

Phoenix Sustainability Initiative

QUARTERLY REPORT

WINTER 2026

January – March





PREFACE

“PSI’s mission is to mobilize UChicago students to advance sustainability on campus and in the broader Chicago community through student-led engagement, advocacy, and awareness projects.”

- PSI Constitution, Article II, Section I

Phoenix Sustainability Initiative, or PSI, is the University of Chicago’s largest and student-run sustainability initiative. Meeting weekly on Thursdays, PSI is divided into eight project groups that each address a different issue tied to sustainability and climate change.

PSI is committed to making change both on and off campus at UChicago. We provide services like campus composting to campus residents, and also work with local groups on activities like business assistance and cleanups through project groups like Community Action. We have accomplished a significant amount this winter quarter, and are working on many exciting new projects going into the spring.

This report is meant to provide an overview of what our project groups have accomplished over the course of the 2026 winter quarter. Each section will go over one of the eight project groups, with a brief additional section covering the less formal PSI working groups. Please direct any questions regarding this report to phoenix.initiative.uchicago@gmail.com.

- The PSI Board





CAMPUS COMPOSTING

PURPOSE STATEMENT

Campus Composting aims to fulfill our goal of reducing and diverting food waste from landfills and subsequent environmental impacts. In conjunction with South-side business Urban Canopy, we collaborate and provide composting services to campus departments, RSOs, official and student-run events, and more. We facilitate a subsidy program for off-campus affiliates to compost their personal food waste and continuously work towards more innovative solutions to the University's food waste problem. Through these initiatives, we assist with the implementation of composting infrastructure and increase student awareness surrounding organic waste disposal.



WINTER QUARTER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- The **Café Waste Diversion** project, aiming to divert coffee ground waste, is continuing smoothly. This year, CC has surpassed over 50,000 composted pounds of waste.
- CC's **Event Waste Diversion** project diverts food waste at RSO, department, and university events on campus. The group provides compost bins, volunteers and set up/clean up to the university.
- In collaboration with **UChicago Dining**, CC is spreading awareness about composting and food waste by weighing composting material in dining halls and advertising Campus composting programs to students.



CAMPUS WASTE REDUCTION

PURPOSE STATEMENT

Campus Waste Reduction aims to identify diverse and unaddressed sources of waste generated by the University and find effective strategies to reduce their environmental impact.



WINTER QUARTER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- In Winter Quarter, Campus Waste Reduction hosted an event in the South Lounge of Reynolds Club, **partnering with Coclo**, a campus-centered, alumni-founded clothing marketplace app. This event was inspired by a similarly successful event completed in Autumn Quarter 2025.
- They also organized a plant-potting event in partnership with PSI group **Green Partnerships, UChicago's Phoenix Farms, and NGO Chicago Reuse Exchange**.
- In a continuation of CWR's soft plastic program, in Winter Quarter **CWR collected 170 lbs of soft plastic waste**. Additionally, they conducted a site walkthrough with WasteNot to determine optimal bin placement and have been in contact with supervisors to ensure quality material collection.
- CWR is continuing its collaboration with **UChicago Dining and Chartwells** to launch a plant-based recipe submission contest to improve sustainable and inclusive dining hall offerings. During Winter Quarter, the contest will open, and selected recipes will be implemented as a **Station Takeover** in Spring Quarter. The winning recipe, based on student vote, will be added into the regular rotation in the following academic year. The other submissions will be compiled into an online cookbook for students to use, especially while living off-campus.



COMMUNITY ACTION

PURPOSE STATEMENT

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.



WINTER QUARTER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- This group has been fostering a considerable relationship with **Illinois PIRG** and is working with their **Safer Cleaner Energy Campaign**. CA had two 'Letters to the Editor' published and have collected signatures to gain public support for the movement.
- Community Action spent a day in Winter Quarter volunteering at **Creative Reuse Exchange**, assisting with creating journals from reclaimed materials for use by a community writing workshop.
- The group organized volunteering with the **Hyde Park-Kenwood Food Pantry** to assist with setup, cleanup, and food distribution on the weekend of January 23rd.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

PURPOSE STATEMENT

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. Through lessons, students learn to identify actions they can do in order to have an overall net positive impact on the environment. Beyond the classroom, we attempt to reach a wider audience in the form of written publications and by giving our support to the schools that we partner with.



WINTER QUARTER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- EE hosted a speaker event for a group of students at **Gary Comer Youth Center** on Feb 27, with talks by UChicago's Professor Lodato, The Nature Conservancy's Edward Warden, and a prior PSI member. Speakers discussed their careers in sustainability and answered a Q&A for the students.
- The group began collaboration with the **Midwest Fine Arts Society** and the **Civic Orchestra** to workshop to teach climate change lectures as they write music.
- EE now runs the **Garden Club at UChicago Charter Woodlawn Campus**. They are working on planning curricula and organizing Spring activities. Funded by Green Fund.



DIVEST UCHICAGO

PURPOSE STATEMENT

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.



WINTER QUARTER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Divest aims to work with **Illinois PIRG** to ask the ICC to limit the rate hike requested by **People's Gas** and to direct them to pursue targeted pipe repair to maximize safety and minimize cost.
- They are continuing to collect signatures to support **divestment**.
- They are also planning the annual spring **Divestival**.



GREEN DATA

PURPOSE STATEMENT

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.



WINTER QUARTER PROJECTS

- GD is analyzing **sustainability and data-driven waste management**. They are trying to understand how effectively current systems—an Eco-Digester and a newly installed Compost Accelerator—are in diverting waste from landfills. This project aims to help **University Dining and the Office of Sustainability** assess the effectiveness of existing waste management tools and identify opportunities for improvement.
- Another GD project seeks to explore **ESG and corporate finance**. It seeks to evaluate (1) whether U.S. corporations have scaled back their Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) commitments following recent political shifts, particularly since Trump's return to office in 2025, and (2) how such retrenchment correlates with financial performance and real environmental outcomes.
- Another project seeks to explore the use of **Emissions Trading Schemes** (ETS) to abate particulate emissions in developing countries, following a pilot study conducted in the Indian state of Gujarat.
- Their final project for the quarter seeks to explore patterns of plastic pollution through the lens of plastic pellet (**nurdle**) distribution across U.S. states and territories, using insights from the International Plastic Pellet Count 2025 report on a global citizen science effort to quantify the the extent of pre-production plastic pellet pollution.



GREEN PARTNERSHIPS

PURPOSE STATEMENT

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.



WINTER QUARTER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

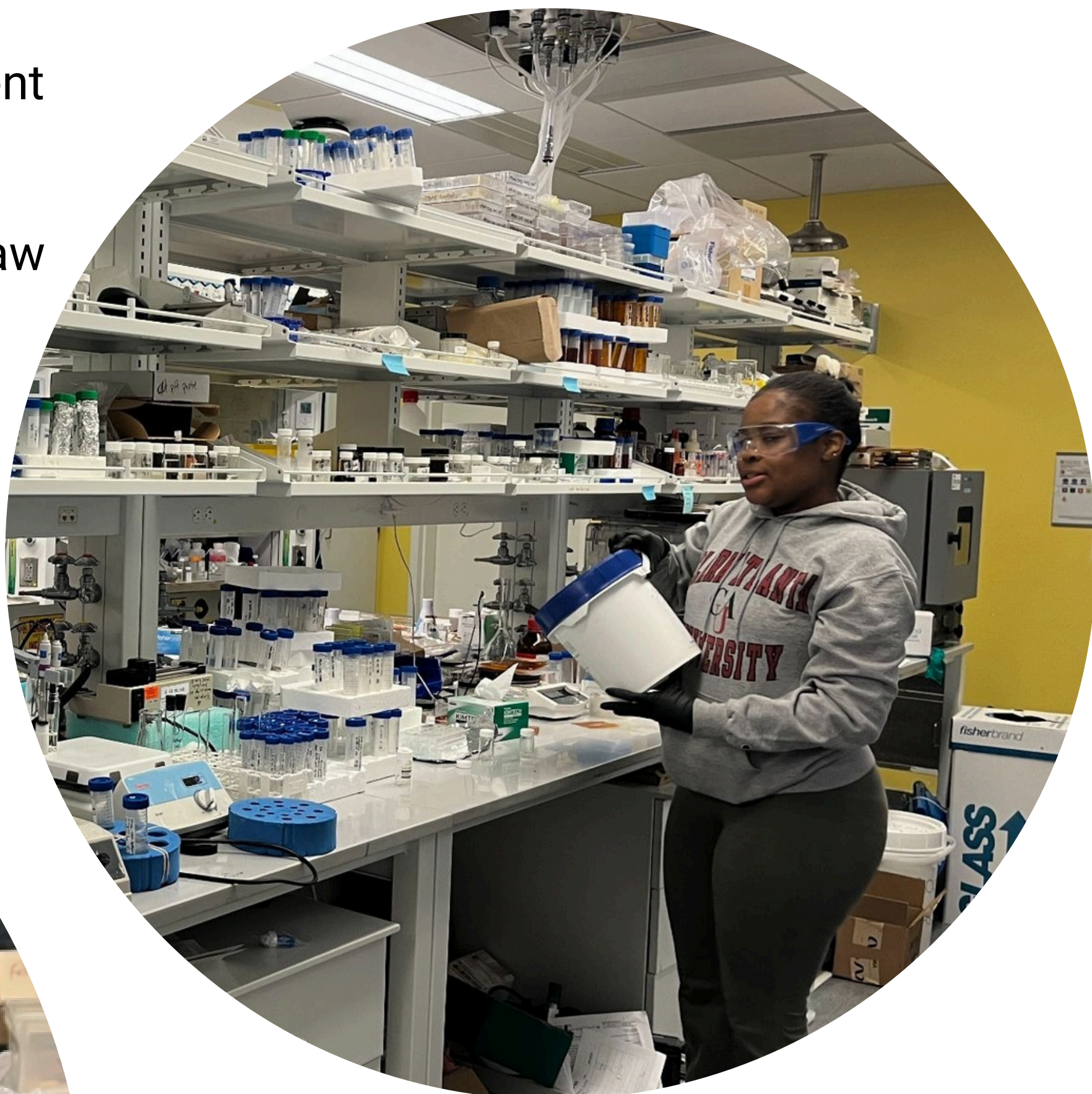
- GP hosted a Book Fair in cooperation with Harper Books Working group. Students were able to give away **1,092** books! This was the biggest event of the quarter.
- GP is supporting labs in switching to sustainable lab practices. To accomplish this, we have: Shadowed & gathered info from different labs on campus on their lab practices (**Rowan Lab, Greenberg Lab, McCoy Lab**), coming up with a proposal for switching to more sustainable practices, Glove recycling, plastic waste, solvent usage, energy usage (such as from greenhouse lights), etc.
- In collaboration with the **Campus Waste Reduction** (CWR) project group, Green Partnerships hosted a plant potting workshop on campus. They collected empty containers (glass jars, tupperware, cans, etc.) to upcycle as pots and partnered with Phoenix Farms to supply free seeds and soil for students.
- GP is planning the annual on-campus **Farmers Market**. Their hope is to encourage students to shop on campus and from small and sustainable businesses.



SCIENCE, ART, AND SUSTAINABILITY

PURPOSE STATEMENT

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.



WINTER QUARTER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Science, Art, and Sustainability is working on tackling **soft plastic usage** on campus by creating ecobricks for practical use and art installations.
- SAS has raised over **\$500** through selling 100% recycled paper posters. This initiative shows that room decor can be sustainable.
- The group hosted a **collaging workshop** for UChicago students. they used recycled, donated material from Harper Community Books to make personal artworks.
- SAS is working on a collaborative art piece for **Logan Center**. The group has been hosting weekly **Sewing Sundays** to create a tapestry to be exhibited in the Logan Center.



WORKING GROUPS



WINTER QUARTER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Currently, there are two main working groups running through PSI:

- **Harper Library Working Group:** This working group provides free and accessible books for the UChicago community. This project has resulted in the collection, sorting, and shelving of around **45,000 books**. They are now working with Harper Library staff who help with book shelving. They are looking to hire a UChicago college student for permanent support.
- **Case Competition Working Group:** The Case Competition Working Group is currently planning PSI's annual case competition. The group has completed sign-ups and is expecting a successful and interesting competition this Spring.
- **Fundraising Working Group:** The fundraising working group is a new PSI working group dedicated to securing financial resources for larger future projects. The group has become meeting regularly to prepare for fundraising events.



SOCIALS



PSI hosts a variety of social events for its members. We provided snacks during general meeting (provided by the Institute for Climate and Sustainable Growth). We also hosted numerous post-meeting events to foster closer relationships between PSI members.

