



Education and Sustainability: Under the Green Umbrella

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.

The Sustainability Movement on College Campuses

Over the past decade, a movement has been emerging on college campuses, with an explosion of activities taking place that all fall under one immense umbrella—and its color is green.

Sustainability has become a major focus for higher ed in recent years. According to the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), there are more green building projects happening on campuses than ever before.¹

And it's not just buildings. From transportation and recycling programs to energy assessments and edible landscapes, green teams, and student-led waste management programs, the sheer variety and number of environmental projects and programs currently taking place on campuses throughout North America is mind-boggling—and extremely encouraging.

Why is this happening on such a widespread scale? The reasons are numerous:

More Knowledge. Like the rest of the world, people in higher ed simply know a lot more than they used to about the importance of sustainability. For some, their education started when they built their first LEED-certified building on campus or did an energy usage assessment; or maybe it began when a faculty member or student started a grassroots movement to explore ways of making their campus greener. But whatever the source of it, knowledge led to action, and today there is hardly a campus around that doesn't have some kind of sustainability initiative going on.²



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More Resources. Organizations such as the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) and the U.S. Green Building Council, which launched the Center for Green Schools in 2010, provide resources and support for those who want to move toward healthy, high-performance schools and campuses. As prominent community members, colleges are often called in as partners on local sustainability efforts and, in the process, become resources themselves. In the meantime, administrators and the architecture and design communities are working more closely together to transform schools at all levels into sustainable places.

Ideal Testing Grounds. Colleges and universities are natural learning labs, almost like mini-cities, with their own infrastructures, buildings, water/waste treatment systems, transportation, and other systems where problems can be examined and solutions tested. They have access to researchers and laboratories, not to mention a ready-made and eager army of workers—students and faculty—in a naturally collaborative multi-disciplinary environment that often includes future architects and designers who are learning good stewardship practices. The job market, too, is demanding new sustainability skills and expertise to fill increasing needs in a wide range of careers.

Attracting Students. College administrators are finding, too, that more and more students are attracted to colleges that practice, teach, and support environmentally responsible choices. Among the more than 12,000 college applicants *The Princeton Review* surveyed for its 2011 “College Hopes & Worries Survey,” 65 percent of respondents said they would value having information about a college’s commitment to the environment; its 2012 survey showed that of 7,445 college-bound high schoolers, 68 percent said that a school’s commitment to the environment “affects their decision to apply or attend that institution.”³

In 2012, *The Princeton Review* published a reference book, “Guide to 322 Green Colleges,” to help students make informed decisions, stating, “Our hope, in coordinating with the USGBC, is to break down what green looks like across different campuses in a way that will help you to choose the right school that will help you learn to live sustainably.”⁴

The USGBC notes elsewhere that environmental issues are often brought to the forefront when colleges are in the process of achieving LEED certification in new or older buildings.⁵ For example, when Kansas State University began planning a major expansion at its Olathe campus, which included going for LEED Silver Certification for a new building, the eyes of team members were opened to numerous ways of becoming more sustainable. As architect Dave Rezac explains, “It started with the mechanical systems and really optimizing those energy efficiencies, and then it just rolled into other things, like reducing water not only in the building, but outside with the type of landscaping we chose.”⁶

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sustainability efforts.

Strategic use of glass, high-performance glazing, and sourcing local materials all contributed significantly to K-State's sustainability goals. "But one of the things we were most excited about was that we were able to recycle 95 percent of the waste during construction, so only five percent went to the landfill," says Rezac. "And it was really innovative ideas that did that. For example, one of the things we did was put all the recycling containers for plastic, metals and so on, very close to the construction site, and then we put the trash container about 500 yards away. So the workers had to walk a lot farther for the trash. It was very successful strategy."

Like many colleges and universities, K-State Olathe has partnered with local elementary and high schools to more closely connect with future college students and better prepare them for the road ahead. Its campus is a shining example of what sustainability can look like.

Of course, the impact schools can have on future generations is exponentially greater as the current 14+ million students go out into the world armed with knowledge and experiences they will share with others in their work and in their communities. We believe we all have a role to play in inspiring and supporting the sustainability efforts taking place in higher ed as we prepare the next generation to use their talents and expertise to make a better world for us all.

Notes

- ¹ Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) *Higher Education Sustainability Review*, 2011, <<http://www.aashe.org/highlights/press-releases/aashe-releases-annual-review-campus-sustainability>> (accessed January 17, 2013).
- ² *The Princeton Review*, "Guide to 322 Green Colleges," 2012 Edition, p. 6.
- ³ *The Princeton Review*, "College Hopes and Worries Survey," 2012, <<http://www.princetonreview.com/college-hopes-worries.aspx>> (accessed January 17, 2013).
- ⁴ "Guide to 322 Green Colleges," p. 7.
- ⁵ Shannon Chance, "Planning for Environmental Sustainability: Learning for LEED and USGBC," Society for College and University Planning, Executive Summary, December 2012, <http://www.scup.org/asset/64575/PHEV41N1_ExecSumm_Planning.pdf> (accessed January 17, 2013).
- ⁶ K-State Olathe: International Animal Health and Food Safety Institute Case Study, Herman Miller Case Study Library, <<http://www.hermanmiller.com/research/case-studies/k-state-olathe-international-animal-health-and-food-safety-institute.html>> (accessed January 17, 2013).

Other Herman Miller Case Studies That Focus on Sustainability:

New Brunswick Community College Case Study
Innovation Park at Notre Dame Case Study