



The Costs and Efficiencies behind Green IT

The following excerpt is based on an interview conducted in May 2009 by Gerry Bayne, EDUCAUSE multimedia producer. To listen to the full podcast, go to <<http://www.educause.edu/er/Anderson&Whitepodcast>>.

Gerry Bayne: The first Earth Day was celebrated nearly forty years ago. What do you think has been the drive for such renewed interest in green IT lately?

Robin Anderson: Penn State has 24 campuses, with about 85,000 students. We have about 42,000 or 43,000 students at the largest campus. And we have more than 11,000 faculty and staff. So it's a big enterprise, and our electricity bill is on the rise. There has been an artificial cap on electricity for years, but now our electricity bill is going up \$9 million. In 2010, it's going up another \$9 million. There's nothing like a crisis to light the fire. It's not just green IT; it's "Let's all cut down on electricity." There is a group within the university physical plant that has been looking at "turn off the lights" and those kinds of actions and talking to students, faculty, and staff. Of course, for those of us who remember the ecology movement the first time around, this is kind of a wake-up call: let's do this again.

Bayne: What about at Goucher?

Fran White: Goucher has one campus, with about 1,500 students. We're a very small liberal arts institution. But we're being driven a bit by the crisis as well. Everyone is. We don't want to continue to increase tuition because we have to cover these power bills. Still, in a more global perspective for IT, we thought we were

part of the solution years ago. Goucher has included environmental sustainability in its strategic plan. It is a huge focus on campus.

Bayne: Let me just drill a little deeper into this question. Do you think the economic crisis is the main driver, or are there other issues behind today's green IT emphasis?

Anderson: I think it's a combination of issues. Again, there's that large electricity bill that we're going to be receiving, but in addition, as a land-grant university, we rely on the state to give us a certain level of funding. State budgets are tight; therefore, the amount of money coming to the university is tight. Oh, and did I mention the electric bill? We're having to cut back on programs and on positions. It makes sense that we should look at the overall picture and look at the technology bill. For example, ten years ago, when we were bringing in large systems, no one was going to be printing on paper; everyone was going to be looking at everything online. But that hasn't really happened. We made it far too easy to print. So I think just in terms of looking at efficiencies as a generic term, that is part of the impetus as well.

Bayne: How would you respond to someone who says, "Many green IT measures are actually more expensive"? For example, recycled paper is more expensive than regular paper.

White: I would say that a big push for us to change how we do things has come from our student body. Because it is a small student body and we have a small

faculty and staff, we act as a community in a very direct presence with one another. Young people are coming from homes where communities require that they recycle. It's a part of their life. So we cannot *not* do that.

Anderson: As far as the recycled paper and the soy-based inks and so forth, one of the groups that I work with is our computer store. The store made a commitment that anything that was going to be printed was going to be printed on recyclable or renewable papers and with soy-based inks. Yes, it was more expensive up front, but somebody had to start the ball rolling. We told our central printing organization: "Look, we want to use these kinds of papers. We want to use these kinds of inks." And when they realized that there was a market for that, more folks made the change. Actually, our costs are dropping now because this is being done on a much larger scale. It was the right thing to do, and the students are aware of those kinds of initiatives.

Bayne: What initiatives are easy to get up and running at the institutional level at your colleges?

White: From a small college perspective, recycling is one of the easiest, simply because there are many vendors that can help. We recycle everything, from CDs and DVDs to paper and electronics. Another easy initiative is print management, because it doesn't require hardware; it requires software and time, but it gets students to think. We call our program "Print Wisely." So students have to think; they have to click "yes" before they print

anything. There can be a cost involved if they use up all their print points. Our semester-by-semester statistics show that printing is decreasing.

Anderson: We are taking very similar actions. Our computer store is using Call2Recycle for e-waste, so that students can drop off cell phones, ink toner cartridges, recyclable batteries, and those kinds of things and receive a discount for use at the store. It's just a slight little incentive, but for undergrads, even five dollars can mean a lot. The other program that we

have started is the recycling of laptops. There's a sliding scale on wear-and-tear of the laptop, but again, store credit is given toward a new laptop. We also do the same thing for mp3s and PDAs. They'll be disposed of properly, and students receive store credit.

Bayne: If you are looking at a new initiative, who would be involved in the process?

White: That would depend on the initiative. But we would routinely try to include

faculty, staff, and students. And then we would look at particular parts of the staff. For example, our facilities management is separate from the IT organization, but so many of the things we do now are conjoined. We bring those folks in whenever we're considering something. And then, of course, we also involve the people who handle the budget.

Bayne: Are there surprises ahead for institutions that adopt green IT practices? Is there anything that we need to think about or be aware of—hidden costs, hidden contingencies?

Anderson: I can give you an example of where we didn't think far enough ahead: our learning management system. Faculty got on board and put their materials on the web. But professors will say, "Make sure you print out these pages and bring them to class." So we didn't close the loop. But I also think that some of the problem is generational. I watch the younger folks in our organization, and they're perfectly content reading lengthy documents online. I just can't do that. Perhaps some of us older folks need to think about changing our behavior patterns. And I agree with Fran that we need to have programs that will make students think before printing and get them to think about the environment.

White: I would say that for any initiative or project that is proposed, we have to look at what the results might be. We have to do better assessment, and we have to do better research. For instance, I don't know if we could have seen the print/paper crisis coming, because this was a whole new world. However, we do have the technology now, and we have the knowledge to do something about that particular problem. We simply need to be more thoughtful when we are working on new initiatives.

Robin L. Anderson was Director of Customer Communications at The Pennsylvania State University from 2001

until her retirement in 2009. Fran White is Director of the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology at Goucher College.



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