



Architects and Cornell's staff used innovative, sustainable methods, such as the Lake Source Cooling System, in creating new facilities, like the one pictured here. Many of Cornell's building designs meet U.S. Green Building Council standards and rank well in the Leadership in Environmental and Energy Design (LEED) rating system.

GREEN U

New York Colleges Share a Common School Color

By Shannon Brescher Shea

From rolling hills to urban streets, New York's college campuses have little in common beyond their goal of higher education. But recently, these diverse institutions have come to share another target—increasing their environmental sustainability.



courtesy of Cornell University

A number of New York schools have partnered together to solve environmental problems. For instance, 42 New York colleges have signed the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment. Signers of this document have pledged to minimize their greenhouse gas emissions as much as possible through energy conservation and investments in renewable energy. Another collaborative effort, the Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) Pollution Prevention Institute hosted by the Rochester Institute of Technology, was recently created to gather together scientists from across the state to research "green" manufacturing processes. It will also provide New York companies with the training and technical assistance needed to install new, cleaner technology.

In addition to collective efforts, many college students and administrators are working to increase their individual schools' environmental sustainability. Here's a look at a few of the many efforts being made on campuses throughout New York State.

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NY City and Long Island

Although their grounds may feature more concrete than lush forest, universities in the New York City area are finding innovative ways to "green" their campuses.

Columbia University ranked the highest among New York colleges in the College Sustainability Report Card, published by the non-profit Sustainable Endowments Institute. To determine Columbia's B+ grade, the institute considered the school's actions on climate change, food/recycling, green building and transportation. It also assessed the resources Columbia dedicates to sustainability, the types of investments it holds, and the amount of information it provides to the public on its financial donations. In particular, the group recognized Columbia for its participation in an innovative project that combines green building and urban planning to create healthy, sustainable communities.

Students and staff at New York University have also established a variety of projects that creatively tackle environmental

problems. The university runs a grant program that finances environmental projects proposed by students, staff, and employees. This year's winners include a "graywater" recycling system, which captures water used in sinks and reuses it in toilets. Students in one dorm have volunteered to test run the system, for the purpose of eventually expanding it campus-wide. In renewable energy, New York University's efforts have also earned it a noteworthy title: second-largest buyer of green power among universities nationwide.

Creating your own power is better than buying it, and the State University of New York (SUNY) schools in the region surrounding New York City are doing just that. SUNY Farmingdale (Suffolk County) has five photovoltaic solar units, and a Solar Energy Center that trains students in solar panel installation and maintenance. Similarly, SUNY Stony Brook (Suffolk County) has bus stops powered by the sun and a 100-foot windmill. Through these efforts and the educational opportunities they provide, these schools are both producing sustainable energy and ensuring its use into the future.



Many schools have found ways to create their own power, like these solar panels used at SUNY Farmingdale.

Albany / Capital District

Our state's capital and the surrounding region have a number of colleges whose environmental efforts place them at the head of the class. In October 2006, SUNY Albany launched a "UAlbany Goes Green" initiative to encourage students and staff to behave more sustainably. The school runs a yearly energy saving contest, where students living in dormitories compete to reduce their energy consumption. During the 2008 contest, students in residence halls lowered the buildings' electricity bills by \$25,000. Likewise, the College of St. Rose in Albany has thrown a "lights-out" party featuring music by "unplugged" bands, to promote electricity conservation.

Northern New York

Colleges near the Adirondack Mountains take full advantage of their settings, and often use them as an outdoor classroom.

In the heart of the Adirondack Park, Paul Smith's College provides a number of hands-on opportunities for students to study environmental subjects. In cooperation with the DEC, the college runs an acid deposition monitor, which allows students to participate in research on acid rain's effects. Students in the forestry program also obtain practical training in responsible forestry, as the college's 14,000 acres are certified as sustainably managed by the non-profit Forest Stewardship Council.

Many students and staff at St. Lawrence University in Canton also explore this area's unique resources through the Adirondack Semester. In this program, students spend a semester living in and studying the Adirondacks to develop a deep appreciation of its history and ecology. In addition, the university recently built the Johnston Hall of Science, the only campus building in New York to earn the U.S. Green Building Council's gold certification.

Both of these colleges, with Clarkson University and SUNY Canton, sponsored the Green Torch Relay, a student bicycle ride from St. Lawrence to Albany. The ride promoted Step-It-Up, a climate change teach-in, and worked to raise awareness of climate change issues in our state legislature.

Central New York

Several colleges in central New York have a tradition of natural resources management, and have expanded that concern into all fields relating to sustainability.

Cornell University in Ithaca and the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse were two of the first universities to establish departments focused on environmental research. But these days, students learn about sustainability just by living on campus. At Cornell, students run the organic farm, Dilmun Hill, and sell their goods at a weekly farm stand in front of the student center. The dining halls supply all of Cornell's farms with fertilizer, through the 320 tons of food they compost annually. Even students' dorms and classes are kept cool sustainably, through the Lake Source Cooling system. In this system, water flows through pipes that run along the bottom of nearby Cayuga Lake, naturally cooling the water used for air conditioning. SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry, the nation's oldest college dedicated strictly to environmental studies, also has a variety of clean energy systems. Currently, the campus has a fuel cell providing electricity, and is planning to install two rooftop solar and wind turbine projects.

Although newer to the scene, Cornell and SUNY-ESF's neighboring schools are quick learners when it comes to the environment. Ithaca College is constructing the first business school in the world to receive the highest standard conferred by the U.S. Green Building Council. The college helped establish

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Get Involved!

If you're a college student or the parent of one, the range of information on college sustainability is constantly growing. The Princeton Review series is beginning to include "green" grades in its annual guidebooks. The Sustainability Report Card, which rates schools on a variety of factors relating to environmental issues, is also available at www.endowmentinstitute.org/sustainability. Also, many colleges have sustainability pages on their websites describing their efforts and how students can become involved.

Once you have decided on a college, it's time to apply. If your perfect pick still uses paper applications, you can encourage the school to go electronic at www.studentsplanttheseed.com.

However, you may already be at a university that is lagging behind. Fortunately, the National Wildlife Federation supplies a variety of resources for student activists. Their Campus Ecology website (www.nwf.org/campusecology) provides case studies of green schools, a campus greening handbook, and sustainability competitions.

You can also encourage your school to join the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment. To learn more about the commitment and which colleges have already become signatories, visit www.presidentsclimatecommitment.org. If your campus is already part of the commitment, encourage other students to visit the site to see what steps your university is already taking.



Reusable trays at SUNY Buffalo discourage students from using Styrofoam materials at meal time.

Sustainable Tompkins, a regional organization that develops local sustainability projects, including an alternative transportation plan and a "clean technology" research center. Syracuse University also promotes a sustainable transportation system, providing all students, staff, and faculty with free access to the public bus system. In addition, the university offers local and organic foods in their dining hall, and recycles about 30 percent of their waste.

Western New York

Niagara Falls is one of our country's most enduring images of nature's power and a conservation success story. Fortunately, the sustainability efforts of western New York's colleges have continued the legacy of the renowned public servants who kept this natural wonder open to all.

Since its start in the 1970s, the SUNY Buffalo Conserve UB energy conservation program has saved the school more than \$100 million. More recently, the school has developed programs to reduce their garbage. The Carry Out Club gives students a reusable tray, mug, and utensils, helping them to avoid using Styrofoam when carrying their meals out of the dining hall. They exchange their used set for

a clean one the next time they return. SUNY Geneseo has also taken an innovative approach to food. They run the Geneseo Campus Community Garden, open to anyone who would like to grow local, sustainable food. The school also established the Geneseo Public Bus Service, which provides car-free transit for residents and students.

Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva allow students to imagine their own creative projects through their Practical Sustainability course. During the semester, students attempt four different large-scale "green" practices, from dramatically reducing water usage to never riding in a car, and then write about their experiments.

University life has always been a time of growth. Fortunately, the green efforts of many of New York's colleges are providing opportunities to combine academic studies and real-world experiences. Through these projects and others like them, our state's colleges are educating and inspiring the next generation of environmental leaders.

Shannon Brescher Shea recently left New York to begin a Presidential Management Fellowship with the Department of Energy in Washington, D.C., where she serves as a communications coordinator in Vehicle Technologies within the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy.