

## ***WMU student sustainability fee***

By Michael Johnson

*A breakdown of the allocation of the sustainability fee at WMU.*

You have finally been accepted to Western Michigan University. You look through your tuition bill. When you look closer, you see an \$8 fee for sustainability. Some students may not notice this fee, while others may think this is somewhat odd.

“I dunno, it just seems odd, like what is it going to,” said Jennifer Colosi, a sophomore at Western Michigan University majoring in business.

So how much money does the Office for Sustainability collect from the sustainability fee? Derek Kanwischer, WMU’s Office for Sustainability’s coordinator of sustainability projects, said last year there was an approximate total of \$355,763 collected from this fee. Of that total, about \$277,744.80 went to the Survey Implementation and Ongoing Projects (SIOP), about \$170,469.77 went towards supplemental funding for faculty, and nearly \$121,708.39 went to supporting green jobs.

The Sustainability Fee began as a student-led initiative and was first collected in Fall 2010. Some students at WMU say they don’t understand what they are paying for when they get charged the sustainability fee. Students like Jennifer Colosi, Jamision Gust and Brandon Johnson, explained that they either pay the fee without second guessing why they paid it or they just pay the fee but don’t understand why they are being charged.

The Office for Sustainability at WMU provides a [diagram on their website](#) to explain what the sustainability fee is and how the \$8 gets allocated. Students pay \$8 for each semester they attend campus classes which means you could be paying \$32 if you attend the fall, spring and both summer semesters.

The WMU sustainability fee diagram shows 57 percent or \$4.56 of the \$8 per semester total allocated for the Survey Implementation and Ongoing Projects Fund (SIOP) minus the cost of the Sustainability Grant (\$75 thousand), 24 percent or \$1.92 allocated for supplemental funding to the Office for Sustainability, and 19 percent or \$1.52 allocated towards green jobs.

Some students said they find this explanation of how the sustainability fee is allocated confusing.

“What does that mean? It doesn’t even really go into detail I don’t know what that means,” said Gust, a current senior at WMU majoring in psychology.

Other WMU students agree. “I guess that’s cool how it breaks down, but I still don’t know where it’s really going,” Colosi said.

“What are green jobs? How much money is that all together? Why do we need to be charged for sustainability I still don’t understand.” said Brandon Johnson a current sophomore at WMU majoring in geography.

Kanwischer said the SIOP fund is used to implement new sustainability projects and initiatives on campus as well as to maintain existing programs. Also, the SIOP fund has most often been used for equipment and infrastructure, but it could also fund wages for part-time employees, independent contractors and consultants but is not used to support the full-time staff or basic operations of the Office for Sustainability, he said.

Kanwischer explained that the Office for Sustainability employs over 20 students each semester in positions like the building's front desk workers and graduate researchers. He also explained that the office employs several additional students to work on waste reduction and recycling efforts using funding separate from the Sustainability Fee.

Kanwischer explained how important the Sustainability Fee is for the Office for Sustainability. “It’s [sustainability fee] very important, it’s a tremendous impact, we couldn’t do what we do without it.”

So, where does all this money actually go?

For starters, projects on campus like the solar panel initiative to make clean energy, the green roof initiative and others like implementing more bike racks around campus to promote riding bikes to reduce car use. These projects were and are initiated by students who had an idea and a plan to help make WMU more sustainable, then the project was supported by the fee, Kanwischer said.

Students may wonder how the money is actually used each year.

“Well what if all the money from the fee isn’t used for projects what happens to the leftovers?” asked Brandon Johnson.

“If that were to happen, which it hasn’t since I’ve been here, then the money would sort of roll over for the next semester or go to help support ongoing projects...the money is always used...anything else goes to student projects,” Kanwischer said.

The Office for Sustainability uses the sustainability fee to help make Western Michigan University a more sustainable place.

“I didn’t think it was that big a deal before I got to know where the money went and why I was paying for it...I don’t mind giving eight bucks if it helps the school stay good,” Colosi said