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Only as Green as Our People: UCSD Commits to Long-Term Sustainability

Christine Clark | November 13, 2007

Going green isn't just resources and technology, but the hard work of people.

How is UC San Diego going green? Solar panels on the roof of the Rady School of Management are lowering energy usage and costs and reducing fossil fuel.

Students are working with Housing, Dining, Hospitality (HDH) to increase recycling and conservation and faculty are leading pioneering research on climate change, sustainability informatics, energy bioscience and biodiversity.

It's clear that UCSD has made a strong commitment to sustainability, according to Environment and Sustainability Initiative (ESI) Director Paul Linden. In 2005, UCSD launched the initiative which helped cement the campus commitment to providing knowledge, technology and trained professionals to partner with the external community to help achieve a more sustainable future.

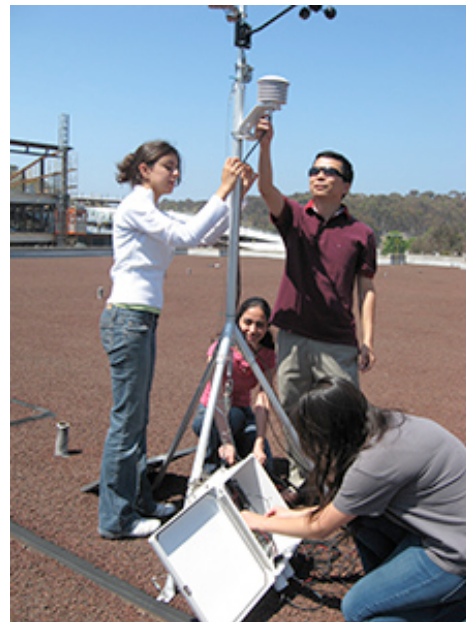
The initiative was designed to help organize talented faculty, staff and students at UCSD around the critical issues of the environment, according to ESI Executive Director Lisa Shaffer.

"We want to put these intellectual ideas about sustainability to use in the real world," Shaffer said.

The initiative also was implemented to educate students about the environment. "Each student should leave UCSD knowing something about sustainability," she said.

The university is already one of the most advanced institutions working on sustainability challenges because it is home to the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, a world leader in climate research, and the California Institute of Telecommunications and Information Technology (Calit2), a world leader in wireless information technology. These unique organizations, embedded within UCSD, uniquely position the campus to pioneer continuous awareness of the interaction of human activity with the Earth's natural systems, Shaffer said.

According to Linden, this is an exciting and important time because sustainability efforts at UCSD have gathered a lot of momentum. He said that ESI has developed a wireless environmental sensor network, which will provide vital information about the



UCSD students working on the DEMROES (environmental sensor network) project.

meteorological and air quality conditions for different microclimates to help support a variety of research projects. And, he said, UCSD has a vested interest in building a sustainable future.

A faculty working group, chaired by Art Ellis, Vice Chancellor of Research, has been formed to develop a vision and plan for the design of a Climate and Sustainability Institute. UCSD also recently hired Maggie Souder as Campus Sustainability Coordinator. Souder comes to UCSD with more than 25 years experience of working in environmental preservation. She will identify and prioritize areas for sustainability efforts in campus operations, conduct strategic sustainability planning, support the Advisory Committee on Sustainability (ACS) and promote partnerships between academic and operational departments to further campus sustainability goals.



UCSD's new Sustainability Coordinator, Maggie Souder.

I look forward to meeting and working with the UCSD community," Souder said. "I am excited to hear ideas, suggestions and questions."

Souder, who first started working on environmental issues when she was a student at UC Riverside, will serve as a point of contact and assist in UCSD's environmental efforts to foster a culture of sustainability among students, faculty and staff and encourage collaboration and participation within the campus community.

Vice Chancellor for Business Affairs Steve Relyea and Interim Vice Chancellor for Resource Management and Planning Gary Matthews also both play a critical role in the campus's sustainability efforts. Under their direction, UCSD has implemented many innovative programs and technologies to monitor and reduce the environmental footprint of the campus and lessen our dependence on fossil fuels.

Students are also at the forefront of the campus's sustainability efforts. HDH employs students who are interested in the environment to implement and contribute to its Major Planet program, a cutting-edge sustainability initiative designed to help UCSD staff, faculty, and students live "Green".

According to HDH Senior Writer Laurie Chambliss, Major Planet interns work as researchers, educators, and advocates to promote and implement new sustainability initiatives throughout HDH and beyond. They organize and or volunteer at events like Trash Sorts, Earth Week, and Save the Earth, as well as energy reduction competitions and campaigns such as the food waste reduction. In addition, they often join forces with the Green Campus Program, which is a student-led outreach program designed to educate the campus about energy efficiency. Other notable green clubs include Muir Environmental Corps and One Earth One Justice.



UCSD going green at a sustainability social.

The Green Campus Program kicked off the 2007-2008 school year with a Sustainability Social. At the event, students welcomed Souder and spoke passionately about their dedication to sustainability.

UCSD students like John Muir College junior Jessica Wall attended the social. Wall has been instrumental in promoting and organizing green campus activities. Double-majoring in environmental systems and economics, Wall has been involved in several other

organizations that promote sustainability, including the Muir Environmental Corps and the Association of Environmental Professionals. She said her dedication environmental issues started at a young age.

“Since I was 10 years old, my life goal has been to try to protect the earth to the best of my ability,” she said. “Hopefully a career in environmental law will help me make a little bit of a difference.”

Wall was one of the most dedicated participants in the Green Campus Energy Conservation Contest that took place from Jan. 5 to March 5. In the contest, thousands of students from Revelle, Muir and Sixth colleges competed against each other in an energy conservation competition.

She said there have been tremendous improvements in sustainability efforts at UCSD because of Lisa Shaffer’s work with the Environmental Sustainability Initiative.



Thurgood Marshall College sophomore Yuki Murakami (center, with a brown shirt) promotes sustainability on campus.

Yuki Murakami is sophomore at Thurgood Marshall College who also is heavily involved in campus sustainability efforts. Murakami has worked with One Earth One Justice and the Environmental Sustainability Committee to change some HDH policies to improve campus sustainability.

“We have helped to improve (and we’ll keep going!) recycling, disposable dishware reduction, and responsible water use on campus,” Murakami said. “We’re trying to achieve composting and biodegradable dishware in the future.”

In addition, students like Polina Osipova work toward increasing sustainability and raising awareness about Fair Trade on UCSD’s campus at the same time.

Osipova has been working with One Earth One Justice ever since she was a sophomore at UCSD, where she strives to increase awareness about social and environmental justice.

The campus’s commitment to green practices and environmental issues, such as energy, water and climate change, should bring real change, Linden said.

“[Climate change] is a huge problem that is facing society and there are a lot of answers we don’t have,” Linden said. “That is why as a university, we should be heavily involved in finding these answers.”



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