Building Sustainable Libraries Preliminary Survey Results

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Equipment will be designed for remanufacture and to last longer. A three-year life cycle for a piece of equipment that contains toxic heavy metals is not going to be good enough — not to mention the fact that a smart phone is estimated to use the equivalent of 600 gallons of gasoline (this includes its manufacture, use, and disposal — its “life cycle”). And we will have to find better ways to manage our own data. In the old days, a single copy of a document would simply be filed. An important document might merit a carbon copy or two. Today, we let digital copies multiply in part because we feel nervous about ever retrieving anything because there is just so much data around. In spite of the environmental cost of this proliferation, there is a Stanford open-source backup project called LOCKSS: Lots of Copies Keeps Stuff Safe. But when hosting a mere 10MB of data takes a gallon equivalent of gasoline per annum (producing 2-1/2 kilos of carbon dioxide), we should be keeping copies to a minimum. Here’s what my email signature says: “Please consider the environmental impact of printing, forwarding, & storing emails. Going paperless isn’t necessarily green!”

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**Guest Editor’s Note:** The “Building Sustainable Libraries Survey” gathers information on sustainability efforts at academic libraries across the United States. These preliminary results will be followed by a final report, in greater depth, released next year by Berkshire Publishing Group and Against The Grain. — KC

Over 1/4 (26.9%) of respondents have a sustainability-related degree or research center.

On average, over 1/2 (56.1%) have taken steps to green computer equipment purchasing and services, with the most popular being sharing printers (95.8%), recycling of equipment (87%), and examining cloud computing (71.4%).

As an area for improvement, on average, only 1/4 (23.7%) of institutions chose books based on sustainability criteria, and no institutions reported asking suppliers about books sourcing or supply chain.

While over half (56%) of respondents favor electronic resources, fewer (40%) have data on the printing of these resources, and no institutions have inquired on the vendor holding an Environmental Product Declaration.

With the exception of scientific and economics/business journals, the majority of respondents feel that available resources on environmental sustainability are “satisfactory.”

On average, almost 1/3 (30.8%) of respondents have implemented some sustainably positive physical changes, with natural lighting, LCD monitors, computer shut downs, and low-water landscaping being the most popular.

On average, almost 3/4 (72.6%) of respondents have implemented sustainably positive changes in terms of supplies, with paper recycling bins (100%), recycle-content paper supplies (96.2%) and the encouragement to reduce office supplies and paper (96.2%) being the most popular.

Over half of respondents belong to AASHE and/or are signatories of the ACUPCC. None of the respondents thought their institution had signed the Talloires Declaration (see pages 18 and 30).