VIII. BENCHMARKING AND ASSESSMENT

This section provides tips on using the national survey questions and findings to benchmark environmental performance at individual campuses, along with some background on assessment.

Why Assess Campus Environmental Performance?

Assessing environmental performance can be helpful in several respects. Each assessment, for example, provides a baseline against which environmental trends on a campus can be monitored over time. Assessments can also help identify opportunities and highlight good practices. This information can be used to further refine goals and to show members of the campus community how their efforts are making a difference. When conducted regularly (every year or 18 months), assessments can help ensure that environmental performance is a dynamic rather than a static process, providing a sense of "where we have been, where we are now, and where we are going." Regular assessment also helps establish mechanisms for collecting and quantifying important information, make information accessible, and ensure that information relayed to the campus and the public is current.

How to Assess Campus Environmental Performance

There are four main steps in any assessment process: identifying indicators, establishing performance benchmarks, evaluating performance against those benchmarks, and documenting the results. This is not necessarily a linear process, however, as one step (such as establishing benchmarks) may be informed by a subsequent step (such as evaluating performance). Establishing a goal to reduce waste by 50 percent in the next academic year may not be realistic, for instance, if a campus is currently diverting only 10 percent.

Though conducted nationally, many of the survey questions and findings on pages 109–136 can assist with each step of the assessment process on an individual campus. Additional resources for developing assessment tools are listed in the resources section of this report. These include the Sustainability Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) by the University Leaders for a Sustainable Future and Campus Ecology: A Guide to Assessing Campus Environmental Performance, by April Smith and the Student Environmental Action Coalition.

Identifying Indicators

The first step of any assessment process is to identify the indicators, i.e. to determine what is important and what should be evaluated. Many of the questions in each of the three modules of this survey can assist campuses in developing indicators for assessing performance. The survey provides at least a starting place from which students, faculty, and staff can identify their own issues and customize questions to their own physical context, culture, and issues of greatest environmental concern. For those who choose to participate in the next national benchmark survey, using some or all of the indicators used in this survey will make reporting on environmental progress easier in the next round.

The three over-arching indicators chosen for this survey are: management systems, curricula, and operations. In developing indicators, campuses might start by asking: What are we teaching? How well are environmental issues integrated across disciplines? What systems are in place at the highest levels to support environmental performance, ensure environmental quality intersects all aspects of campus life, and sustain initiatives over time? What are we doing to enhance our environmental performance in each of our operations and through our research?

Each of these, in turn, is broken down into yet more detailed indicators of performance.

Management Systems (Presidents' Module)

We asked presidents about the systems in place to support environmental programs at the highest levels. These included such indicators as:

- Campus mission statement
- Goal setting and review
- Written policies
- Training and orientation
- Accountability mechanisms
- Staffing
- Incorporation into planning

In a longer survey, we might also have asked about reporting on goals and progress, assessing performance, and rewards and recognition. In crafting your own assessment tool, your team will undoubtedly be able to think of other indicators of environmental performance that pertain to management systems at the highest levels. A suggested goal for this component of assessment is to identify those

elements on a campus that need to be in place in order for environmental performance to be sustained and improved over time in all academic and administrative departments.

Curricula (Provosts' Module)

We asked academic provosts about environmental courses and teaching at their campuses, covering such indicators as:

- Existence of majors and minors
- Required environmental courses
- Courses offered within each discipline
- Professional development for faculty
- Evaluation of teaching and learning
- Experiential learning opportunities for students

In a survey of this scale, we were limited in our ability to assess the extent to which core courses across all disciplines integrate environmental modules and case studies; the specific kinds of professional development opportunities offered to faculty; or the outcomes of environmental curricula in terms of students' learning. Assessing environmental teaching methods and learning outcomes across all higher education disciplines is an area in which much more work is needed. These are all issues that individual campuses may wish to explore in more detail.

Operations (Chiefs of Facilities or Plant Operations Module)

We asked chiefs of administration or plant operations at each campus about environmental management in a number of areas:

- Waste reduction and recycling
- Purchasing recycled and other green products
- Energy conservation, renewables, and efficiency
- Landscaping
- Transportation

Each of the questions asked within each section can be used as a starting place from which to develop indicators for assessing operations at an individual campus. We gauged, for example, how much energy and water is being used on each campus and which programs are in place to foster efficiency, conservation, and the use of renewable energy. We also assessed the range of materials being recycled, diversion rates, and methods of reducing waste. The degree to which campuses have implemented programs such as integrated pest management, landscaping for wildlife, planting native plants, and restoring habitats was also evaluated.

A longer survey might have probed more deeply into water conservation (i.e., efforts to reduce storm-water run-off and impermeable surface) or into dining services, laboratory practices, and print operations. We might also have covered research, community-relations, or planning and land use in more detail. Publications in the resources section will help identify and prioritize amongst the many indicators, besides those used here, campuses can use for evaluating operations.

Developing Performance Goals

Once performance indicators have been identified, the next step in assessing campus environmental performance is to develop performance goals. Without goals, assessments may indicate trends in resource consumption, but they do little to indicate whether or not programs have been successful. Goals should reflect three factors: (1) What is performance now and what would be a realistic improvement within a particular timeframe (e.g., annually and every three to five years)? (2) How are my peers doing in this area? And (3) what do global trends indicate an appropriate goal might be?

Concerning question number one, staff and faculty should have a good sense of realistic performance goals for their departments. As for question number three, regarding globally appropriate responses, campuses have a wealth of resources for answering this question, and it may be an appropriate question to submit to university debate. A number of publications listed in the resource section, such as the various reports produced by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the annual *State of the World Report* by the WorldWatch Institute can also be consulted in this process.

Benchmarking Performance Against Peers

While the findings on pages 109–136 may not be particularly helpful for answering questions one or three, they can be useful for benchmarking performance against one's peers. These findings can facilitate comparison in a number of ways. First, they detail the percentage of campuses engaged in recycling and numerous other activities. The relative percentages indicate which programs are more common than others. This can be useful for determining which areas to emphasize. Campuses might wish to put programs in place that are common practice at other schools or to prioritize areas in which they can stand

out amidst their peers. The criteria we used in identifying exemplary programs (pages 105–108) may be helpful to you in this process.

Second, we have identified campuses that stand out in particular areas that might be consulted for more information. The resources section also lists publications online and in print that include case studies on certain programs at various campuses that might also be consulted, including *Green Investment, Green Return*, which details how thirteen campuses have saved almost $17 million through various conservation projects.

Third, several of the findings go beyond the percentage of schools involved in a particular activity to look at average recycling and consumption rates. To facilitate comparison, we included comparable units (e.g., per capita or per gross square foot) where possible for some information, and when it was statistically relevant, broke information down by type of campus, such as 2-year, 4-year, state or private school, and region of the country.

Sample Benchmarks

Many of the most important environmental practices are virtually commonplace on campuses, enjoying activity levels of more than 30 percent and, in many cases, well over 50 percent. To establish benchmarks, you might look through the percentages listed in the survey to see where your campus stands relative to peers or you might consult the criteria we used (pages 105-108) for identifying exemplary programs at the campuses featured throughout this report. The latter may assist you in establishing your own criteria for benchmarking and even scoring performance across a range of areas on your campus should you wish to do so. For those campuses interested in expanding the boundaries of environmental excellence, it may be of particular interest to note the areas in which roughly 30 percent or fewer campuses have programs in place. This applies to campuses that:

- Have a written declaration of environmental responsibility
- Set and review goals for purchasing organic food
- Set and review goals for making environmentally responsible investments
- Have written policies for conserving water, reducing pollution, protecting natural habitats, purchasing environmentally sound goods, purchasing organic goods, or making environmentally responsible investments
- Hold campus units accountable for environmental performance, through incentives and/or penalties
- Consider environmental impact when master planning decisions are made

- Have an environmental task force
- Have a green purchasing coordinator or full-time administrator who manages environmental issues beyond regulatory compliance
- Orient students, faculty, or staff to environmental programs and procedures
- Offer environmental courses within the anthropology, business, economics, communications, engineering, education, history, law, literature, or philosophy department
- Have a campus-wide requirement that students take courses on environmental issues
- Have a recruiting program to attract students interested in studying environmental issues
- Formally evaluate or recognize how faculty have integrated environmental topics into their courses
- Have plans to further reduce the types and amounts of waste generated
- Have a chlorine-free requirements for office paper
- Specify that office paper purchased must contain a minimum of 25% post-consumer waste
- Recycle or compost 30 percent or more of municipal solid waste generated on campus (12 percent of campuses recycle 50 percent or more; 17 percent recycle 40 percent or more; and 28 percent recycle 30 percent or more; whereas 24 percent of schools report they recycle 10 percent or less and 4 percent admit they recycle none of their waste)

Evaluating Performance Against Goals and Documenting the Results

Once goals have been determined, based on one or more of the factors described above (current performance levels, comparison with peers, and appropriate responses to global trends), the third step in assessment is to measure performance against those goals. The fourth step is to document and share these results. The more people in and beyond the campus community informed of the outcomes of these assessments, especially about goals and progress in meeting them, the more people will be invested in helping to achieve these goals.

Tailoring Assessment for Your Campus

Even campuses comparable in size and type may be different in fundamental ways. The availability and price of resources; markets for recyclable materials; infrastructure; regulations; and cultural factors may all vary considerably from institution to institution. Benchmarking performance against one's peers, while a helpful exercise, may have more limited applicability for some issues than others. Thus, each of

the elements of assessment, ranging from the indicators selected to the style of reporting, should be adapted as appropriate.

We have attempted to present findings that are useful not only for gauging campus environmental trends nationally, but also for improving performance at individual campuses and institutions. There is no one right or best way, however, to improve environmental performance. Reducing the human ecological footprint will demand creative institutional solutions that may far transcend any of the approaches identified here. We hope that this survey will serve as a starting point for many campuses and foster a re-examination of policies and practices in every sector of society. Your feedback on this survey is invited, including what should be part of or omitted from future surveys. To provide feedback please see the feedback form at www.nwf.org/campusecology. Thank you for your efforts towards a more environmentally sustainable and just future!