

## Students Heading Back to College this Month—What Will They Find?

### NWF Releases *Campus Environment 2008 Results:* *A National Report Card on Sustainability in Higher Education*



August 21, Reston, VA.—Is your alma mater among those stepping up to green their campus? Are our colleges preparing students for a greener future? You can find out in National Wildlife Federation's just-released [Campus Environment 2008 Report Card](#), a comprehensive look at nationwide trends in sustainability among America's institutions of higher learning. The report compares findings with the previous study conducted in 2001.

The 2008 Report Card, based on a survey conducted in partnership with Princeton Survey Research Associates International, found that environmentally progressive and sustainable operations are now ranked among the highest priorities on campus. Ironically however, students are less likely to be environmentally literate when they graduate than their predecessors.

The study, which reviews programs at 1,068 institutions, recognizes colleges and universities for exemplary performance and awards academic letter grades (A through D) for collective, national performance on a broad range of conservation issues, including energy, water, transportation, landscaping, waste reduction and environmental literacy. Campuses in the survey are not graded or ranked on an individual basis; rather, the survey analyzes collective trends in the areas of management, operations, and academics.

With 27% of U.S. colleges and universities responding, the 2008 survey (sent to presidents, administrators, and facilities managers) is the nation's largest study to date created to gauge trends and new developments in campus sustainability. It was also the first study of its kind when conducted in 2001.

“The 2008 report finds that campus leaders value sustainability. They speak about it, plan for it, hire staff to support it, and the campuses they lead are steadily becoming greener models for the wider society,” said Julian Keniry, NWF's senior director of campus and community leadership. “At the same time, the educational

curricula to prepare students for a post-college world influenced by climate change are not keeping pace. On most campuses, the business leaders and facilities managers appear to be making greater strides towards sustainability than their faculty peers.”

The study reveals trends including:

- The most prevalent environmental initiative is water conservation, versus recycling in 2001;
- Conserving energy is 2008’s most popular performance goal, versus the 2001 goal of upping environmental performance in new buildings;
- The biggest green opportunity colleges are missing is adequate education about sustainability for their students;
- Funding is the biggest obstacle to expanding environmental and sustainability programming, versus the “other priorities” cited in 2001.

Regarding school management, American colleges show greener overall leadership than they did in 2001. The study reveals that management generally values environmental, social and economic sustainability and is putting systems in place to broaden and sustain engagement campus-wide. Indicators of this commitment include increased goal-setting to improve performance, more staffing for sustainability programs, and a rise in orientation programs on waste reduction and other sustainability efforts on campus. However, sustainability initiatives still face roadblocks such as inadequate funding and support for faculty development.

Efforts to green our campuses shine most brightly in day-to-day operations. Facilities leaders, together with students and faculty, have been instrumental in driving programs to conserve energy and water, increase the amount of clean energy used to power the campus, and reduce waste. Since 2001, the number of campuses using clean renewable energy has grown significantly, and a new movement to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases has taken hold. However, little progress has been made to date in reducing the congestion, pollution and other environmental impacts associated with campus commuting.

Results show that academics still lag behind the operations vision of the campus—even more so than when this survey was first conducted in 2001. Sustainability-related education offerings and recruitment programs have declined, as

have faculty doing environmental and sustainability research. Just over half of colleges and universities now offer either an undergraduate major or minor in environmental and sustainability studies, down from two-thirds in 2001.

“This Report Card tells us there is a widening gap between where higher education actually is on teaching sustainability versus where it should be,” said Kevin Coyle, vice president of education for National Wildlife Federation. “Given the environmental challenges and opportunities this generation will face, I find this cause for deep concern and am committed to working with our partners to address this on both state and federal levels.”

More than 240 individual schools are recognized and named in the report for having exemplary levels of sustainability activities, as determined by survey responses. The school engaged in the greatest number of such activities is Willamette University in Salem, Oregon. Willamette is committed to energy efficiency and conservation, greener transportation, environmentally friendly landscaping practices, as well as to orienting personnel and faculty to the sustainability goals of the campus.

Other campuses with high numbers of exemplary marks include the Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta; Michigan State University, East Lansing; University of Arizona, Tucson; University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Cascadia Community College in Bothell, Washington. Dozens of other campuses are recognized in the report for specific programs.

The 2008 Report Card data, highlighting current trends and comparing them with 2001, provides ideas for enhancing sustainability at any school or business. It is designed to inspire further effort to improve environmental performance and literacy at all schools. Moreover, the results will help to shape state and national education policy initiatives.

“The NWF Report Card is the Gold Standard for charting the sustainability movement in higher education. Coverage of both operational and academic programs is particularly important. Strongly recommended reading for administrators, faculty and students,” said David W. Orr, professor of Environmental Studies and senior advisor to the president, Oberlin College. He is also the author of *Earth in Mind, Ecological Literacy, The Last Refuge*, and *Design on the Edge*.

More than 18 million students are enrolled in over 4,000 American colleges and universities, offering a compelling opportunity for sustainability leadership. “The Campus Environment 2008 Report Card reveals just how well institutions of higher learning are preparing students for the environmental challenges they will face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” said Mary McIntosh, PhD, lead survey researcher with Princeton Survey Research Associates International. “Many of the men and women who will lead our businesses, educational institutions and government agencies in the next 20 years are in college now.”

“We need to offer today’s college students the kind of academic and professional preparation that will ready them to envision and create a healthier and more sustainable world,” concludes David Eagan, PhD, survey project co-coordinator based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Co-sponsors of the study include the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), American Association of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), APPA-Leadership in Educational Facilities, American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), Clean Air-Cool Planet (CA-CP), Energy Action Coalition, National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC), National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO), National Association of Campus Activities (NACA), the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies at UW-Madison, Society for College and University Planning (SCUP). The study is funded by the Kendeda Fund and other sources.

The full Campus Report Card, including a list of schools participating in the survey and a list of schools with exemplary programs can be found at [www.campusecology.org](http://www.campusecology.org).

Since it was launched in 1989, National Wildlife Federation’s Campus Ecology Program has worked with the college campus community (students, faculty, administrators and staff) to promote sustainability and ecological stewardship on campuses and beyond. Visit [www.campusecology.org](http://www.campusecology.org) for more information.