



Education and Sustainability: From Idea to Action

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Why and how sustainability has become a major focus for colleges and universities is the theme of a series of Herman Miller articles. They highlight the new and exciting projects we are continually uncovering both in our research and in our partnerships with education customers.

As a long-time sustainability practitioner and advocate, we believe:

- Good design can provide a foundation for sustainability and set the stage for building a greener campus.
- Education is a powerful tool; supporting and nurturing a new generation of environmentally conscious citizens will benefit us all.
- We all need to work together to create a more sustainable world.

In our series, we examine a range of topics, from examples of student-led initiatives to instructions on how to start a green team. We hope you find these explorations valuable and inspiring, and we encourage you to share them with others.

From Idea to Action: Building a Sustainable Campus

People in colleges and universities throughout North America are committing to creating more sustainable campuses. They're launching a range of efforts, from recycling programs to meeting LEED building standards to developing alternative energy sources.

Oftentimes, these efforts begin with one person or one class with a desire to change the status quo. Something sparks an idea, then a discussion ensues, and the next thing you know an action plan is taking shape.

For the novice, starting a sustainability program may sound like an overwhelming task: Where to begin? Who to involve? What to take on? But like many challenges, it is much less intimidating when it's broken down into a step-by-step process.

And that's just what Herman Miller's "Guide Toward A Greener Campus" does. This how-to guide walks you through the process of launching a sustainability program, from recruiting team members to setting goals to communicating key messages.

Our resources for developing the guide include Herman Miller employees, higher ed customers, and students with extensive experience implementing successful initiatives both on campuses and in commercial settings.



Following is a brief summary of some of the key stages involved, assuming that you already have a core group of interested people, such as a class or a student green team to start with. After reviewing this information, we urge you to get your copy of the guide for more details. Consider it a first step on your journey to creating a more sustainable campus for your school.

Gathering the troops. You'll need to begin with a kick-off meeting where key players can be identified and recruited as active team members. At this stage, you will chose leaders, delegate responsibilities, outline objectives, plan strategies, and develop timelines.

Creating a baseline. One important step in achieving any long-term change is creating a baseline. It will help you identify needs and will also be useful for creating metrics in the future when before/after comparisons can be done.

This will require gathering information. If your goal, for example, is starting or expanding a recycling program, you would

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Under the Green Umbrella

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need to find out first what's currently going into the trash. Holding a "dumpster dive" can help you identify potential recyclables. (It isn't as bad as it sounds, and in fact, students really get into it.) This will then propel you on to the next step, which in this case, would be identifying and talking with area recyclers to learn more about the whole process.

Determining what actions will be taken. Once you've identified problems, you'll begin researching potential solutions. At this point, you will have enough information to decide what your objectives are, what you need to do to achieve them, and when the program will launch.

Communicate key messages. Communication is critical throughout the process. It's important for many reasons, not the least of which is to reinforce how your efforts will benefit the school—environmentally, financially, operationally, etc. It will also help keep your project top of mind, keep people informed, and inspire others to get involved or support the effort in other ways.

Launching the program. Finally, you will develop a launch plan and timeline, developing all the action steps necessary to accomplish your mission. But, of course, your work doesn't end here.

Continuing the program. The period following the launch is also a critical one to keep the momentum going and to make sure the program stays on track. Again, communication is key; it's important at this stage to share successes and celebrate victories. (Social media outlets, such as Facebook and Twitter, are ideal for this.)

An essential component for any launch is finding ways to make your effort become a natural part of your campus culture. This will take time, effort, and commitment, but it will benefit everyone, and the earth.

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