The Role of Sustainability in the University of the Future
The Higher Standard represents a collection of unique ideas, thoughts, and resources to help Higher Ed leaders move education forward.
The Role of Sustainability in the University of the Future

According to *Inside Higher Ed*, college and university business officers are skeptical of the benefit of implementing sustainability initiatives, with a staggering 75% saying they disagree or are unsure if these efforts have led to significant financial benefits for their institution. While higher education has developed an increased focus over the last decade on building a more sustainable future for physical campuses, many schools still struggle to quantify the results despite the potential promise that these investments bring. For the schools that have made progress in this area, many have been able to benefit from substantial returns on sustainability efforts. In this issue of *The Higher Standard*, we explore schools that have been able to address this challenge to make a meaningful impact on their campus and within surrounding communities.

### UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES

28%

median annual ROI for established Green Revolving Funds (GRFs).

For many institutions, particularly those that do not have large endowments, the biggest challenge remains identifying funding for sustainability projects when budgets are tight and there are many competing priorities.

See how the University of La Verne has addressed this challenge with a Green Revolving Fund ➔ Page 3

### INFLUENTIAL INSIGHTS

75%

of CBOs are skeptical about the financial benefits generated by sustainability efforts.

Moving sustainability efforts forward requires a focus on developing a financial business case that demonstrates the potential to save money and generate ROI by actively pursuing more sustainable initiatives on campus.

Learn how to successfully build a business case for sustainability initiatives on campus ➔ Page 6

### AHEAD OF THE CURVE

96%

of facility leaders view energy efficiency as important to fulfilling their school's mission.

Higher education plays a significant role in the sustainable development of society. Making a commitment to both the campus and the surrounding community demonstrates how schools can have great influence on large, global issues.

Discover how Oberlin College embraced this leadership opportunity to make a significant impact ➔ Page 9

### FUTURE FOCUS

64%

of college applicants value having information on a school's commitment to the environment.

As more students look to attend colleges with green campuses, sustainability will continue to be a top priority. To create an impactful sustainability program, collaboration and clear communication across departments is key.

Review best practices for creating a productive sustainability program on campus ➔ Page 12

---


Putting Sustainability at the Heart of a Campus Master Plan

The University of La Verne Positions Itself as a Leader in Campus Sustainability

Celebrating its 125th anniversary this year, the University of La Verne recently completed an initiative to revamp its Master Plan—and sustainability is at the heart of the blueprint for the future. From expanding its Sustainable Campus Consortium to establishing a Green Revolving Fund, the university continues to position itself as a leader in sustainability. We sat down with University of La Verne’s Vice President of HR, IT, Facilities and Safety, Dr. Clive Houston Brown, to learn how faculty, staff, and students are working together towards creating a carbon-neutral campus.

First American: Sustainability has been at the heart of the University’s mission and master plan for many years. Explain why this has always been a top priority for the campus and how you manage to keep it as a top priority, despite competing initiatives.

Dr. Houston Brown: Founded in 1891 by the Church of the Brethren, we have always had a rich heritage of social justice, community engagement, and environmental responsibility as reflected in our four core values of Ethical Reasoning, Diversity and Inclusivity, Lifelong Learning, and Community and Civic Engagement. Though the university is no longer officially affiliated with the Brethren, those core values remain.

In our Ethical Reasoning core value, the university affirms a value system that actively supports peace with justice, respect of individuals and humanity, and the health of the planet and its people. In our Community and Civic Engagement core value, the university asserts a commitment to improving and enhancing local, regional, and global communities.

These core values are reflected in and permeate our strategic plan, which in turn shapes and guides our Facilities and Technology Master Plan. Sustainability, therefore, maintains a high priority despite competing initiatives because it is interwoven in the basic fabric of who we are as an institution and is addressed in our 2020 Vision statement.

First American: In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge schools face when trying to prioritize sustainability on campus?

Dr. Houston Brown: For many institutions, particularly those that do not have large endowments, the biggest challenge remains identifying funding for sustainability projects when budgets are tight and there are many competing priorities. We have resolved that with the Green Revolving Fund. This Fund creates the vehicle that ensures there is a separate, defined, and renewable source of funding for sustainable projects. In fact, the more projects we do, the more savings we realize as an institution, and the more the Fund grows.

First American: How do Business Officers (and other key stakeholders) evaluate and prioritize these investments? How have you been able to successfully bring these key stakeholders together on the commitment to sustainability at your university?

Dr. Houston Brown: We have been able to successfully bring key stakeholders together on the commitment to sustainability at the University of La Verne because sustainability is a natural part of who we are and what our mission encompasses. Sustainability is an important aspect to administrators, academics, and students alike at our institution, as demonstrated by our participation as an ACUPCC signatory and our early participation in the Billion Dollar Green Challenge. The key to a unified approach and commitment is joint leadership of our institution’s Sustainable Campus Consortium by a member of the President’s Executive Cabinet and the Chair of the Natural Sciences Division. This ensures the initiative has a strong academic focus and inclusion, while also ensuring it has a direct link to the institution’s leadership team for strategic and
budgetary purposes. Strong student participation is also a critical factor to ensure sustainability-related learning and development takes place during their time at the university.

There was initial resistance to funding a new initiative, the Green Revolving Fund, during tough budget times. Our solution was to identify projects the Facilities Department was already planning to do using deferred and renewal budgets—and that we knew would result in savings in utility usage—and get leadership approval to redirect the annual savings from those projects into the newly established Green Revolving Fund until the project costs were recouped. In this way, we were able to create and grow a fund without the infusion of new budget allocations (Figure 1).

“We direct 100% of the annual utility savings from each project back into the Green Revolving Fund until ROI is achieved.”

Once the project recoups its investment, savings can be directed into the Green Revolving Fund and/or returned to the institution’s General Operating Fund. At the University of La Verne, we direct 100% of the annual utility savings from each project back into the Green Revolving Fund until ROI is achieved for that project. If a lighting retrofit project costs $40,000 and has a four-year payback, meaning it reduces the campus electrical usage by $10,000/year, those annual savings are transferred from the Utilities operational budget into the Green Revolving Fund each of those four years to pay the GRF back and help fund future sustainable projects.

Once ROI is achieved, 50% of the annual utility savings from the project are returned to the institution’s General Operating Fund through a one-time, permanent reduction in budget allocation to the Utilities-Electric account. In this manner, we retain the level of our Green Revolving Fund through the ROI period and then grow it incrementally through the following three years after ROI.

First American: At the heart of your master plan is the Sustainable Campus Consortium. Describe what that is and how you were able to successfully implement this initiative on campus.

Dr. Houston Brown: The Sustainable Campus Consortium is a grass-roots group of faculty, staff, students, and community members who share a passion for sustainability and the environment. Formed many years ago, the Consortium meets on a regular basis during the school year to help guide environmental issues on campus. Over the past five years, as project funding was made available through the deferred maintenance and plant renewal funds and Green Revolving Fund, the Consortium played an active role in the oversight of sustainable initiatives on campus.

With high-level administrative and academic representation on the committee, we have a strong focus on both infrastructural and instructional initiatives around sustainability. The former is important as it moves us towards carbon neutrality, but the latter is critical because it moves us towards awareness and long-term change.

First American: When it comes to energy-efficiency projects, benchmarking yourself against other similar organizations is critical. What resources do you turn to in order to define your measurements of success?

Dr. Houston Brown: The University of La Verne makes use of the Association of Physical Plant Administrators (APPA) energy usage data for benchmarking and comparative purposes, and the Sustainable Endowments Institute’s Green Revolving Investment Tracking System (GRITS) for project and initiative tracking and benchmarking. The former provides us with strong external institutional comparison capabilities to measure how we are doing against national and regional averages (continued on page 5)
in general, and peer institutions in specific. The latter allows us to internally benchmark our anticipated energy and water reductions with what we actually achieve with our sustainable projects. We are also able to measure our success through inclusion in things like the Princeton Review’s Guide to 361 Green Colleges.

**First American:** The University of La Verne was one of the first schools in California to join the Billion Dollar Green Challenge. Describe why it was so important for your school to be a part of that initiative and what specifically it meant for your campus.

**Dr. Houston Brown:** Although the University of La Verne had long been a proponent of sustainability and environmental issues, we had never established a specific budget for these types of initiatives. In the past, they were handled on an ad-hoc basis with funding requested and provided sporadically as institutional budgets allowed. When we saw the goals of the Billion Dollar Green Challenge, we recognized the benefit of creating a perpetual revolving fund that could be used to pay for sustainable projects in perpetuity.

We overcame the obstacle of seed funding for this endowment by applying the financial savings from energy efficiency projects we already intended to do towards the Green Revolving Fund. This kick-started the Green Revolving Fund and each year that we conduct additional energy reduction projects, those savings feed back into the fund. Having that institutional commitment to re-direct the dollars from the energy savings was made possible by our public commitment to the Billion Dollar Green Challenge. What this commitment means for our campus is that we now have a dedicated, permanent, revolving source of funding for our sustainable initiatives.

**First American:** What types of projects have been implemented on campus as a result of your Sustainability Plan and what is the impact the projects have had on your campus and students?

**Dr. Houston Brown:** We have focused heavily on energy and water reduction initiatives during the last three years. We started by conducting an energy audit of 10 of our buildings and identifying issues that, once resolved, would result in more efficient operations and reductions in energy consumption. The majority of the electrical-use reduction projects involved either upgrading lighting fixtures to energy-efficient LED systems or upgrading older HVAC systems to more energy-efficient systems. These projects have reduced the university’s electric usage by 1.2 million kWh/year. We have also completed many projects to reduce water usage. We have replaced large swaths of turf with sustainable plants and drip irrigation and have also upgraded most of our toilets and faucets to low-flow versions. These projects are saving over 2.8 million gallons of water a year.

We have also, however, focused on educating our students, faculty, and staff through presentations, displays, and residence hall competitions. Each Spring, we host an energy reduction competition between the various residence halls where the winning floor that reduces consumption the most over an eight-week period gets T-shirts, a pizza party, and bragging rights for a year.

We are also seeing an increase in sustainability-related student programs and initiatives on campus over the last few years. The university has a student club called Students Engaged in Environmental Discussion and Service (SEEDS) that focuses on sustainability efforts and has helped with initiatives like the sustainable garden that was dedicated a couple of years ago.

We also include students in our research and data gathering for annual sustainability reporting requirements such as those for our ACUPCC commitment. We have not yet assessed how our sustainability efforts have impacted recruitment and retention, but we know research shows a majority of students feel an institution’s commitment to environmental and sustainability efforts are an important factor in their college selection process. In addition, a minor in Sustainability was recently approved and is in our Fall 2017 catalog.

**First American:** In your opinion, what is the most common misconception about campus sustainability that you have seen at your and other institutions?

**Dr. Houston Brown:** That sustainability projects are a financial drain on the university and the only benefit is environmental. While this might be true with some of our water-use reduction projects due to the cheap cost of water, it is certainly not the case with other projects. Many of the electricity reduction projects have very robust ROI, which can sometimes be achieved as fast as two to three years. The institution realized real budget savings through ongoing reduced utility usage. These savings lowered ongoing operational costs for the university and increased the size of our Green Revolving Fund for future initiatives.

**First American:** What are the top priorities related to your sustainability plans over the next 5 – 10 years?

**Dr. Houston Brown:** We want to continue to focus on reducing our institutional and individual carbon footprints, raising awareness of sustainability-related issues, and expanding our integration of sustainability throughout the curriculum.

**First American:** What advice would you have for other campus leaders that are attempting to make sustainability a higher priority on their campus?

**Dr. Houston Brown:** Most institutions of higher education support the idea of initiatives addressing sustainability. The resistance is generally financial in nature, especially for smaller colleges with tight budgets and limited endowments. To move sustainability efforts forward, focus on developing a financial business case that demonstrates actively pursuing sustainable initiatives has the potential to save the university money by reducing energy usage costs. Use data from peer institutions and the Sustainable Endowment Institute to show actual savings and the ROI possibilities of these initiatives.

For more details on the University of La Verne’s commitment to sustainability, visit:
https://sites.laverne.edu/sustainability/
Influential Insights

Building a Business Case for Sustainability Initiatives

Over the past decade, the focus on sustainability initiatives by colleges and universities nationwide has increased. However, making the business case for these projects still remains a challenge for most CFOs. With an increasing demand for higher education to play a significant role in building a sustainable society, making the case for these initiatives is more critical now than ever.

While the topic is not new, sustainability is becoming increasingly more important, given the rate at which we are using resources globally.

90% increase in global carbon emissions from fossil fuels since 1900.

48% increase in consumption of marketed energy anticipated by 2040.

Much of the drain on resources comes from buildings alone, which account for 40% of energy use and 1/3 of the greenhouse gases in the country. Higher education contributes significantly to these emissions, as colleges and universities collectively account for more than 5 billion square feet, $14 billion in operations and maintenance costs and spend $6-7 billion annually on energy/utility costs.

With aging buildings, rising costs and shrinking budgets have caused business officers to shift their focus toward implementing sustainable practices that run facilities more efficiently.

However, due to the difficulty of measuring these initiatives, many business officers are still skeptical of the financial benefits of this focus. Despite the challenge, more and more schools are finding ways to build a strong business case for sustainability initiatives on campus.


96% Facility leaders that view energy efficiency as important to fulfilling their school’s mission.

71% Schools planning to improve buildings in order to achieve sustainability goals.

75% CBO’s not convinced sustainability efforts have provided significant financial benefits.

College and university campuses collectively account for 5 billion sq/ft

$6-7B/year annual amount spent on higher education energy/utility costs

SUMMER 2017 ISSUE | 6
1. CONNECT TO INSTITUTIONAL MISSION

At the heart of every school’s mission is to contribute to future generations—and to society as a whole—in a meaningful and impactful way. Environmental awareness thought-leader, Dr. Anthony D. Cortese, views sustainability as that contribution and believes it should be a core component in higher education’s mission. “We are about the maintenance, renewal and evolution of civilization. If we are the people that educate all of the professions in society, we have a deep responsibility to try to fulfill that mission.” Cortese isn’t alone in this perspective, as many influential organizations and leaders in higher education also see the significant role higher education can play in building a sustainable society.

91% of business officers state institutional mission as extremely or very important in deciding to strengthen or eliminate programs and initiatives1.

2. BENCHMARK AGAINST OTHER SCHOOLS

In today’s competitive environment, it is critical to keep up with what other schools are doing. The awareness of where your college or university stands compared to other, similar institutions can be a great indicator for areas of opportunity or improvement. Benchmarking your school against others can serve as a starting point for your campus to make better informed decisions about how to run campus facilities more efficiently. Establishing baselines for your sustainability initiatives is the first step towards identifying opportunities for continuous improvement overtime.

86% of institutions participating in the AASHE’s STARS program say it has led to changes on their campus that will move it toward being more sustainable11.
3. ESTABLISH SHORT AND LONG-TERM GOALS

Since each institution is different, setting goals for your organization is critical when it comes to measuring sustainability initiatives. Working with organizations that provide resources to help schools start these conversations within their own communities is also helpful. Programs such as Second Nature’s Climate Leadership Commitment, provide a framework to develop a Climate Action Plan for your college or university. Commitments such as these encourage your campus to set goals for various types of emissions and track progress towards the goals that are specific to your own campus.

Results shared by Climate Leadership Commitment signatories (as compared to non-signatories):

- **75%** saved money with Climate Action Plan efforts
- **47%** achieved lower emissions from purchased energy
- **27%** reported less energy used per square foot.

4. QUANTIFY THE BENEFITS

Despite the potential promise of energy-efficiency initiatives, many schools still struggle to quantify the results associated with sustainability projects on campus, often times viewing these efforts as an expense only. However, the potential cost savings, rate of return, and available incentives make these projects worth the upfront investment. Below are a few examples of the ways in which institutions have been able to quantify the benefits for their campuses.

- **$28M Cost Savings** due to a 45% reduction in energy use at Appalachian State University
- **$1.9 M in Cost Savings** generated from the Waste Diversion Program at University of Washington
- **$14.5M Costs Avoided** through conservation measures at the University of Washington
- **28% Annual ROI** median ROI for established Green Revolving Funds (GRFs)
- **10-20% NPV Savings** from Large Scale Renewable Energy solutions on a 15-25-year contract
- **27 - 81% Average IRR** on low carbon investments and process energy efficiency measures
Embracing the Role as a Leader in Environmental Sustainability

Oberlin College is leading the way when it comes to environmental sustainability in higher education. Its commitment to the campus, students, and the surrounding community demonstrates how a college can embrace a leadership position on an influential global issue. With more innovation on the horizon supported by a progressive strategic plan, Oberlin is just getting started and will continue striving to make a significant impact—both on its campus and in the surrounding community—for years to come.

Colleges and universities play a significant role in the sustainable development of our communities and our society. Because of this, higher education leaders have recently focused more effort on reducing their environmental impacts over the past two decades. However, many schools still struggle to keep sustainability as a top priority among competing initiatives and shrinking budgets. With natural resources becoming more strained and additional financing scarce, the challenges faced by colleges and universities are more daunting and difficult than ever before.

Embracing Role as a Sustainability Leader

Despite these difficult times, there are leaders in education that are embracing this challenge and driving real change among their campuses and within their communities. Oberlin College, a liberal arts school in Ohio, is an example of how institutions can welcome the role of becoming a global thought and action leader in environmental sustainability.

According to Meghan Riesterer, Assistant Vice President for Campus Energy and Sustainability at Oberlin, it all starts with a strong vision, stating “at Oberlin College we strive to think beyond our physical and organizational boundaries to create energy systems, communities and lives that are sustainable and resilient.”

“We strive to think beyond our physical and organizational boundaries to create energy systems, communities and lives that are sustainable and resilient.”

This vision drives the mission of Oberlin as well, which Riesterer said is, “to lead by example and motivate others across the globe, especially students, to realize how holistic systems thinking, collaboration and decision-making affect our forward progress.”

While having a shared vision and central mission is critical, it also takes a substantial amount of time and resources to solve issues central to environmental sustainability. For many years, Oberlin has taken tangible actions toward meeting its commitment to sustainability by leveraging a culture of innovation to support and drive innovative sustainability initiatives such as the development of an aggressive climate action plan, implementation of green building practices and creation of community partnerships.

Building a Culture of Innovation

In 2006, Oberlin became one of the nation’s first higher education institutions to accept the carbon neutrality challenge by signing Second Nature’s Carbon Commitment (formerly ACUPCC), which required a 100% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2025. To accomplish this goal, the college created an aggressive Carbon Neutral Master Plan that is projected to reduce the college’s annual water consumption by 7.5 million gallons and reduce current scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions by 73%, with a 92% reduction from the 2007 baseline (Figure 1).

Oberlin also took the commitment a step further by launching the campus-wide From Coal to Carbon Neutrality (FC2CN) campaign to highlight the 2025 vision and communicate progress on various projects such as the conversion to a coal-free central heating plant and the development of a 2.27 MW solar array. This campaign also inspired a student-led initiative to track progress in real-time and give visibility into the long-term strategies for achieving the goal.

Then, in 2015 Oberlin again reinforced its leadership position by signing the Resilience Commitment, focusing on climate adaptation and resilience planning. Together, the focus on carbon neutrality and climate resilience constitute a new, integrated Climate Commitment, which enhances the ability to transcend traditional campus silos of academics, operations, student life, community engagement, and administration for holistic social impact.
Setting the Standard for Green Building

One way Oberlin strives to meet its sustainability commitments is by implementing green building practices and policies into all of its facilities. This effort ensures all new construction and renovations are built in accordance with the U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED silver standard or above. This effort continually reduces the use of campus resources and ensures that all buildings are designed with energy-efficiency in mind.

What is unique, however, is that Oberlin isn’t just following green building standards, but actually creating them. One example dates back to 2000, when the state-of-the-art, Adam Joseph Lewis Center (AJLC) facility was built on campus. This innovative building helped drive many of the LEED standards that are commonly used today and was declared by the New York Times as “the most remarkable” of a new generation of environmentally responsible buildings.

This success has also led to a culture of sustainable growth and innovation that expands green building practices beyond just single campus buildings to a whole city block, such as with the new 13-acre Green Arts District, which will serve as a driver for community economic revitalization and include the restoration of three college-owned properties; the Allen Memorial Art Museum, Hall Auditorium, and the innovative Hotel at Oberlin.

Uniquely built, the Hotel at Oberlin features geothermal walls, radiant heating and cooling, sustainable landscaping, and innovative programming, putting it at the forefront of modern green building. It is also on track to become one of five hotels in the country to receive LEED Platinum certification. In addition to its innovative technology, this facility is also positioning itself as a prime location for forward-thinking, high-impact sustainability events, such as the 2016 national conference After Fossil Fuels: the Next Economy. This event hosted many of the world’s prominent philanthropists, business leaders, and educators to collaborate on urgent changes needed for a successful transition to a sustainable economy driven by safe, renewable energy. Through efforts such as this, Oberlin College is setting a new benchmark for community-scale green development across the country.

A Collaborative Effort

While the progress made on campus is remarkable, another piece that takes Oberlin’s efforts to the next level is its commitment to the surrounding community. Through the recent participation in The Oberlin Project—a joint effort with the City of Oberlin to create a sustainable base for growth and development—the school has quickly established itself as a sustainable leader in the community.
When it comes to evaluating the impact of these initiatives, tracking performance is extremely challenging, but critical to ensure the campus is moving in the right direction. Oberlin is constantly focused on improving efficiency and has implemented several energy conservation measures (ECMs) to monitor progress and refine its strategy.

The college also developed The Oberlin Environmental Dashboard, a community-level conservation tool that helps raise awareness and serves as a building-monitoring platform for facility operators. This dashboard is what Riesterer refers to as an “energy behavior change project” that gets members of both the campus and the community involved in meeting sustainability goals. Oberlin’s conservation tools have also sparked new goals to improve waste and water reduction efforts.

**Future Endeavors**

Despite the progress made thus far, Oberlin isn’t done yet. The college has more plans on the horizon including engaging in a GHG scope 3 study for travel and waste on campus, designing a process to capture waste heat at the Lorain County Landfill electric generation station to heat and cool campus buildings (LFG CHP), and transitioning the campus to a low-medium hot water system. Throughout each effort, Oberlin is planning a multi-faceted education, engagement, and outreach campaign on campus and beyond into the large community.

From the development of an aggressive climate action plan supported by the implementation of campus energy projects to increased visibility toward progress, community involvement and student empowerment, Oberlin’s strategy serves as a shining example of how schools can plan for and achieve environmental excellence in higher education and drive significant impact on substantial global issues.

**Student Role in Sustainability**

This empowerment to drive change among the community and students is core to the mission at Oberlin. “Our students remain the key to ensuring we are staying ahead of the curve in sustainability initiatives on campus and beyond,” said Riesterer, who refers to student insights and perspectives as the most valuable part of Oberlin’s program. “Student ideas and desires have spurred many initiatives and created a culture where sustainability is embedded throughout Oberlin College,” shares Riesterer.

“Student ideas and desires have spurred many initiatives and created a culture where sustainability is embedded throughout Oberlin College.”

One example of this is a student intern that is shared between the Office of Environmental Sustainability and the Financial Planning Office. This student, known as the “Project Metrics Intern” has a very specific and meaningful role to help the institution research and recommend useful metrics relevant to sustainable decisions made by leadership in a manner that respects the financial responsibilities of the institution.

“If students are heard and empowered to create a more sustainable, resilient campus community, then the time, attention, and investment to help the students focus on ways to make forward progress will prove to be the best investment we as higher institutions will ever make,” said Riesterer.

The beauty of the approach is the students, who are on campus for about 4 years, get to live on a campus they have designed and then take the lessons learned and sustainable habits formed into the “real world” where they spend the rest of their life creating a more sustainable world for all—not just Oberlin College.

Learn more about Oberlin’s Commitment to Sustainability: [http://new.oberlin.edu/office/environmental-sustainability/](http://new.oberlin.edu/office/environmental-sustainability/)

The sustainably built Hotel at Oberlin is at the forefront of modern green building.
3 Tips for Strengthening Collaboration Among Institutional Leaders

One of the core values that every institution embodies is commitment to preserving the campus environment and surrounding communities. As institutional leaders develop strategic plans for the future, increasing sustainability is a priority for many colleges and universities. Facilities leaders, sustainability directors, and finance officers all play significant roles in improving the campus environment and empowering students to become the next generation of environmental advocates. While today’s leaders have a direct impact on implementing sustainability initiatives, they are faced with the challenge of renovating aging structures with budget constraints and limited resources. Leaders in facilities and finance must work together to overcome this obstacle and come up with innovative solutions.

With more than 20 years of experience working with colleges and universities, we’ve found that collaboration and clear communication are fundamental components for creating a productive sustainability program. However, effectively communicating a sustainability plan that demonstrates financial benefits and aligns with strategic goals can be challenging. Here are our three takeaways for communicating the financial business case for sustainability initiatives that have worked well for many schools.

1) Speaking the Same Language

As a leader of campus operations, it’s helpful to have some background in financial management to discuss sustainability initiatives with business officers. Second Nature has trained 300 Climate Leadership Commitment signatories on financial management terms needed to secure funding and make Climate Action Plans more successful.12

Here are some tips for developing a sustainability plan that outlines financial costs and benefits of the initiatives:

- Expand knowledge of financial terms and research potential funding resources such as energy grants and financing vehicles.
- Evaluate construction costs, equipment costs, installation costs, projected ROI, and estimated life of the assets for sustainability initiatives.
- Illustrate the project costs vs. energy savings visually with tables, graphs, and infographics to discuss with business leaders.

2) Aligning Goals to Enrollment and Retention

With more prospective students interested in green campus initiatives, colleges’ sustainability goals can impact the admissions process. According to the The Princeton Review 2017 College Hopes & Worries Survey Report, 64 percent of respondents said having information about colleges’ commitment to environmental issues would contribute (strongly, very much, or somewhat) to their application and attendance decisions.4 Energy conservation projects can foster collaboration and environmental stewardship among students, which can help fulfill every college’s mission to build society’s future leaders.
Here are three ways to align sustainability projects with overall strategic goals for enrollment and academic programs:

- **Coordinate initiatives with targeted enrollment and retention goals outlined in the strategic plan.**

- **Determine how the initiatives can improve curriculum objectives by offering students new academic programs and research opportunities.**

- **Evaluate other ways staff, faculty, and students can get involved by forming sustainability committees.**

3) **Seeking Valuable Alliances**

Leveraging objective data on energy cost savings from associations can help colleges know where they stand on sustainability in relation to other colleges of similar size. More than 800 institutions have registered for ASSHE STARS (Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System), which institutions can use to measure performance and evaluate other institutions’ sustainability best practices. In addition, building relationships with environmental associations and local community leaders can be resources for expertise knowledge that a business leader can relate to.

Here are several takeaways for enhancing sustainability initiatives with external data:

- **Provide ROI results from credible sustainability reports and metrics tools.**

- **Reach out to external experts from environmental associations to present research on sustainability benefits.**

- **Form an alliance with local sustainability community leaders and discuss potential for collaborative energy efforts.**

**Conclusion:**

As a financing partner that helps institutions fulfill sustainability projects, we know how strengthening collaboration between facilities directors, finance officers, sustainability directors, and external experts can be critical to drive energy projects forward. Sustainability initiatives backed by financial outcomes, strategic goals, and external data can help institutional leaders clearly demonstrate campus benefits and energy cost savings. In the future, maintaining a robust sustainability program will be increasingly important to remain competitive in the education space.
The Higher Standard represents a collection of unique ideas, thoughts, and resources to help Higher Ed leaders move education forward.

First American Education Finance is a financial services company dedicated exclusively to serving education.

Yesterday, we were students and graduates from colleges and universities across the country. Today, we are the parents of students, striving to provide the best possible education for future generations. Through the work that we do, our team dedicates their professional lives to serving the unique needs of the Education community.

For over 20 years, we have developed a deep understanding of the needs and challenges that schools are facing, allowing us to provide solutions that help deliver the best education possible to their students. Our unique solutions help schools solve challenges from campus improvement projects to technology equipment management—all through a simple and transparent experience.

Working with hundreds of schools across the country gives us the opportunity to share unique content and ideas from your peers. The Higher Standard represents a collection of these ideas, thoughts and resources to help Higher Ed leaders move education forward.

We hope you find this information valuable and encourage you to participate in the conversation. To learn more and to comment on the articles in this issue, visit www.FAEducationFinance.com/The-Higher-Standard.