

BEHIND THE SCENES

“At UBC, moving towards sustainability comes down to a simple principle – do unto future generations as you would have them do unto you.”

Recent achievements in both the Library and Information Technology Services are testament to this sustainable way of doing business that combines customer service and innovation with an eye to the future.

“Integrating sustainability into our work is part of our DNA – it’s core to what we do,” says Don Thompson, Chief Technology Officer. “Aside from the obvious global implications, we’re always looking for time, operational and energy efficiencies. The whole focus of this campus has been around sustainability from the start.”

BEHIND THE SCREEN

The heat generated from thousands of computers, servers and monitors across the university is significant – enough that it became a major focus for the IT department.

“We are computer users and that’s not going to go away. But if we’re more efficient in how we use computers, that can make a real difference,” says Thompson.

Key has been the move to server virtualization. The number of servers was reduced to four from 100, and the heat generated in the server room will be fed into the campus geo-exchange loop, essentially heating other campus buildings in winter and reducing energy consumption demands.

The department is also testing desktop virtualization, reducing the need for the individual towers under each desk, and streamlining how staff and students use copiers and printers. Strategically locating central copiers in each building can reduce the number of individual machines that consume significant amounts of energy.

“The eventual goal is to become a carbon neutral campus. That’s a big deal for me,” adds Thompson. “It’s the right thing to do for the environment, to be responsible. We’re all doing our small part in the grand scheme of things.”

BEYOND THE STACKS

At the library, a cross-departmental “Green Team” came up with different ideas to foster sustainability and help make that public space more environmentally friendly. It was essential given that more than 5,000 people use the library every day.

“Initially we tackled the “low-hanging fruit” such as using double-sided photocopies, reusing scrap paper and increasing awareness around buying green products for the library,” says Melody Burton, Chief Librarian. “But sustainability has become a much bigger lens for us. It has changed our way of thinking about everything we do.”

A significant project over the last year involved 200 old, cushioned wooden chairs that were starting to wobble and the upholstery unglued. But rather than discard 200 chairs into the landfill, they opted to refurbish them.

“Some just need a little fixing up. We had to ask ourselves ‘Do we throw them all out and buy plastic or invest in fixing what we have?’” says Burton. “There were so many positives to refurbishing the chairs – using local skills, saving waste from the landfill, more comfort and we’ve extended their lifespan.”

For Thompson and Burton and their teams, the different initiatives have now raised the question of where to go next.

“We’ve done the obvious, tangible things,” says Burton. “We need to look at those elusive pieces and the broader interpretation of sustainability. Rethinking more in terms of education and sustainability and what more we can do not just as staff but also for our students and the greater community.” ●



