

BY DEBRA ROWE, PH.D.

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# **POWER** OF **COLLABORATION**

Do you sometimes feel that a lot of the work for sustainability rests in your office and, if you could get more staff positions on the campus involved with sustainability, your efforts would be more efficient and effective? Do you want to explore new resources about sustainability that can help you collaborate more effectively with colleagues on campus? Take a look at the Higher Education Associations Sustainability Consortium (HEASC). HEASC is a network of higher education associations with a commitment to advancing sustainable development in both their constituencies and in the system of higher education itself.

The members of HEASC include three professional associations for college and university presidents and chief academic officers that include most of the U.S. higher education institutions: the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), the American Association of State Colleges & Universities (AASCU), and the National Association of Independent Colleges & Universities (NAICU). Other members of HEASC cover specific areas or interests for the campus, including student affairs, recreation, environmental health and safety, business and procurement offices, sustainability directors, and more, as follows:

- College Student Educators International (ACPA-Student Affairs)
- Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE)
- Association of College and University Housing Officers – International (ACUHO-I)
- APPA, providing Leadership in Educational Facilities
- Campus Safety Health and Environmental Management Association (CSHEMA)
- Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU)
- National Association of College & University Business Officers (NACUBO)
- National Association of Educational Procurement (NAEP)
- NIRSA: Leaders in Collegiate Recreation
- Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities (HACU)

By working together, these associations develop and provide more useful publications, webinars, and other resources. Through ongoing discussions, collaborations, and the HEASC Fellows program, the associations are more effective at their efforts to create long-term systemic changes that will make a more sustainable future for all. APPA is a founding member of HEASC.

Since its beginnings in 2006, HEASC seeks to help higher education take the lead in making education, research, and practice for a sustainable society a reality. Higher education's leadership is critical to help businesses become sustainable, to promote thriving and secure communities, and to provide economic opportunities for the broadest number of people while preserving the life support system on which all current and future generations depend.

One strategy is to ask staff in other areas on your campus to review the online HEASC Resource Center (<http://heasc.aashe.org/content/heasc-resource-center>) and provide input about what might be helpful to use at your institution. Each HEASC member association graciously shares its key sustainability resources on the HEASC website. Visitors to the Resource Center and the News and Update page (<http://heasc.aashe.org/content/heasc-news-updates>) can learn about sustainability from a variety of staff perspectives, providing deeper insights and useful tools for a diversity of sustainability initiatives and applications.

HEASC supports its members' work in advancing sustainability by:

- Promoting and enhancing each others' sustainability efforts;
- Sharing and exchanging information, knowledge, and experiences;
- Building the capacity of the associations to make sustainability a goal of their programming and practices;
- Enhancing professional development, including training in sustainability for association staff and their constituents;
- Integrating sustainability into associations' professional development programs;
- Connecting the associations to the best expertise, resources, and information in sustainability for higher education;

- Producing publications on trends in sustainability in higher education; and
- Engaging in joint projects, and in projects with other associations and organizations that advance sustainability.

Within the past year, HEASC has furthered many of its initiatives, producing new resources for all involved in higher education. The key strategic direction for HEASC over the past four years has been to encourage using the campus and the community as a living lab for sustainability. Individual HEASC association members have developed tools to move this strategy forward.

For example, the American Association of Community Colleges produced three toolkits that can be used by all types of higher education institutions. The first tool focuses mostly on using the campus and is entitled *The Campus as a Living Lab*. It describes the potential for students to work with facilities staff to learn about and contribute to a more sustainable campus. The second tool, entitled *Creating an Environment to Grow Green Jobs: Community Colleges Shaping State and Local Policies*, recognizes and addresses the need for colleges to engage in governmental policy to remove the regulatory barriers to sustainability issues, such as energy efficiency and renewable energies. A third tool, *A Guide to Climate Resiliency and the Community College*, addresses the possible role of higher education institutions to convene and work with other regional stakeholders to prepare for climate change disruptions and build more resilient and sustainable regions.

Another example of individual association resources that benefit all HEASC members is AASHE's *Guide to Creating & Managing Sustainability Internship Programs*.

## COLLABORATION AND HEASC FELLOWS

In addition to individual HEASC associations creating resources that are useful to all HEASC members and their constituencies, the HEASC Fellows program has created useful resources to advance sustainability solutions. HEASC Fellows are higher education staff or faculty who apply to work pro-bono for approximately three hours per week on a national level project. Anyone in higher education can apply using the forms on the HEASC site and their application is reviewed by all member associations. HEASC Fellows' projects are co-designed by the Fellow and the HEASC Fellows facilitator. The Fellows' work is then highlighted on the HEASC website.

Recent Fellow projects included papers on how to raise funds for sustainability, how to build community partnerships for sustainability, career information on sustainability jobs, and how to assess supply chain emissions in higher education. Fellows

have also coordinated webinars cosponsored by HEASC members, such as the recent webinar "Civil Discourse & Civic Engagement in Student & Academic Affairs through Planet Education." This recording focuses on how to help our states move forward with clean energy plans, removing barriers to the implementation of renewable energies and energy efficiency while teaching the skills of civil discourse and civic engagement.

Collaborations between HEASC members can produce powerful results. For example, APPA and NACUBO are working together on key metrics for sustainability performance. HEASC members work together to create the Smart and Sustainable Campuses Conference (March 30-31 in Baltimore) and to support the annual Campus Sustainability Day. ACUHO-I, American College Personnel Association (ACPA), NIRSA, and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) worked together to produce a series of webinars on sustainability topics.

HEASC and association members' staffs keep an eye on the policy arena and inform each other about policy opportunities to strengthen education and actions for a sustainable future. These have turned into opportunities to inform legislators about how to make policy more relevant and useful to sustainability efforts within higher education and within society as a whole. Recent efforts included information to inform better energy legislation and include sustainability in higher education reauthorization. Efforts also support the inclusion of sustainability in federal agency grant program design.

## HEASC CALLS TO ACTION

HEASC has two active Calls to Action. One is a call to include sustainability in the job descriptions and performance reviews for all staff on campus. This is a way to institutionalize sustainability so it doesn't fade away as sustainability champions retire or move to other positions.

Secondly, HEASC has issued a call for more energy literacy on campuses for all students, with an emphasis on making students aware of the urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the possibilities for using energy efficiency and renewable energies to create solutions that pay for themselves, provide jobs, and can often provide the majority of the institution's energy needs. This call to action comes with





a list of resources that point to the potentials for such solutions. Too many students are either unaware of our need to implement more sustainable forms of energies or are taught only the doom and gloom facts instead of the successes and the analyses that point to the vast potential for more energy efficiency and renewable energies.

HEASC is presently exploring more collaboration with ecoAmerica in its Solutions Generation campaign. This initiative focuses on hidden opportunities within the climate crisis for system planning to reduce suffering from the crisis while enhancing economic and social sustainability. Multiple sectors of society (e.g., commu-

nities, healthcare) are working on creating similar initiatives with ecoAmerica via its Momentum program.

HEASC members agreed early on to support the American College & University Presidents' Climate Commitment ([www.acupcc.org](http://www.acupcc.org)). This commitment, when signed by the president of a higher education institution, commits the college or university to measure their greenhouse gas emissions and create a climate action plan to eventually eliminate these emissions. Additionally, the pledge commits the institution to educating its students about climate change challenges and possible solutions. To date, 686 signatory institutions have submitted 2,151 greenhouse gas inventories and 533 climate action plans.

While the curricular side developed more slowly than the operations work, the national trend to increase sustainability literacy is growing more robust. *Interdisciplinary Environmental and Sustainability Education: Results from the 2012 Census of U.S. Four Year Colleges and Universities* describes how the curricu-



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## ...CLOSE TO ONE-QUARTER OF ALL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES HAVE NEW EDUCATIONAL COURSES-PROGRAMS RELATED TO SUSTAINABILITY.

lar commitments to interdisciplinary environmental (IE) and sustainability have increased substantially in the past five years (Vincent et al., 2012).

The number of IE and sustainability academic programs has increased dramatically. The 2012 census identified 1,151 academic units/programs offering 1,859 baccalaureate and graduate degrees at 838 colleges and universities, a significant increase over the 840 academic units/programs identified in the original 2008 census. The number of schools offering IE and sustainability academic programs increased by 188 (29%), the number of academic units/programs by 311 (37%), and the number of degree programs by 676 (57%).<sup>1</sup>

*Sustainability Education: Results from the 2012 Census of U.S. Four Year Colleges and Universities* (Vincent et al., 2013) noted that close to one-quarter of all colleges and universities have new educational courses/programs related to sustainability.

HEASC also agreed to call for and support a sustainability tracking system. In response, AASHE created the Sustainability Tracking and Rating System (STARS). STARS provides a self-assessment that higher education staff can use to understand the depth and breadth of their present efforts and plan for improvement. This year, 105 higher education institutions earned a STARS rating, representing institutions in the United States, Canada, Ecuador, Japan, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. An annual overview and data are available at <https://stars.aashe.org/pages/about/publications.html>.

HEASC has also become involved in international sustainability efforts. HEASC is a Senior Advisory Board member for the international Sustainability Literacy Test. The Senior Advisory board includes four United Nations agencies and other international networks of higher education institutions. The test is a useful tool for educators and staff, allowing for an across-institution and across-countries assessment of basic sustainability literacy. While version one focused on basic knowledge questions regarding sustainability, version two (under development) will focus more on proactive problem-solving

skills that will help create solutions to our shared sustainability challenges. HEASC staff is involved in the development of version two, which is due to be released in the fall of 2015. The test is presently being used in over 30 countries and is available in eight languages.

The work of HEASC has been recognized and shared via the U.S. delegation to the World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, held in November 2014 in Nagoya, Japan. Other country and continent representatives, from England to Australia, Africa to Asia, have become aware of the HEASC collaborative structure and available resources.

HEASC staff is presently working with staff at the U.S. State Department to design next steps in this international arena, including the following: connecting higher education institutions to local and regional governments to build local solutions while developing students' skills for sustainability; improving communications regarding sustainability empowerment, tools, connections, and successes across countries; and developing policies for systemic change for sustainability. ♻️

### ENDNOTES

- 1 [http://www.slideshare.net/lbirkey/ncse-2012-ies-full-report?utm\\_source=slideshow02&utm\\_medium=ssemail&utm\\_campaign=share\\_slideshow\\_loggedout](http://www.slideshare.net/lbirkey/ncse-2012-ies-full-report?utm_source=slideshow02&utm_medium=ssemail&utm_campaign=share_slideshow_loggedout), pg. 7

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