

QUARTERLY REPORT

PHOENIX SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE | WINTER '24



OUR MISSION

To promote environmental awareness and integrate sustainable practices throughout UChicago and surrounding communities.

PSI aims to:

- Expand our network to enhance partnerships and collaborative opportunities
- Build an open, inclusive, and inviting community
- Promote project productivity through workshops, leadership trainings, and accountability measures
- Provide members with necessary skills to accomplish tangible outcomes in project work
- Encourage creativity in addressing issues and designing solutions to environmental problems





OUR PROJECT GROUPS

Centered upon a project group structure and partnership model, we create lasting change and impact by getting directly involved in planning, directing, and executing initiatives. Our project groups address issues of specific interest to our members and are relevant to local sustainability needs.

This quarter, PSI has **8** project groups:

1. Campus Composting
2. Campus Waste Reduction
3. Community Action
4. Divest UChicago
5. Environmental Education
6. Green Data
7. Green Partnerships
8. Science, Art, and Sustainability

CAMPUS COMPOSTING

Campus Composting aims to reduce improper disposal and creation of organic waste in the University of Chicago community by changing waste sorting practices. We assist with implementing composting infrastructure and increasing student awareness surrounding organic waste disposal.

CAFE COMPOSTING

We have successfully applied to the Green Fund to start composting at **Harper Cafe** and continue at **Ex Libris Cafe**, shifting all responsibilities at both cafes to the managers and cafe staff. As we hand over responsibilities for pickups, payments, and trainings, we hope to find a permanent source of funding before the end of next academic year when we can no longer be supported by the Green Fund. This project has been envisioned since the earliest years of Campus Composting and we are thrilled to see it realized.

To date, over **13,000 pounds of coffee grounds** have been diverted from Ex Libris Cafe for composting.

We received **\$3,350 from the Green Fund** for cafe composting.



ZERO WASTE EVENTS

Team members created a **Zero Waste Event Guide** to be distributed in early spring quarter. Inspired by zero waste guides created by other universities, it will fulfill the need for accurate and specific knowledge about sustainability at events. We plan to distribute this guide to University and RSO event organizers, especially since we cannot directly assist with a large number of events on campus.

We diverted organic waste at the **Afro-Caribbean Student Association's** annual culture show, a popular and engaging event with **over 400 attendees**.


We are in the process of planning to assist with the **South Asian Student Association's** culture show, the **Organization of Latin American Student's** culture show, and a **Women in STEM** networking event, all taking place in spring quarter.

OTHER COLLABORATIONS

We compiled a list of departments and organizations currently composting on campus and reached out to other groups who might be interested.

We have received many requests for assistance with composting from University groups. We try to accommodate every request, and our long term goal is for University departments and buildings to be able to manage composting services on their own, as a few already do.

We met with **UChicago's Food Recovery Network** to assess how our groups can collaborate and divert leftover food from events. We received compostable takeout containers from them and over **30 guests** used them at the ACSA culture show, leaving the event organizers with no food waste. We will continue to assist them by promoting free leftover food at events we assist with.



CAMPUS WASTE REDUCTION

We work with campus organizations, residence life, and off-campus students to increase sustainability awareness, support waste reduction and diversion, and increase reusable options.

reSOURCE

Campus Waste Reduction operated the **reSOURCE** thrift store for the **third consecutive quarter** in the lower level of Stuart Hall. The store was open **three days a week** (Wednesday-Friday, 1-4p.m.), for all community members to have convenient access to inexpensive and sustainable second-hand clothing options. We continued collecting clothing donations from UChicago community members and selling them in the store, giving them a second life on campus and diverting clothing waste.

ReSOURCE had two big events this quarter. We hosted a \$1 bins night with **WHPK** where we sold **361 items** and we partnered with SAS to do a \$1 bins night and upcycling event where we sold **110 items**. The store will continue to be open next quarter, with many more plans for collaborations and events.

DEFAULTVEG CAMPAIGN

We partnered with the grassroots initiative **DefaultVeg** and met with a representative to obtain resources and tips on how to launch a DefaultVeg campaign on campus to further on-campus sustainability goals.

By synthesizing DefaultVeg data and graphics, suggestions from vegan students on campus, and personal observations of the plant-based dining experience in dining halls, we developed a [comprehensive proposal](#) to be sent to dining and sustainability administrators to open an avenue for collaboration between PSI, DefaultVeg, and UChicago.

MOVE-OUT

We met with members of the **UChicago Maroon** to discuss utilizing **Maroon Marketplace** as a tool to reduce waste for move out. Plans to market the site and delegate additional responsibilities will continue next quarter.

E-WASTE

After surveying the current e-waste recycling systems available on campus, we recognized that they were not widely used. We reached out to Housing & Residence Life, Facilities Services, and IT Services and to Dean Rasmussen, who was receptive to the idea of improving e-waste recycling on campus and put us in contact with the Director of Operations at Housing & Residence Life, Dan Barker. We had a fruitful conversation with Dan about implementing e-waste bins in the dorms, especially for end-of-year dorm move-out. In the Spring quarter, we will investigate where Facilities and HRL plan to send the e-waste, and help make informational posters for the trash rooms in the dorms about e-waste (as per Dan's request).

FOOD WASTE

We created an email list to promptly inform students about surplus food availability at various events. The logistics of managing this list have been determined to ensure efficiency. To kickstart the initiative, relevant organizations and offices hosting catered events have been contacted to facilitate the seamless implementation of surplus food distribution. Additionally, promotional materials for the upcoming quarter have been created to raise awareness and encourage student participation in this initiative.

PROFESSIONAL CLOSET

We helped oversee a partnership with **Model United Nations** for a quarterly conference that saw the Closet lend clothing items to members. Additionally, we are currently working on securing a partnership with the **Center for College Student Success (CCSS)** to help promote the Closet on their outreach materials and potentially source funds to acquire clothes from reSOURCE.



COMMUNITY ACTION

Community Action aims to connect students with environmental activism and service organizations across campus, Hyde Park, and the South Side communities. Through immersive and hands-on projects, we strive to build strong and long lasting relationships with members of our community.

UCHICAGO FACULTY INTERVIEWS

We interviewed a variety of faculty and administrators about how they are directly working to make the University more sustainable. We additionally asked those we spoke with about current student efforts as well the areas in which the University could improve its sustainability.

We have not yet compiled our results from the Faculty interview project into a final product as we are not finished conducting the interviews themselves. Once completed, we plan to put together a report/article summarizing the qualitative data received from the surveys to distribute to the rest of PSI and possibly the environmental community on campus as a whole.

INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

Collaboration with Promontory Point Conservancy: we met with the organization's leadership to discuss opportunities for collaboration. They proposed a data-focused collaboration on the trees, which was passed on to **Green Data**. We started working on their second collaboration idea, a comprehensive survey of the UChicago population's opinions about the point. This survey aims to inform them of their visitor demographics and identify what aspects of the park are to be preserved. We began collecting responses related to respondent demographics and personal views of the Point as a vital natural resource for the Southside community. We will continue sharing the survey to gather even more responses while analyzing the data from these responses in the spring.

Indiana Dunes: we are planning a field trip to the **Indiana Dunes** in collaboration with **Environmental Education**. The project aims to **expand the University of Chicago's commitment to community outreach** as it educates local South Side students about the environment and engages them in topics related to the environment. We applied for the UChicago Green Fund this winter to support this project for the spring quarter.

DIVEST UCHICAGO

Divest UChicago aims to build infrastructure to support the fossil fuel divestment movement at the University of Chicago from an institutional perspective. We seek to build a broad coalition of student organizations, alumni, faculty, and other stakeholders; engage members of the administration in open communication around divestment; and expand the reach of the campaign through work with media outlets and community organizations.

OP-EDS

We researched and wrote about a variety of issues facing the divestment campaign, producing **4 op-eds** that will be published later this year. These include topics such as the administration's unresponsiveness, the Kalven report, and the university's mismanagement of the endowment.

TABLING

We tabled on a weekly basis in several locations, spreading awareness about the divestment campaign and reaching **2,500 petition signatures**.

DIVESTMENT RESEARCH

Alumni research: we established a broad base of alumni support, regularly meeting with a group to establish contact between different parties.

Financial research: we investigated the effect of divestment on portfolio returns and climate goals. Some sources we looked at include the Blackrock divestment report and the Booth School review on shareholder activism.

University policy: we researched more into university structure and operations to understand how we can better collaborate with administration.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

The purpose of Environmental Education is to engage and connect with students in the Chicago Public School System through a curriculum centered around various environmental and sustainable topics and what actions we can take to have an overall net positive impact on the environment. We also aim to extend beyond the classroom and reach a wider audience in the form of written publications.

TEACHING

We now have all of our members teaching in one of our **four schools** where we lead weekly sessions. We have a growing portfolio of presentations (we have produced around **15** more this quarter) and resources to use for a variety of ages and classrooms and are becoming increasingly confident as educators.

Gary Comer Youth Center: throughout the quarter, we taught high school classes at **Gary Comer Youth Center** twice a week, exploring a broad range of environmental issues with a focus on environmental careers with the **Green Teens program**. With some of us having taught there for several years, and some of us just starting, we've been able to build meaningful connections with many of the students and have helped them understand what the environment and environmentalism more broadly mean to them.

Woodlawn Charter School: We also had two students teach at the **Woodlawn Charter School** every Friday where they alternated leading sessions with the coordinator of the Garden Club program. Predominantly teaching a middle school class, we've focussed on exploring different types of food systems and the way they've transitioned over history, looking at concepts like meat production and the rise of alternative proteins, looking at the milk industry and the increasing popularity of alternative milks, as well as the soda industry and the honey industry.

Ray Elementary: two members of environmental education also taught at **Ray Elementary**, leading weekly sessions targeted at 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders. It has been a great opportunity to improve our teaching skills and our ability to communicate with and get to know our younger students.

Dulles Elementary School: towards the end of the quarter, we also started teaching at **Dulles Elementary School**, an incredibly rewarding opportunity that we hope to build on going into next quarter. We are acting as guest speakers in partnership with the UChicago Medical students South Side Science Scholars and have a 3 part teaching series focusing on environmental, hands-on topics.





GREEN DATA

Green Data merges students' passion for environmentalism and data science through substantive member education and member-led research- and consulting-oriented projects. With numerous learning and collaboration opportunities throughout the year, members leverage data to tackle issues of sustainability while developing technical and leadership skills. Using this analytical perspective, we aim to produce and share results that have a tangible impact on UChicago and the community at large.

reSOURCE ANALYSIS

We are working on an analysis of **reSOURCE's** sales data, and looking to gather insights about which items sell the most, optimal price points, and best store hours. Using these insights, we would like to create a report benchmarking reSOURCE's achievements. We also want to implement a real-time, integrated analysis with reSOURCE sales that would continuously update. We obtained reSOURCE data and are finishing up preliminary analyses. We discovered that tops and sweatshirts are the most sold items by a high margin and that the best times for reSOURCE to be open are Thursday and Friday through the afternoon.

ØRSTED

We reached out to an **Orsted** representative and discussed a potential collaboration. The purpose would be to offer insights for the company based on Orsted data while gaining practical experience with data analysis.

We're still in discussion with Orsted on the department our team would work under and what data would be available to analyze and provide insights on.

Orsted agreed to a potential case competition partnership again for next school year, and we're waiting to hear back on a specific data analysis project for Green Data.

TRANSPORTATION

We are working on an analysis of transportation options on campus, specifically **Lyft** and **UGo** shuttles, looking to use surveying and data analysis to understand and come up with a proposal on how UGo Shuttles can better serve the student body and UChicago community.

We finalized a survey to collect transportation usage and attitude and opinion data. We Obtained a dataset on Chicago rideshare usage and solidified partnerships.



GREEN PARTNERSHIPS

Green Partnerships empowers our members to promote sustainability by partnering with local businesses and nonprofits in projects advocating for sustainable practices. Along the way, our members develop and strengthen their skills in partnership formation, research and analysis, and sustainability consulting—implementing tangible green practices in their community.

WASTENOT COMPOST

We are helping to coordinate a partnership between **WasteNot Compost** and UChicago organizations in the 1155 Building to provide their events with sustainable and compostable utensils. We are focused on the business side of composting and using WasteNot as an all-inclusive tool to potentially persuade organizations on campus to compost. We are talking with the 1155 Building and WasteNot to coordinate the business side of supplying compostable utensils for future events. We are in contact with a few organizations in the 1155 Building and need to further confirm their interest before proceeding.

FARMERS MARKET

We will invite different student-run and local sustainable businesses to campus where students will learn about and support these sustainable product alternatives. We hope this event will promote sustainable consumption and practices on campus as well as support the local Chicago economy.

We have secured **15 vendors**, including both established local Chicago and student-run businesses, for the event being held on April 27th. We have a contract and guidebook for our vendors that are ready to send to our vendors once our venue booking is confirmed.



STUDENT CENTERS

We are looking to revamp the reusable cup rewards program in **Ex-libris**, looking to create a better marketing strategy for the discount as well as reintroducing the previous punch card program. We are also exploring **Ex-libris** potentially selling reusable cups.

URBAN RIVERS

We are helping **Urban Rivers** identify target audiences for their organization to help them increase attendance for future events. In particular, they are launching a new location with a garden walking area and want to promote this area to new and existing demographics. We are in regular communication with **Urban Rivers** and have developed a robust framework for our marketing and target audience research work for the Spring Quarter. We aim to present our deliverables for **Urban Rivers** by Week 6 of Spring Quarter for **Urban Rivers** to implement our suggestions for the launch of their newest event occurring the week after.

PLANT BASED STUDY BREAK

We are aiming to promote plant-based eating on campus as well as promote local restaurants in Hyde Park. We will partner with these restaurants and resident houses on campus to host plant-based study breaks in the spring quarter.

We created an infographic with our proposed plant-based restaurant partners in Hyde Park as well as a more budget-friendly option with plant-based snack brands. We distributed this infographic to **11 houses** on campus and secured study break slots with **5 resident houses** on campus for the Spring quarter.

SCIENCE, ART, AND SUSTAINABILITY

SAS seeks to bridge PSI to the general student body and grow the sustainability movement on campus by using media and the arts to render scientific research accessible and draw attention to environmental issues.

reSOURCE UPCYCLING WORKSHOP

We collaborated with Resource to host an upcycling and mending workshop. We featured four stations: Fabric Painting, Mending, Scrunchie Making, and Bedazzling. Materials were either purchased from Amazon or taken from the Creative Chicago Reuse Exchange (CCRX), which we are working on developing a more permanent relationship with. Amazon purchases were all items that we will keep and reuse, as we plan to host this event recurrently (per quarter basis) to promote upcycling and sustainable fashion.

We were able to successfully set the event in motion, culminating in an event that was able to mobilize all of our members as volunteers. Although we do not have official numbers on the amount of people who visited the event, the event was always at capacity until the end of store hours.



LAB WASTE

One member of our project group was working on a lab waste project, which involved surveying labs about their use of pipettes and eppendorf tubes. We hope to turn this into a collaboration with Green Data and get the survey off the ground next quarter.

We were able to finish the form, and it is at the stage where it is ready to be shared and disseminated with the greater public— we already have **3 responses** from lab group members.

ART INSTALLATION

We collaborated with the Logan Center on creating an exhibition that was carried over from the Fall. This quarter we aimed to complete the installation from which the timeline was extended from the fall.

We were able to successfully complete and finish the project by week 3 of the Winter Quarter as well as organize a social in conjunction with the opening of the exhibition. We also synthesized photos from our installation into a series of posters that we are looking to sell at Green Partnership's Farmers Market.



WORKING GROUPS

CLIMATE CASE COMPETITION

We are collaborating with the Energy and **Climate Club** and **Energy Policy Institute** at UChicago to host a **Climate Case Competition** this year. We have secured a client, **Marathon Capital**, and will have an information session for participants first week of the Spring Quarter. The case competition—set at the intersection of business, data science, and energy—provides students with the opportunity to critically investigate a modern-day problem and develop a realistic and research-backed solution for our client.

DORM SUSTAINABILITY

Our dorm sustainability working group is also looking to reduce end-of-year moveout waste, potentially through a collaboration with the **Creative Chicago Reuse Exchange**. Additionally, we have produced a series of flyers to put up in the dorms related to waste sorting, waste reduction, conservation, and more. We hope to distribute these flyers next quarter.



EXECUTIVE BOARD

EXPANDING PSI'S NETWORK AND MEMBER RESOURCES

We hosted a tabling event with the **Office of Sustainability** to showcase various sustainability programs and initiatives on campus. We also highlighted UChicago's **2030 plan**. We interacted with around **70 students**, and around **30 students** signed up for the Office of Sustainability's newsletter. We also asked students to make climate pledges at the tabling event and we ended up with **20 different pledges** from different students making various environmental commitments. We hope to continue our communication and partnership with the Office of Sustainability into future years.

We also organized a field trip and service opportunities for members at the **Creative Chicago Reuse Exchange (CCRX)**. PSI members worked with volunteers from **Volunteering Untapped** to produce **600 upcycled notebooks** for **Chicago Young Authors**. **10 members** attended the event, and we hope to collaborate with CCRX on projects in the future.

PSI AUCTION

We hosted our inaugural PSI auction to fundraise and promote the circular economy. Members auctioned over **20 items and services, raising over \$300**.



SUSTAINABILITY SYMPOSIUM

A coalition of student-run sustainability organizations, including the USG Committee on Campus Sustainability and the Phoenix Sustainability Initiative, plan on hosting a Sustainability Symposium on April 18th from 5 to 7 PM.

We hope to highlight a diversity of efforts to promote environmental sustainability at the University of Chicago. Our event will consist of two component parts: a poster and a speaker session. Much like the Sustainability Symposiums in Spring 2023 with Melina Hale and Fall 2021 with Paul Alivisatos, the poster session will highlight student research and projects at both the undergraduate and graduate level intended to improve campus sustainability. The speaker session will feature a variety of speakers who can speak to what we have identified as the three pillars of sustainability at a university: academics, research, and campus sustainability. President Paul Alivisatos will be giving introductory remarks to our panel.

PROMOTING MEMBER BONDING

From RSO-wide socials to organizing one-on-one member connections, we value maintaining an inviting community to encourage collaboration.

This quarter, we organized **4 large-group socials** for PSI members to promote bonding across project groups: cooking night, a tea party study break, our annual "PSI Trivia Night", and an art unveiling in collaboration with **SAS**.

We also organized "project group playdates" for different project groups to mingle. Furthermore, our interest groups and project groups set up individual socials for their group members.



PHOENIX SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO