
Today's News

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A Longer View of Sustainability Dominates Annual Campus-Planning Conference

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Buildings intended to be friendly to the environment -- both during their construction and after they are occupied -- are a major focus again this year for architects and campus facilities officers attending the annual conference of the Society for College and University Planning. But many of those attending the conference, which began Monday, say their institutions are starting to take a broader look at issues tied to the environment and sustainability.

Those institutions are not just debating how to make their food-service and janitorial employees better stewards of the environment. The colleges are also contemplating whether and how to incorporate concepts of sustainable living into their curricula, their institutional philosophies, and their relationships with their communities, speakers at the conference said.

"We cannot continue to operate as we have," said Peter W. Bardaglio, Ithaca College's provost, during a session titled "Building Sustainability in the Curriculum." He offered as a model a precept of New York's Haudenosaunee tribes, who traditionally try to consider the impact of their decisions on the next seven generations. Colleges, Mr. Bardaglio said, should be equipping their students with both knowledge enough to protect the environment and an understanding of why doing so is essential.

Ithaca's own sustainability programs are taking their cues from such efforts as Northern Arizona University's [Ponderosa Project](#) and Emory University's [Piedmont Project](#), as well as from Berea College's campus-wide commitment to sustainability, Mr. Bardaglio said. Among other things, Ithaca is integrating sustainability into courses across the curriculum and planning a \$14-million "high performing" business-school building, to be designed by Robert A.M. Stern Architects. The college hopes the building will win a top-of-the-line platinum rating from the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program.

At the same time, Mr. Bardaglio said, Ithaca's students are studying the possibility of generating electricity from turbines mounted on the college's South Hill campus. And some students asked the college to reserve a dormitory for those interested in sustainable living, although the structure itself is just a standard-issue building.

In another session, conferencegoers heard about a recent survey that looked at the sustainability policies and practices of Boston-area colleges and universities, 11 of which responded to the

survey questionnaire. The study was conducted by Vicki Sirianni, former chief facilities officer for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Ellen A. Watts, an architect with the firm Architerra, and was intended to gather reliable information for decision makers.

It found that the 11 institutions, with student populations ranging from 225 to 25,700, had an average per-person electrical usage of 5,600 kilowatt-hours a year in the fiscal year 2003 -- but that the range ran from a low of 3,900 kilowatt-hours to a high of 10,900. Energy cost per person ranged from \$460 a year to \$1,900, with an average of \$650. Whether the institution was a small college or a large research university did not appear to affect how much power people used. Total energy costs for the 11 institutions for the fiscal year amounted to \$90-million. If that figure could be cut by a third -- through improved insulation, more reliance on daylight, and better use of natural ventilation -- the savings would pay for one new science building a year, Ms. Sirianni said.

Asked about their current sustainability practices, all 11 institutions named the same three -- construction-debris recycling, white-paper recycling, and water conservation -- but varied regarding others. When the institutions were asked what would drive them to adopt a sustainable practice, and what would prevent them from adopting a practice, the answers were twins: savings and costs. The initial cost of purchasing something, or of constructing a building, is a particular focus. "At the end of the day," said Ms. Sirianni, "we are so concerned about first cost that we will purchase something even if it's going to kill us."

Some institutions are taking a longer view, however. Mark H. Gleason, a project manager at Middlebury College, described a "think globally, act locally" philosophy that underlies not only design and construction at the college, but many other aspects of campus life as well. The philosophy is derived from a policy the college's trustees adopted in 1995 that makes every member of the Middlebury community responsible for stewardship of the environment. The trustees later endorsed sustainable-design principles for construction projects and most recently pledged to reduce the college's carbon emissions to 1990 levels by 2012.

Among the results, Mr. Gleason said, are a recycling center that prevents 62 percent of the college's waste from going to landfills, local food-service purchases that amount to 20 percent of food spending, and the production of 300 tons of compost a year that is used on college land. A building that could not be reused was instead "deconstructed" in a way that reclaimed 97.4 percent of its material, he said.

New buildings at Middlebury, meanwhile, take advantage of daylight wherever they can, and whenever possible incorporate local wood, much of it from land the college owns. Much of their furniture is made by local craftsmen. Two new residence halls were designed with natural cooling systems and without air conditioning, and a new dining hall has a "green" roof -- one planted with vegetation that will both insulate the building and slow the runoff of rainwater during storms.

The conference continues through Wednesday.