Girvetz To Turn Green for Good of Environment

by Ashley Ratcliff - Staff Writer
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Girvetz Hall will be the first of many buildings on campus to review its consumption of natural resources and make energy-saving changes to the way its facilities operate.

Campus Sustainability Coordinator Perrin Pellegrin said the project, which began in Fall Quarter of this year, entails cleaning the building, monitoring energy and water use, and developing a protocol to maintain landscaping using environmentally friendly techniques. Girvetz will become the first building at UCSB to participate in the green buildings initiative - a plan to require all buildings within the UC system to meet the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards of efficiency. LEED is a national standard for developing high-performance, sustainable buildings based on materials selection, energy efficiency and water savings.

The plan emphasizes using green-friendly items - like low-wattage light bulbs - and avoiding furniture and carpeting made with toxic chemicals. It also involves creating more comprehensive recycling programs.

Pellegrin said the cost to implement the plan at Girvetz would be minimal, as it requires no major construction. She said work should be completed by December.

"It shouldn't cost money. It's just a change in the culture of operating the building," Pellegrin said. "The landscapers are using less-toxic fertilizers and mulch to kill weeds in natural, green ways, instead of spraying Roundup ... Everybody gets to work together from the custodial and energy management teams. If Girvetz is successful, the plan will be implemented to all buildings."

Aaron Gilliam, co-chair for the Environmental Affairs Board and senior environmental studies major, said making existing campus buildings environmentally friendly will save UCSB far more money than is spent in retrofitting.

"You can design a building to save money," Gilliam said. "The capital costs of a green building can be higher, but the operation and maintenance of a green building costs far less. It ends up paying off the initial costs after a while, so the project eventually pays itself back."

Gilliam said a student effort contributed to the successful implementation of the Green Buildings Initiative, which uses LEED ratings to rank buildings on a scale ranging from certified, to bronze, silver, gold and the highest certification of platinum. Gilliam said Girvetz was aspiring to silver certification.
"There was a student signature drive in which students signed a petition," Gilliam said. "The [University of California] Office of the President agreed to have the initiative be a UC-wide program. Our school pushed for more than the certification and pushed for the silver-equivalent rating. However, there's not a 100 percent commitment from the administration."

In order to attain certification for Girvetz, there need to be at least three months of performance data for the building, Pellegrin said.

"We have to submit readouts of the electrical, water and gas loads of the building," Pellegrin said. "The baseline readings will be from December to February. In April, we expect to hear back about having an award."

Gilliam said green buildings are designed to use less water and require less energy to operate.

"Green buildings use more renewable, reusable materials and try to reduce the impact on the environment," Gilliam said. "There's human health to think about. The green buildings use materials that don't contain toxic chemicals in things like furniture, dyes and carpet."

There is no timeline for the green buildings initiative project completion at UCSB, Pellegrin said, as so much depends on the results of the Girvetz plan.

"Progression is based upon the success of the project in the pilot building," Pellegrin said. "The policies, practices and procedures are the same across the UC campuses. The U.S. Green Buildings Council will certify a lot of buildings at the same time, and eventually other campus buildings."

Gilliam said the next step in the green buildings initiative is the sustainability master plan, which concerns the long-term goals of the project in making the campus as a whole more environmentally focused.

"Our long-range plan is to have the campus more sustainable for the future," Gilliam said. "Students and staff are working on that plan right now. Hopefully the long-range development plan will be finished by the time school starts in 2005."

Former EAB Sustainability Chair and senior environmental studies major Edward France said the sustainability master plan is about improving the UCSB campus.

"Green buildings are better; they're more functional to be in and less harmful," France said. "With the campus sustainability plan, we gather information in all the service areas of the campus, get measurements and then make goals. With water, we focus on using less of it. With our purchasing, we buy environmentally sound products. It's about doing a better job because everyone will benefit from it."

France said other campuses are developing plans similar to the sustainability master plan, but he said he feels motivated to make UCSB the first to put it in place.

"It's about overcoming lethargy and actually putting the energy into it, as a university," France said.
UCSB, which was the first to pledge to the green buildings initiative, has already been involved in building green-friendly structures. Bren Hall, an environmental science lab and office building, opened April 2002, receiving a platinum LEED certification. Pellegrin said Bren functions better than non-green buildings and takes fewer dollars to operate.

"Bren Hall proved that green buildings are possible on UC campuses," Pellegrin said.

Gilliam said the entire UCSB campus should strive to be more like Bren Hall.

"Ideally, Bren Hall is what our entire school should try to be," Gilliam said. "We're trying to make our campus more sustainable for future generations by not deteriorating the earth. One way to make our school environmentally conscious is to have our buildings be environmentally conscious."