

Phoenix Sustainability Initiative

QUARTERLY REPORT

SPRING 2026

March-May





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 a continuation of our ongoing commitment to publish a record of our activities for each quarter of the UChicago school year. It is meant to provide an overview of what our project groups have accomplished over the course of the 2026 spring 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.

WHAT DID WE DO THIS QUARTER?

- During the spring 2026 quarter, Campus Composting added a new community composting bin location at **Kimbark Plaza**, rounding our total number of community bins out to four (our bins are located at the Smart Museum, Logan Center, 5535 Kenwood, and the alley behind Kimbark Plaza).
- To increase student enrollment in the community composting program, **we tabled in Reynolds club, at the PSI Farmers' Market, and at Divestival** and gave away five-gallon buckets (purchased using grant money from the Green Fund) for home compost collection for free to newly enrolled composting members.
- We continued to host and **staff biweekly plate waste awareness events in the dining halls**, as well as special events such as Berrypalooza, in partnership with UChicago Dining.
- Furthermore, we facilitated composting at events with partner RSOs such as **MAB's Summer Breeze and the SASA dance show**. As a result of these initiatives, we diverted just over 5000 lbs. of waste in the spring quarter (5094.426 lbs.) and cumulatively diverted over 10,000 lbs. over the course of the academic year (10049.756 lbs.)
- On the social side of things, we partnered up with Phoenix Farms to host a **compostable tea bag making night** where we learned more about the native plants of Chicago! We also brainstormed and launched a fun beverage for Earth Week, the **Mama Earth Matcha**, at the student-run campus cafes.





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.

WHAT DID WE DO THIS QUARTER?

- Campus Waste Reduction has been working year-round to get its **soft plastics recycling program** off the ground. The project, intended to improve the range of plastics that campus waste facilities can process. The project was initiated in the fall as a **Green Fund grant** and came into effect during the second half of the school year. During the spring, we officially launched our partnership with WasteNot, a local compost and recycling pickup organization, to place seven receptables in identified areas of need across campus. The collected materials are donated to Trex, a company that recycles soft plastic into decking materials. Thus far, the program has recycled **357 pounds of plastics**.
- Continuing our work in the fall and winter, we also hosted another swap event this spring. Partnering with ReSource, we ran an **exchange** allowing people to swap clothing/household items, ranging from dishware to purses.
- We also hosted a variety of **promotional events with campus dining halls** intended to promote the minimization of food waste and encourage sustainable habits.





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.

WHAT DID WE DO THIS QUARTER?

- This year Community Action (CA) collaborated with numerous organizations, fulfilling their mission to continue sustainable and equitable community initiatives in Hyde Park and the greater Chicago area.
- In Spring Quarter the group attended the **Safer Cleaner Energy rally with PIRG** and co-organized a discussion on the history of natural gas use and its prospective future use in Chicago. This is a campaign that we have been involved with since Winter Quarter.
- We also co-sponsored the **UCSC Earth Day volunteer event** and participated in volunteer events across Hyde Park. In May we collected over 220 nurdles (small plastic pellets that are byproducts of plastic production) for data collection with **Environment America** from 57th Street Beach.
- We also held a **trash cleanup** later that day at 57th Street Beach. We volunteered with **Just Roots** to help prepare their urban farm for the season.
- CA promoted group cohesion by holding multiple group- and club-wide social events, such as a project group social picnic on the Quad during Spring Quarter.





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.

WHAT DID WE DO THIS QUARTER?

- This spring, EE continued teaching weekly lessons at both **Ray Elementary School** and **Gary Comer College Prep**. Each week, we taught two lessons to different classrooms at Gary Comer and one at Ray, covering a variety of topics designed to make sustainability and environmental science engaging and accessible for students. Throughout the quarter we further built out our blog by posting new articles consistently, edited old lessons, and made new ones to strengthen our curriculum plan.
- Outside of our standard teaching, we had the opportunity to expand our outreach through several special events and partnerships. At Ray, we partnered with the **Ray Sustainability Committee** and the Ray Student Council for the school's Career Day and Earth Day celebrations. During Career Day, EE members visited several different classrooms to introduce students to careers in environmental science and sustainability. For **Earth Day**, we spent the day leading seed ball-making activities with students of all ages while teaching them about native plants, pollinators, and the importance of supporting local ecosystems.
- Finally, we worked with the **Chicago Civic Orchestra** and the **Midwest Fine Arts Society** to give students ages 7-15 environmentally-themed lessons in preparation for their concert focused on climate change. We also had the opportunity to speak before their performance, introducing the audience to our project group and the lessons we presented to the orchestra.





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.

WHAT DID WE DO THIS QUARTER?

- Over spring quarter, our primary focus was planning and enacting our **fourth annual Divestival**, a protest and music festival aimed at raising awareness about fossil fuel divestment among the UChicago and Hyde Park community. On Friday, April 24, UChicago students and Hyde Park community members gathered in Harper Quad to protest university investment in fossil fuels. The festival included student music performances such as **Dirt Red**, and **Sleazy Disco** and tabling from UChicago and Hyde Park organizations, such as **ReSource**, **Illinois PIRG**, **UC Dems**, and more. Additional speakers from the **Phoenix Sustainability Initiative**, **Environmental Justice Task Force**, and **CEGU researchers** highlighted the environmental and ethical damages of fossil fuel investment.
- In addition to our Divestival planning and organization, Divest UChicago collaborated with Illinois PIRG and Community Action on **Chicago's Safer Cleaner Energy Campaign**. Chicago's natural gas utility, Peoples Gas, proposed a \$10 to \$11 rate hike to continue a program replacing old iron natural gas pipelines. While Peoples Gas continues to overspend billions of dollars on infrastructure for profit, it has failed to decrease pipeline failure rates, and Chicago residents, predominantly low-income, bear the risks of the pipeline repairs. In preparation for the **Rally Against the Peoples Gas Rate Hike** on April 1st, Divest UChicago students collected petition signatures on campus, phonebanked to raise community awareness of the event, organized a poster-making drive, and attended the rally.





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.

WHAT DID WE DO THIS QUARTER?

- One group of our members continued work with the EPIC India team creating resources to help Indian states set up **Emmissions Trading Systems** for air quality. We built a dashboard that monitors coal emmissions across a set of specific regions in India, and tracks their contribution to the emmissions of different air pollutants like NO₂, PM₁₀/PM_{2.5}, and more.
- Another working group investigated the impact that abandoning or sticking to **ESG goals** had on the performance of different companies. The spring leg of this project primarily focused on expanding the size of the company data set that we used as well as developing a regression table and visualization for our findings.
- One working group primarily focused on analyzing plastic pollution through the lens of **International Plastic Pellet Count (IPCC) 2025** report on a global citizen science effort to quantify the the extent of pre-production plastic pellet pollution. The project was primarily centered around analyzing regional factors that seemed to be correlated with high nurdle (pellet) pollution.
- Our final Green Data working group started work on a project to **improve transportation access on campus**, working with Professor Evan Carver in the CEGU department. The project will use data-driven insights to determine ways that school administration can expand access to transportation.





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.

WHAT DID WE DO THIS QUARTER?

- Green Partnerships was very busy this past spring quarter, not least of all because we held our largest event of the year: **PSI's third annual Farmers Market!** This year, we packed the quad with more than 50 vendors and **800+ attendees**, with the goal of encouraging students to shop locally and highlighting small, sustainable businesses throughout Chicagoland. We showcased a broad range of vendors, including urban farms, local beekeepers, vegan bakeries, and jewellery artisans. We additionally partnered with Midwave Radio to bring live music and cultural RSOs to the market! This project was the culmination of months of planning, outreach, and communication, but was worth it many times over. We look forward to making next year's market even better!
- Other spring quarter projects included the continuation of our workshop series, where participants could practice sustainability hands-on through sweater unraveling. We partnered with **reSOURCE** to collect old sweaters, and across two sessions unraveled dozens of them, collecting just as many balls of yarn. SAS will repurpose this yarn in their projects!
- Finally, we continued our work with the **Office of Sustainability** to promote energy conservation and waste reduction in on-campus laboratories. To this end, we launched an ambassador program to promote **Rheaply**, a digital marketplace that on-campus labs can use to exchange materials instead of throwing them out!





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.

WHAT DID WE DO THIS QUARTER?

- One of our major projects was organizing and leading a **Warren Woods** trip, which grew out of SAS planning. Through a day trip to the Warren Woods field labs, Dr. Emily Bretl led us to think more intentionally about ecological learning, internship / art residency opportunities, and how students can connect with local landscapes beyond campus.
- Alongside this, we developed our collaborative creative tapestry project: through recurring **Sewing Sundays and mending workshops**, members practiced sewing skills, repurposed textiles (from CCRx and reSOURCE), and planned toward a larger fall exhibition at the Logan Center that will highlight reuse, repair, and collective making.
- We also continued **ecobrick making** as an ongoing sustainability practice, encouraging students to think critically about plastic waste and slow, tangible forms of reuse.
- Beyond these long-term projects, SAS hosted several community-facing events throughout the quarter, including **Earth Day chalk art**, a **hand warmers workshop at reSOURCE**, and a **nature walk with Kathleen Golomb** featuring cyanotype making with Student Wellness.
- Our main fundraising event for spring quarter was the **\$1 portrait and poster sale** at the Green Partnerships X PSI Farmer's Market. These smaller events brought together art-making, environmental awareness, and fundraising in approachable ways, allowing students to participate regardless of prior experience.





WORKING GROUPS

WINTER QUARTER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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

- **Harper Library Working Group:** The project that collected, sorted, and shelved around **45,000 books** has completed its mission and filled the shelves of Harper Library. The role of maintaining the Harper Library book collection will now fall to official library personnel as the working group dissolves, with our mission accomplished.
- **Case Competition Working Group:** We hosted a case competition in partnership with the World Resources Institute. Over 20 teams competed to develop innovative ways to accelerate the energy transition in Illinois by pitching ways that the state could make progress on its climate roadmap goals.
- **Fundraising Working Group:** This quarter, the Fundraising Working group sold stickers at Divestival, raising money for PSI socials. We also formed the PSI Alumni Council, a group of UChicago alumni interested in advising PSI, interacting with current students, and supporting its fundraising efforts.





SOCIALS

WHAT DID WE DO THIS QUARTER?

This quarter, PSI hosted a variety of different social events, including, but not limited to:

- **PSI Formal:** It is an end-of-year tradition for PSI to host a formal for its members, to celebrate the year's accomplishments and hand out coveted PSI superlative awards.
- **Senior Sunset:** To send off our PSI seniors, we held a picnic for them after the final meeting of the club at prominary point.
- **Project Group Socials:** Different project groups held different events open to the full club, such as Green Data's slime-making event or a full-PSI board game night.

