regional and Community Planning) talk about the ecological footprint concept. He tells Jill how this framework describes the amount of productive land needed to support a given population.

Since Jill flew to her Go Global placement, she uses Offsetters, a project for carbon offset investments created by UBC profs James Tansey and Hadi Dowlatbadi (www.offsetters.ca)

At the Trek Program Centre, which promotes sustainable transportation, Jack reserves a community co-op Zip Car for a date (www.trek.ubc.ca).

Jack and Jill carpool to UBC Okanagan in late March for the annual Urban Forum conference organized by Prof. Bernard Momer (2009 theme: cities and creativity). UBC Okanagan is the second location in B.C. to use "warm-mix" asphalt, a paving method that uses lower temperatures, takes less energy to apply and makes less smoke.

Jack tours the Faculty of Education's Learning Garden, which promotes the principles of sustainable environmental practice, stewardship of nature and eco-literacy.

Jill visits the Fipke Centre for Innovative Research – a building fitted with a geoechange groundwater energy system for heating and cooling. In time, every academic building at UBC Okanagan will use geothermic exchange.

YEAR 4

Jack and Jill hear John Robinson (Institute for Resources, Environment and Sustainability professor and co-winner of the Nobel Peace prize with Al Gore in 2007) speak about "Issue-driven Interdisciplinarity in the Service of Sustainability."

After, Jack and Jill discuss "green" graduate degree options like the IRES Resource Management studies and the Sauder School of Business' Sustainability and Business MBA.

In the First Nations Studies Program 320 Seminar, Jack learns about cultural sustainability – understanding how cultural groups create their social history.

Jill's chemistry lab uses the Chemical Exchange. This free service identifies unopened, unneeded chemicals on campus and markets them to other potential users on campus. In 2005, more than 400 kg of chemicals were exchanged.

Jack and Jill graduate and take the Sustainability Pledge (www.sustain.ubc.ca/sustainable_u).

In 1997, UBC became Canada's first university to develop a sustainability policy. UBC's Sustainability Office has helped guide efforts that have made UBC a leader. See www.sustain.ubc.ca