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Going Green

Students say sustainability matters — and schools are responding

By Lela Nargi

DAYANARA AVILEZ'S DIRECTION AS a first-generation college student was set when a representative from the School of Sustainability at Arizona State University (ASU) visited her Mesa, Ariz., high school during her sophomore year.

"I learned that there was this nice (program) package ... that included all the things I love: animals, humans, the environment, justice," she says. From then on, "I knew I would be applying to the School of Sustainability, and that would be my major."

Interest in sustainability is high among U.S. college students, and not just those majoring in some aspect of it. A recent survey by *Inside Higher Ed* and College Pulse found that 45 percent of students considered an institution's environmental sustainability in their college enrollment decision. They select schools

such as ASU, University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UWSP) and Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) because of their strong sustainability focus.

PROTECTING WILDLIFE AND RESTORING HABITAT

With an interest in wildlife policy, Avilez is about to graduate with her bachelor's in sustainability, and already taking classes toward her master's in sustainability solutions. During a school internship, she conducted a survey of Phoenix residents' perceptions of wildlife like coyotes, and her honors thesis is similarly focused on wildlife protections.

Some of ASU's sustainability goals align with Avilez's own; for example, its native plantings helped get it certified as a pollinator-protecting Bee Campus. It's also replacing what Assistant Director of University Sustainability Practices Alex Davis calls "nonfunctional" grass "with



PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

The 4-acre student farm at Penn State donates produce to local food banks.

desert-adapted aesthetic replacements to ... use substantially less water."

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Collaboration is where Penn State shines. Its Sustainable Communities

Collaborative matches students, including those taking any of the school's 400 sustainability classes, "with communities in need, and they're able to get projects done — maybe on stormwater, maybe related to carbon emissions" — those communities can't afford, says Lara Fowler, interim chief sustainability officer. Ten years of this



ALYSSA LOSCIG/ALYSSA JULIA PHOTO

Alysha Ulrich and Gabrielle Leach head Penn State's Student Sustainability Advisory Council.

"engaged scholarship" has matched about 4,000 students with 300 projects.

That high level of engagement pervades Penn State's Student Sustainability Advisory Council. Co-chairs Gabrielle Leach, a third-year environmental resource management major, and Alysha Ulrich, a fourth-year earth science and policy major, collaborate with fellow council members on carbon neutrality, sustainability education and zero-waste. "We research a benchmark, then advocate (to the administration) on ways that we can improve sustainability efforts," Ulrich says.

Results can be slow to develop, but the council has had success in building a student farm, implementing a bike-share program and introducing reusable takeout containers to the dining hall. It recently pushed to get sustainability language written into Penn State's beverage contract. Says Leach, "We're not just asking, 'How are you going to use (more) recycled materials?' It's also, 'How green is your (transportation) fleet? How are you going to benefit students?'"

Kenzie Luterbach, a UWSP senior majoring in natural resources sustainability, is proud that students drive sustainability. She says at her school they manage the campus garden, teach

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OF U.S. COLLEGE STUDENTS CONSIDERED AN INSTITUTION'S ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THEIR COLLEGE ENROLLMENT DECISION

SOURCE: *Inside Higher Ed/ College Pulse survey*

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“green” practices in residence halls and collaborate with other schools to urge university divestment from fossil fuels.

Student involvement is also critical at UCSB. Katie Maynard, acting director of sustainability, says every student, staff, faculty member and administrator needs to be engaged if the school is to meet its pledge to be carbon-neutral by 2025. The oceanfront university manages 340 acres of lagoon-peppered nature reserve it's restoring to protect against storm surge, improve biodiversity and provide “mental health outlets for our students,” says campus sustainability manager Jewel Persad. Faculty research is incorporated into campus projects, and outdoor spaces double as learning labs.

ELIMINATING WASTE, IMPROVING EFFICIENCY

Pretty much every campus has a flashy project or two that adds to its unique sustainability profile. For example, ASU's 90 photovoltaic arrays help provide a quarter of the university's electricity. Its LEED platinum-certified planetary health center had every exterior panel custom-made to provide cooling shade for the interior.

The Bryce Jordan Center at Penn State



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

At the University of California, Santa Barbara outdoor spaces double as learning labs.



University of California, Santa Barbara

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA



Wildflower lagoon at University of California, Santa Barbara

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

EDUCATION

used infrared imagery to identify where the building was leaking energy; a retrofit cut the building's electricity losses by 15 percent and steam heat by 40 percent and steers the university toward its goal of 100 percent emissions reduction by 2035.

UCSB's similarly strong sustainability goals enticed senior Lauren Sullivan, an environmental studies major who has conducted environmental audits for the university's office of sustainability, on lighting for a university museum, carbon for the nature reserves as well as food waste for campus events. Additionally, research laboratory audits helped the school understand what equipment could be turned off at night and where water could be conserved in these energy-intensive spaces.

"I love the intersection of physical science with environmental studies," Sullivan says. "I didn't realize how important it was going to be for me to have this interdisciplinary approach."

Luterbach geeks out about renewable energy, especially UWSP's 100 percent renewable electricity; it's the only higher education institution in the state with it.

For sustainability coordinator Dave Barbier, UWSP's composting program is a point of pride, processing 150,000 pounds of food and yard waste annually. "We were the first university in the state to have composting in every ... building on campus," he says, and compost is used in landscaping and as field dressing for athletic fields.



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, STEVENS POINT

The University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point campus sets up covered bike racks.

Sometimes, though, sustainability can be uncomfortable. Biking is a way of life on the UWSP campus, even in the frigid Wisconsin winters, and the university is building covered bike shelters to encourage more of this green transportation. "We want to establish that this is part of our identity," Barbier says.



Solar panels over outdoor dining area

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, STEVENS POINT

By composting food and yard waste, the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point campus has saved 235 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents since 2007.



"We were the first university in the state to have composting in every ... building on campus."

**– DAVE BARBIER,
sustainability coordinator,
University of Wisconsin,
Stevens Point**