Student Senate discusses rating system for UW-La Crosse sustainability

By Brittany Maule
Staff Reporter

At the Student Senate meeting on Wednesday, Oct. 30, several of the Senate members were dressed in costume to celebrate Halloween, but the topics covered in the meeting were much more serious than the playful and witty costumes. The Senate passed a resolution with a 14-6-10 vote to support the idea that UW-La Crosse should be included in the Sustainability Tracking and Rating Systems, or STARS, program.

This program would involve UW-La Crosse in a rating system for sustainability that is already being exhibited by five other UW System campuses, such as UW-Oshkosh, UW-Stevens Point, UW-River Falls and UW-Stout. Bob Tyser of the Biology Department spoke at the meeting and explained some of the aspects and benefits of the program of UW-La Crosse would gain from being involved in it.

“This program would allow us to show all the great things our campus is doing in sustainability,” said Tyser.

STARS works by having the member campus collect all of the information on their sustainability efforts, and then submitting this information to be evaluated by the program. From this information, the campus is given a rating (gold, silver, etc.) that they can compare to other campuses and display as an accomplishment. Tyrer stressed how STARS would “establish a road map by which our campus could become more sustainable.” The program does not require a fee to join, $900 the first year and $800 for every subsequent year. According to Alexis Merbach, Sustainability Tracking and Rating Systems (STARS) works by having the campuses collect all of their information on their sustainability efforts, and then submitting this information to be evaluated by the program.

the Environmental Sustainability Director for Student Association and one of the authors of the resolution, this money would not be integrated into a student fee. Merbach and freshmen senator Elaine Anderson presented the resolution which underwent both debate and scrutiny before ultimately being passed. For Merbach, this support from Student Association was crucial for the future of STARS at UW-La Crosse. "Seeing that STARS has the student’s support can take it even further, because the faculty listens to the students,” he said. Student support is something that STARS was lacking. In her presentation of the resolution, Merbach cited that joining STARS had support from over 200 members of Students for Sustainability. Tyrer added that this past spring, a survey was conducted on campus where 930 respondents were asked if they favored a program where UW-La Crosse’s efforts would be tracked and evaluated, and 90 percent of the respondents favored joining such a program.

In the passing of this resolution, Tyrer was quick to give credit to the students of UW-La Crosse in accomplishing sustainability initiatives. "Students are leading the way in our sustainability efforts, and are really being role models for staff and faculty to follow,” he said. Having the Student Association’s approval will be a crucial piece of support in the future of STARS at UW-L. Merbach was glad to see that the resolution and Student Association’s support because it “needs to start with students, because it will ultimately affect them the most.”

Potential addition to Murphy Library

By Samantha Loomis

On the second floor of Murphy Library, there is a room that has the potential of becoming a Maker's Space. A Maker's Space is a small scale workshop that students can use to create projects with equipment that is not accessible anywhere else on campus.

These projects include robotics kits, circuit boards, 3D printers and other hands-on creations. A sewing machine may be available, as well as a green screen to create videos and movies. These "lab" or "maker" labs were started at MIT and have slowly been working their way into campus libraries, as well as public libraries, nationwide.

MIT's Media Lab was created under the School of Architecture and Planning in order to encompass the cross-disciplines of electrical engineers and designers. The purpose of this lab is not to just brainstorm ideas as one would in a "think tank" but to take a product and make it a model. The type of production encouraged within the lab focuses on product innovation, research, design and sponsorships through private enterprise. LEGO, General Motors and Samsung are a few sponsors that have been involved in the lab conducting new product improvement and research.

Library Director Catherine Lavalle-Welch stated that a Maker's Space on campus would "encourage innovation, self-production and self-reliance." During her previous employment, she was involved in a "learning commons," which was similar to a Maker's Space. Lavalle-Welch articulates the Maker's Space "would not be competing with other resources available on campus but adding to what is already there." Of course, UW-La Crosse's Maker's Space would not house such big-name corporations, but nothing is impossible.

Professors would also be able to assign more multimedia focused homework for students if the Maker's Space was to be created. This would encourage hands-on learning outside of the classroom and open doors for students who wish to dabble in the arts of engineering and mechanics, or media and technology, creating an opportunity for UW-La Crosse students.

Lavalle-Welch believes most of the funding would come from university funding, system funding as well as funding from grants and private donors.

Lavalle-Welch and her staff of librarians have been small-scale advocates for a Maker's Space and wanted to get feedback from the students. A survey was created and posted on the Murphy Library home page in hopes of getting students opinions on the matter. The survey has been up for three weeks and Lavalle-Welch says she has received "excellent feedback" concerning the types of activities that would like to be held in the upcoming Maker's Space. The survey is still up and every student is encouraged to participate in completing it.

How do you feel about the construction proposal for a new residence hall in the summer of 2014 and have the new spaces ready by fall of 2015? Bob Hetzel, UW-L Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance, said, “As for the schedule for the parking ramp addition, we are hoping to start the construction process in the spring of 2014 and have the new spaces ready by fall of 2015. We have just 200 parking spaces, and our goal in building the new parking ramp was to make sure the university doesn’t lose any parking spaces with the construction of our new building projects.”