



Sustainability in Higher Education

Sustainability in the Higher Education World: A Tremendous Opportunity

The sustainability movement in higher education comes as no surprise: prospective college students are increasingly outspoken about their interest in applying to colleges that demonstrate a commitment to sustainability. Thus, many colleges across the country are making sustainability a priority in their academics, research, student life, and campus operations.

To date, over 660 college and university presidents have signed the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment, which is an important step towards creating a more sustainable campus. Also, over 800 institutions are members of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. Institutions that do not commit to being more sustainable must be cautious not to fall behind the trend.

There are over 4,500 institutions of higher learning in the U.S., and many are, quite simply, massive consumers of resources. What a great opportunity to make a meaningful positive impact on the environment and educate students that will graduate and do the same in their careers.

Our in-depth experience working in the higher education industry uniquely situates us to help colleges and universities identify and apply customized sustainability solutions that will drive toward energy and water cost reductions and avoidance, improved processes for materials purchasing and waste management, higher levels of active transportation to and from campus, and more engaged students that are better prepared for life after college.

Our Higher Education Clients

In the last five years, we have built great expertise in the higher education industry through working with institutions such as the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO), the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC), Nebraska Wesleyan University, and Metropolitan Community College.



Outcomes

Our services will typically produce the following benefits:

- Improved ability to attract, retain, and develop students
- Reduced operating and maintenance costs
- Improved community relations and positive publicity
- A more resilient community and planet
- Increased financial stability

A small sample of outcomes from one client - UNMC:

- \$200,000 – 250,000 in yearly energy cost savings/avoidance
- Campus-wide Energy Star rating improved 100% in 2 years
- 39% increase in recycling volume
- Transportation demand management pilot programs
- 66% awareness levels of UNMC's sustainability efforts

“ The Verdis team offered invaluable support and guidance as we moved forward with our green efforts. Their methods are backed by research, and they have strong knowledge of how to enact behavior change on a large scale. Thanks to Verdis, we now have an initiative that benefits the environment, saves money, and increases employee satisfaction.”

Melanie Stewart

Sustainability Manager

University of Nebraska Medical Center



At right: Craig Moody (Verdis Group Managing Principal) captures notes while Daniel Lawse (Verdis Group Principal and Chief Century Thinker) facilitates conversation during UNO's Sustainability Leadership Immersion. We often facilitate these types of workshops with key stakeholders to dig into the detail of what sustainability means for an institution of higher learning and to begin envisioning the future.



Our Approach

data analysis +
performance
metrics

We firmly believe you cannot manage what you do not measure. Therefore, we begin our work by collecting data to establish a benchmark of current operations. This starting point allows us to establish specific, measurable, and achievable goals for your organization. Verdis is experienced using a variety of benchmarking tools such as the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education's Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS), EPA's Energy Star, the Greenhouse Gas Protocol, and the Campus Carbon Calculator.

static + dynamic
strategies

We are adept at identifying static opportunities to increase sustainability such as a lighting retrofit, but our ability to also pinpoint dynamic opportunities to engage and empower people allow our sustainable solutions to have the largest impact. For example, Verdis successfully coordinated with UNMC facilities staff to engage employees across campus in an energy curtailment effort that reduced peak electricity demand by nearly 20 percent during the record heat of 2012, saving tens of thousands of dollars for UNMC.

sustainability master
plan
or
climate action plan

Developing a custom sustainability plan for your organization will ensure that your sustainability initiatives align with your organizational mission and strategy. A plan must be reasonable and attainable yet bold and innovative. When the plan is complete, you will have a clear and concise vision for where you're going, know how to get there, the ability to track your progress so you know when you get there, and several tools to engage students, faculty, staff, and administration.

implementation,
advising, & tool
deployment

Once a sustainability plan is complete, the majority of our clients ask that we continue our partnership. In doing so, we help facilitate and oversee implementation activities, which can take a variety of forms. Our expertise and experience in implementing sustainability projects ensures their success and effectiveness. We also offer a few proprietary tools that can play key roles in the process. The first is a web-based Dashboard that succinctly communicates progress toward sustainability goals. The second is a web- and email-based Pledge Tool that incorporates research-validated engagement techniques that help engrain a sustainability culture into your college or university.

The main outcome of our work is typically a Sustainability Master Plan that provides a strategic roadmap to make your organization more fiscally sound, a more desirable place to work, and a bit kinder to the planet.

the
triple
bottom
line



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We wanted to take an organized, well-thought-out approach to improving sustainability, and Verdis Group fit the bill perfectly. They brought multiple disciplines together to create our plan, implement action steps, and change the way our entire organization thinks on an individual level about the wise use of precious resources.

Dennis Pate

Executive Director and CEO

Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium

