



Fostering a Generation of Sustainability Natives

Published on 7 Jun 2012 | Written by [Jaime Van Mourik](#) | Posted in [Center for Green Schools](#)

At the [Center for Green Schools](#) at the U.S. Green Building Council, we are fostering a generation of “sustainability natives” - children and adults who act to benefit the earth without needing to be asked - who will help us reach our vision of healthy, high-performing schools and campuses for all students within this generation.

But what exactly does that mean? Our belief is that if we nurture and educate the younger generations to understand that sustainability is a matter of course as opposed to a method for dealing with the struggles we face today, it will become second nature. Teaching the importance of saving energy, diverting waste, conserving resources and creating an environment that fosters social equity is important, but is it realistic? We think the answer is yes, but with quite a bit of work.

Over the past few months, the Center for Green Schools at USGBC has presented two initiatives targeted toward the higher education community.

The 2012 [Campus Conservation Nationals](#) (CCN) competition was a three-week dorm challenge with more than 100 colleges and universities working toward the goal of saving one gigawatt-hour of energy. By the end of the challenge, the goal was nearly doubled by engaging close to a quarter million freshmen on campuses of all shapes and sizes. Now this only scratches the surface of the more than 18 million students on campus every day, but the fact that in only its second year, the competition has garnered increased attention by the higher education community is a feat in and of itself. And as further encouragement, it seems as though many of these freshmen are already predisposed to energy efficiency tactics by way of their early education. Many students entering the halls of higher education are coming in with literacy around sustainability that has been unseen in past generations.

Another way we are reaching this audience is through [The Princeton Review’s Guide to 322 Green Colleges](#): 2012 Edition. Released in partnership with the Center for Green Schools at USGBC, the guide profiles 322 colleges and universities in the United States and Canada that demonstrate notable commitments to sustainability in academic offerings, campus infrastructure, activities and career preparation. In its third year of publication, the guide has shown an increase in interest and action among both higher education professionals and prospective college students. In fact, in its annual “Hopes and Worries” survey The Princeton Review found that 68 percent of college-bound high school students in the United States say that a university’s commitment to sustainability is an important factor for selecting the “right” school.

Today, many institutions have made sustainability and green building part of their campus cultures. However, fostering a generation of sustainability natives doesn’t mean that we should just be schooling them in the facts and figures of our global errors. We also need to be creating healthy spaces for these students to prosper in their studies without negatively affecting their ability to learn. If we don’t improve our current built surroundings, we will ultimately harm the younger generation’s ability to become the future leaders and global citizens we desperately need. Events like CCN serve as an opportunity for students to engage with and understand how their actions impact the environment s they live and learn in.

I am encouraged everyday as I hear extraordinary stories coming out of higher education that usually include one key part of the equation - individuals who are much younger than me making an impact. [Join us](#) as we celebrate these successes while also working hard to transform the landscape in which we inhabit every day. With a collective force, we can make even greater strides towards our ultimate vision.



Jaime Van Mourik
 Director of Higher Education
 U.S. Green Building Council



Member employees, USGBC staff

USGBC Articles can be accessed in the USGBC app for iOS or Android on your iPhone, iPad or Android device.



