



# Education and Sustainability: The Answer to “How Do We...?”

*Why and how sustainability has become a major focus for colleges and universities is the theme of a series of Herman Miller articles. They highlight the new and exciting projects we are continually uncovering both in our research and in our partnerships with education customers.*

*As a long-time sustainability practitioner and advocate, we believe:*

- *Good design can provide a foundation for sustainability and set the stage for building a greener campus.*
- *Education is a powerful tool; supporting and nurturing a new generation of environmentally conscious citizens will benefit us all.*
- *We all need to work together to create a more sustainable world.*

*In our series, we examine a range of topics, from examples of student-led initiatives to instructions on how to start a green team. We hope you find these explorations valuable and inspiring, and we encourage you to share them with others.*

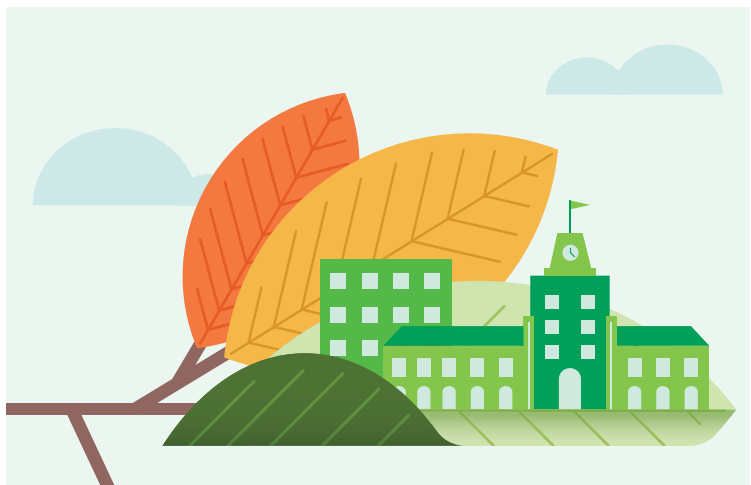
## **Resources for the Sustainability Journey**

Here's the thing about sustainability: The more you start to look at what needs to be done, the more you see that needs to be done. That can be overwhelming, especially on a college campus, where you can literally watch the trash pile up before your eyes and where, with the constant foot traffic in and out of buildings, it can seem like the college is heating (or cooling) the whole world instead of a building.

Fortunately, a few organizations have already done a lot of work that you can leverage—that they want you to leverage. They know it's going to take all of us working together to reach sustainability.

## **Center for Green Schools at the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC)**

The Center for Green Schools' mission is to create green schools for everyone within this generation. As part of the USGBC, it has a broad audience—architects and facility managers, as well as students, faculty, and higher education administrators. The website has something for everyone—everything from roadmap resources, to an overview of different programs (e.g., STARS and LEED Green Building) and the relationship between them, as well as information for faculty members about how they can use the environment as a pedagogical tool in the classroom.



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For students, there's "Hands-On LEED: Guiding College Student Engagement," which tells students ways they can get involved in sustainability efforts that contribute to LEED certification. And facility managers will find resources like "The Paid from Savings Guide" particularly helpful. That guide shows how to save money on utilities and then redirect that money to fund green building retrofits. The "Campus Profiles" section profiles what four-year institutions are doing in three areas—buildings, curriculum, and community—and are available as PowerPoint presentations (complete with speaker's notes) that anyone can download and use in support of their own proposal.

The Center for Green Schools also collaborates with people on campus. "In many respects, we are solutions architects," says Jaime Van Mourik, director, Higher Ed. "People come to us with a particular problem and we either work with them or help them convene a group to determine what needs to happen."

One example is how they worked with the United Negro College Fund's (UNCF) Building Green at minority-serving institutions (MSIs). The Kresge Foundation gave UNCF a \$1.8 million grant to launch a program that would increase the number of LEED buildings at MSIs and to increase the number of MSIs that take part in the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment (a commitment to become carbon neutral). "UNCF is not an expert in the environment or green buildings, so they brought us in to help advise them on tools and strategies that they would need to pursue LEED certification," says Van Mourik. "We act as a consultant or advisor."

Often they work with organizations to help identify who might ultimately own the program. For example, when the White House wanted to put in place a program that would recognize K-12 schools for the progress they are making on sustainability issues, the Center for Green Schools was asked to provide thought leadership. "We convened with other groups a conversation about how schools would be recognized, provided thought leadership on the program structure and then, working with others, determined that the best place for the Green Ribbon Schools program is the Department of Education. "We don't own the program, but we are strong advocates of it and we continue to work with the Department of Education to get the word out," says Van Mourik.

#### **Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE)**

Started in 2005, AASHE is a professional association for those interested in advancing campus sustainability. Its mission is to empower higher education to be a leader in sustainability by providing resources, education, and a network of support through which best practices can be shared. Many of the resources are available to anyone; others are available only to AASHE members.

AASHE's website has a comprehensive list of resources, and there's something for everyone. Students will find information about initiating specific efforts on campus (e.g., start a composting program or bottled-water reduction program), connecting with others, publicizing their efforts, and fundraising. For those involved in campus operations, there are case studies and information on green building policies. For administrators, there's information on coordination and planning and investment and financing. And that's just a small sampling of what's on the site.

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AASHE also hosts webinars, workshops, and conferences that include campus tours, and it publishes a campus sustainability review annually that quantifies successes in the higher education sustainability movement. It also works with institutions around the country to host various education workshops on campus on topics like “Developing a Campus Sustainability Living Lab.”

But STARS (Sustainability, Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System) is AASHE’s best known resource. It’s a framework that enables comparisons of sustainability performance over time and across institutions using a common set of measurements. Colleges and universities can measure their sustainability performance and then, if they choose, publicly report that data, meeting the increasing demand for transparency. They can even submit the data to the Princeton Review’s Guide to Green Colleges, a free annually updated guide to green colleges.

Having tracked sustainability in higher education for a number of years, AASHE is well positioned to identify trends. One that’s encouraging is the increase in hiring for sustainability positions on campus. But that increase comes with a challenge, since those open positions don’t always come with “a clear sense of what they are doing,” says Meghan Zahniser, AASHE’s director of programs. “Sometimes, the only direction they are getting is to ‘make us green.’ There is a staggering amount of education that has to happen regarding the roles and responsibilities of these newly created positions.” says Zahniser.

Zahniser is excited about the opportunity that represents. “We see higher education as the group that can lead the sustainability movement,” she says. “They are pushing sustainability and innovation in a way that isn’t happening in other sectors.” And organizations like AASHE and Center for Green Schools at USCBG are happy to help.