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Higher Education Goes Green

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Guest Perspective

Embracing Sustainability

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April 14, 2008



This Earth Day, America is in the midst of a spring greening.

That's good news. But at American colleges and universities, we need to set an example and go beyond green. We need to embrace true sustainability, which means seeing things whole and acting accordingly. Here at the University of New Hampshire, sustainability encompasses climate and energy, ecology, food systems and culture across what we call the CORE: Curriculum, Operations, Research and Engagement. What and how we teach and research; how we govern our communities

with respect to decisions regarding energy, land use, transportation, food, art and politics; and how we respond to the challenges of the larger communities in which we are embedded are all central questions of sustainability.

"In a sustainable learning community, everything is curriculum and everyone is an educator," our chief sustainability officer, Tom Kelly, likes to say.

Our students the next generation of citizen-professionals -- learn in their classrooms, of course. They study climate science, marine science, public health, sustainable engineering, and sustainable food systems. They participate in research on climate and energy, complex systems, ecology and disease, rural communities, and community development.

But at UNH, students also learn where they live, work, and play.

One unlikely source of sustainability curriculum, for instance, is a 1,200-acre landfill not far from our Durham campus. Later this year, UNH will begin to use purified methane gas from that landfill as our primary energy source, bringing this renewable gas to our cogeneration plant via a 12-mile pipeline. In doing so, we'll become the first university in the nation to use renewable landfill gas as a primary energy source, reducing our greenhouse gas emissions an estimated 57 percent below 1990 levels. We will, in effect, be reducing emissions by actually reducing emissions, and not through the purchase of credits or offsets.

The cost of a healthy environment does not necessarily come with higher financial obligations a point that is not lost on UNH's stakeholders, who are among the most

TAKE ACTION

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FACEBOOK

YOUTUBE

TODAY'S QUIZ

How many American college and university Presidents and Chancellors have signed the American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment?

- 127
- 307
- 507
- 1007

Guess

EARTH DAY ON CAMPUS

April 22, 2008

WHAT IS EARTH DAY?
HOW ARE CAMPUSES INVOLVED?
WHAT CAN YOU DO?

TOOLS YOU CAN USE

90 MILLION*

* Number of people in Bangladesh at risk of poisoning from contaminated drinking water.

In some parts of the world, clean water doesn't even flow from the tap. Billions of people around the world are exposed to water in contaminated drinking water that can lead to cancer.

Now thanks to an initiative from college Water Community partners, about 100,000 colleges and universities will benefit from a new tool to assess drinking water. See another example of how American colleges and universities can lead the way in solving the problems that face our world. We launched the 2007 Challenge: Prioritize Sustainability, a \$1 million prize which is in drawing to fund implementation of the nation's leading sustainability and water research.

Increased attention to clean water in colleges and universities will continue to protect students in the face of the rising threat.

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frugal of Yankees. Although our initial investment of \$45 million is substantial, we estimate that we will recoup this cost in ten years.

There are lessons to learn through our transportation policies and services, which have avoided an estimated 4.5 million vehicle miles in one year via our Wildcat Transit system. Ridership is up—way up—with a record-breaking one million-plus riders this past year alone. That makes us the largest public transit service in New Hampshire, and the majority of our vehicles run on alternative fuels.

Our students also learn sustainability where they eat. "Trayless Tuesdays" in our dining halls help them curb their appetites to waste. What they don't eat gets composted at one of our campus farms and sold back to local gardeners. Through our Local Harvest initiative, we've partnered with nearby farms and suppliers including some right here on our campus -- to serve as much locally produced food as possible. And next month, we'll unveil the new incarnation of the popular UNH Dairy Bar to feature local foods, a nutritious menu, and sustainable operations under the mantra of "local, sustainable, fresh." Not coincidentally, the Dairy Bar's renovation is part of a \$1 million effort to restore UNH's on-campus Amtrak station and expand its intercity bus capacity.

These accomplishments, among many others, have led some to consider us the most sustainable university in the country. UNH is ranked by the U.S. Department of Energy in the top five percent for energy efficiency among similar colleges and universities.

I am relatively new to the University, but its longstanding commitment to sustainability was among the main things that attracted me here. The power of education—one of New England's biggest and best resources—should never be undervalued. Overall, American universities teach some 14.5 million students each year, and because universities are often the largest organizations in their communities, their approaches to sustainability issues are important and can affect federal, state, and local policy. Sustainability and higher education make a great match. It is heartening to me to know that UNH is a leader among the thousands of American universities that are seeking solutions for today and tomorrow.

Mark W. Huddleston became the 19th president of the University of New Hampshire in July 2007. He brings three decades of experience in public and private higher education as a faculty member, dean, and senior administrator, most recently as president of [Ohio Wesleyan University](#). He received his bachelor's degree in political science from SUNY-Buffalo and holds both a master's degree and Ph.D. in political science from the [University of Wisconsin-Madison](#). An author of numerous books and articles, he has been active as a consultant for both the U.S. government and international organizations. He also served as an advisor in Bosnia on rebuilding financial and administrative infrastructures after the Dayton accords.

For more information about sustainability at the University of New Hampshire, go to www.sustainableunh.unh.edu.