

# Students Guide the Way in Sustainability at UC San Diego

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The college experience: fraternity parties, football games and...LEED. [LEED](#) (or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) has played an integral part on the [University of California San Diego](#) (UCSD) campus. When UCSD students help to complete LEED certification projects on campus, they prove that making a positive impact is also an essential part of the college experience.

When UCSD received word that the San Diego Supercomputer received [LEED Gold for Existing Buildings](#), we validated that it had the trappings of being a highly sustainable building, with dedicated staff to ensure it stayed that way. But behind the scenes, I knew that it was a dedicated team of students that made the project so exceptional.

*UCSD students participating in a trash sort*

I had the honor of guiding the LEED certification process. As the LEED project manager, I knew it was more than just getting our certification - it was about doing the right thing for the students involved. That meant giving them the time to learn about LEED, make connections on campus and learning from any mistakes that they made along the way. I put trust in their abilities, trust in the process and trust that USGBC would understand if challenges arose because of our integration of students in the project. All of those things held true.

At times it was challenging, as the project was competing with midterms, class projects and other interests that the students had. I had to get creative in how we set deadlines or planned events. Who would have thought that a trash sort would garner such a high turnout?

And they weren't just pushing paperwork or simply filling out templates either. These students were working with administration, collaborating with building occupants and tracking down information from very busy facilities management staff.

In the end, it was all worth it. LEED was a medium to educate, engage and empower everyone on our campus. The same students who worked on the project are now the officers in the [USGBC Students](#) group at UCSD. They are taking their experience and sharing it with San Diego State University students in a collaborative effort at the Mission Bay Aquatic Center. It marks the first time USGBC Students from two schools are partnering to certify a building, and UCSD will educate SDSU on how to incorporate a student-based volunteer workforce for the LEED certification process of buildings on their campus.

My experience with the students often brings me back to something a very influential mentor once said to me: "you are going to make a difference in the lives of the young people you meet." I have been the lucky to be in the position where, from my perspective, it is more that they are making a difference in mine.

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