

Going 'Green'

International education offices and organizations are taking on an environmental stewardship role.

SPURRED BY INTENSIFYING GLOBAL CONCERN over the effects of climate change, many campus international education offices and education abroad organizations are delving more deeply into their environmental impacts and seeking ways to improve.

Some already participate in basic green practices, such as recycling, switching to more energy efficient lighting, and shutting down equipment at night.

But many realize they can, and must, do more.

"I think it's going to start catching on, like a ball that gets bigger and gains momentum as it starts rolling down the hill," says Astrid Jirka, outreach coordinator for

the Office of International Programs at Ithaca College, a frequent participant in green education initiatives, and codirector of the Green Passport Program.

"It is certainly a ripe field and time to try to sow the seeds of change," Jirka says.

For some offices, "going green" means making small changes as time and budget allow. For others, it means a



Green To-Do List

Education abroad organizations needn't look far for green inspiration. This list—by no means exhaustive—pulls from a variety of initiatives by universities, international education offices, program providers and associations. Consider these go-green tips.

Offices

- Set up a green office program with area representatives, tracking of results, and recognition of results.
- Recycle paper, glass, plastic, batteries, and fluorescent lights.
- Give preference to recycled materials and print double-sided.
- Convert to paperless processes and post PDFs of handbooks and guides.
- Set computer equipment to shut down at night or go into sleep mode when not in use.
- Participate in programs to minimize waste and measure results.
- Replace lighting with compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) and put lights on timers.

Facilities

- Upgrade windows to ensure maximum heat seals.
- Convert faucets to low-flow and toilets to low-flush versions.
- Purchase ENERGY STAR appliances.
- Hold contests between campus buildings and housing units to see who can reduce energy consumption the most.
- Purchase energy from renewable sources, such as wind power.
- Build new buildings with sustainable materials and design incorporating water collection, solar panels, and strategic shading.
- Consider environmental impact of overseas accom-

modations from an energy consumption standpoint, as well as location and proximity to mass transit and ease of commuting via foot or bicycle.

Student Advising and Programming

- Opt for online resources when possible.
- Distribute education abroad fair resources conservatively and offer boxes at exits for returning materials for reuse.
- Encourage student enrollment in the Green Passport Program, www.greenpassport.us/
- Support or create programs to further envi-



Carolyn Mueller (second from right), a DePauw University senior, pulls invasive weeds in March 2008 with other AustrLearn students in Anna Bay near Port Stephens as part of a Conservation Volunteers Australia volunteer weekend.

from directors to staff members to students themselves. "I just learned so many things in America we think are necessities are really just luxuries," says Jen Williams, a 23-year-old James Madison University graduate who gained a new environmental perspective during a 10-week AustrLearn internship at a wetlands center in New South Wales, Australia. "We don't need, in the summer, to have our houses and buildings at such a cool level. It's the same with the winter. In Australia, it doesn't get as cold there, but they don't keep their houses so toasty warm."

Paperless to Save Trees

When it comes to negative environmental impacts of education abroad, paper consumption is a significant contributor. To reduce paper use, some offices are switching to paperless processing and posting resource materials on their Web sites.

At the Office of International Programs at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, recently installed software has moved most of the application process online, says Seth

comprehensive audit of negative impacts and implementation of measurable goals toward reducing the organization's carbon footprint, both in the United States and at sites abroad, as well as incorporating education about sustainability into predeparture programming

In weighing what do to and when, challenges arise, such as: How can a small office

incorporate green practices on a limited budget? In trying to reduce consumption and energy, does an organization risk losing effectiveness in student advising and programming? How much can an organization ask of its staff and participants to contribute toward environmental sustainability?

Central to the success of most efforts is the ability to effect change at an individual level,

ronmental sustainability, whether through coursework, volunteering, service learning, internships or "ecopreneurship" ventures.

- Integrate host country environmental values into program design and management.

Travel

- Assess travel companies and airlines for their commitment to new sustainable aviation fuels.
- Purchase carbon offsets to address staff air travel and offer same option to student participants.
- Provide links to carbon calculators and offsetting organizations on program

materials and Web sites.

- Provide predeparture "travel light" educational materials.
- Hold "virtual" meetings via teleconferences and webinars with campus advisers.
- Create an international student forest, with new groups planting native species trees to help offset CO2 emissions.



Organizational Culture

- Form grass-roots committee to lead sustainable practices.
- Pose monthly "Green Challenges" encouraging staff to climb stairs instead of riding elevators, bring reusable rather than disposable containers and collect hard-to-recycle items (tennis shoes, batteries, old cell phones).
- Host talks on environmental topics.
- Stay informed on green trends by signing up for news from thought-leading publications, organizations and blogs.
- Share the environmental

benefits of buying local products and produce.

- Encourage use of mass transit, carpooling, and biking to work.
- Keep a donated bicycle at the office as alternative transportation.
- Set up staff volunteer days toward conservation activities, such as trail building or weed removal.

Contributing sources:

United States: Colorado State University, Forum on Education Abroad Standards of Good Practice (Sustainability proposals), Living Routes, NAFSA Task Force on Environmental Sustainability in Education Abroad, University of Colorado at Boulder, World Learning/SIT Graduate Institute, AustrLearn / AsiaLearn / EuroLearn.

Australia: Murdoch University, Southern Cross University, University of Queensland, University of Canberra, University of Technology, Sydney.

New Zealand: AUT University.

Webb, a senior coordinator of study abroad. Cost savings and more efficient processing were primary drivers behind the change, Webb says, but the environmental benefits also mattered. "We've dramatically reduced the paper we print, that students print, and that we store," he says.

Even though online services now assist in many aspects of education abroad, human interaction and some support materials will always be important, he says. "We still need

printed material to hand to students, to hand to parents, and to mail," he says. "You can't just give everybody a Web site."

Offsetting Air Travel

Outside of the environmental impacts of paper, air travel poses what is likely the greatest dilemma for environmentally sustainable education abroad.

"It's kind of fighting human nature and human desire to try to limit travel," says Lisa

Loberg, director of study abroad for California Lutheran University. "Certainly, the goal of international education is to have that exchange of people. You can't just do it online." Loberg says her program's relatively small size doesn't make it a candidate to set major trends in sustainability, but it does its part to educate students on environmental responsibility and to reduce its consumption of resources and energy. "Looking more at the big picture," she says, "I feel the contribution we make is by sending students abroad so they start to understand the responsibility they have to the greater good."

The air travel inherent in that raises difficult questions, such as: If a student flies across the world to spend six months living in similar manner to home, was the flight's environmental impact justifiable? What if the student spends part of his time in the host country planting trees? Does that act make up for the flight?

To counteract travel-related CO2 emissions, some programs encourage students to purchase carbon offsets—basically payments to environmental sustainability organizations. Doing so for a roundtrip flight from the United States to New Zealand, for example, costs roughly \$50 to \$75.

Living Routes, an educational nonprofit that runs education abroad programs in sustainable ecovillages across the globe, was an early adopter of carbon-offsetting practices. Daniel Greenberg, executive director of Living Routes and a leader in education abroad green efforts, believes solutions to the air travel pollution might include more local off-campus programming and the use of virtual technology. "I think we all have to look at every trip we make," he adds, "and decide, 'Is it worth it?'" The organization, affiliated with the University of Massachusetts Amherst, now also tracks its environmental impacts to determine its carbon footprint so it can take corrective measures, such as reducing air travel by participating in study abroad fairs "virtually."

Office Programs With Results

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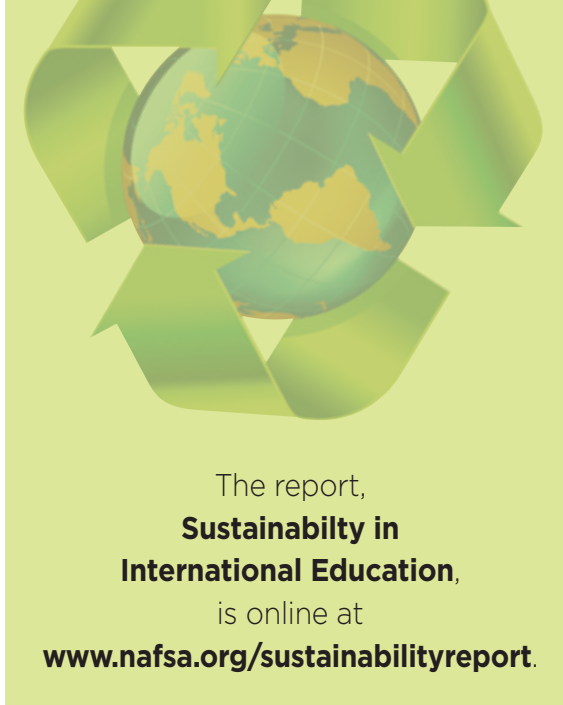
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Sustainable Student Options

If students want to, they can make environmental sustainability the focus of their abroad experience through courses, internships, service-learning programs, or volunteer opportunities. There are numerous programs offering innovative and creative experiences in these areas.

It also is possible to create short-duration environmental education programs so students focused in different academic areas can also give back to their host countries. AustrLearn/AsiaLearn/EuroLearn, for example, began partnering in 2003 with Conser-

vation Volunteers Australia (CVA) to create volunteer weekends for all program participants in Australia and New Zealand. Since then, more than 1,800 AustrLearn participants from the United States and Canada have contributed more than 6,200 volunteer days and more than \$1 million (AUD) in volunteer labor.

"I wanted a chance to learn more about conservation issues in Australia," says Carolyn Mueller, a senior at DePauw University who

Australia's University of Queensland launched a Green Office Program in 2005 that not only implemented green practices but also annually assesses its efforts with data from a survey that includes both energy and waste audits and interviews with staff members.

The program has grown from seven to more than 80 areas across three campuses, and is staffed by a student one to two days a week for 10 months a year. Last year, the program garnered a seven percent improvement over the prior year in the already participating areas of its main campus (as measured by the annual assessment). "The program has been well received, especially over the past couple of years," says Kay Ollett, environmental coordinator with the Property and Facilities Division, which runs the program. "With climate change gaining a higher profile in the community, everyone is keen to minimize their carbon footprint."

The program recruits representatives across campus and keeps them motivated through newsletters, visits to recycling facilities, speakers on environmental topics, and an annual award ceremony recognizing the most improved and best new areas. "After the first couple of years, it is important to find ways to motivate and encourage existing representatives," Ollett says. "Otherwise they tend to stop attending information sessions and hence lose interest. A key way we've been able to keep people interested is through motivational speakers presenting on different topics. We recently had a researcher give an excellent presentation on the effects of rubbish in the ocean on turtles."

Travel-Light Education

A wide variety of predeparture online resources are available so students can learn about environmental stewardship, including the Green Passport Program, www.greenpassport.us, an intercollegiate initiative started in 2007 to educate students, encourage them to pledge environmentally friendly practices while abroad, and report back on what they've learned.

"It's starting to really catch on," says Ithaca College's Jirka, who is codirector of the program. "Last fall, we had 15 students who took the pledge. Now, we have close to 150."

"This momentum we are seeing around sustainability is really quite new and powerful," she says, "as is the use of new technologies and how students can use these technologies (social networking sites, and the many networking tools they provide in particular) to communicate and spread awareness."

Going forward, the program intends to use social media and Web interactive tools so students can share experiences and serve as advocates.

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spent three days removing invasive weeds in March 2008 as a CVA volunteer while studying in Australia. "I really enjoyed my time with CVA. It definitely gave me a firsthand look at Australian environmental issues. I learned a lot, met some great people, and had a chance to get my hands dirty."

Her time in Australia allowed her to see firsthand the severity of drought conditions and the true challenges of water shortage. Since returning to the United States, she's carried forward what she learned about water conservation.

"Although we get plenty of rain in Missouri, I understand that the earth is a closed

system and the interconnectivity of our planet's water cycle is complex and important," she says. "CVA teaches its volunteers to be conscious of their everyday decisions and their personal impact on the environment."

Green Momentum

Whatever the focus of individual offices, the greening of education abroad represents an opportunity to demonstrate international leadership toward shared solutions, says Living Routes' Greenberg.

Even with a legacy of exemplary environmental programs and genuine efforts toward

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Even with a legacy of exemplary environmental programs and genuine efforts toward environmental stewardship, education abroad has room for improvement in sustainability.

environmental stewardship, education abroad has room for improvement in sustainability, he says. "Everyone I talk to recognizes it's an important issue," he says. "It's amazing that it hasn't happened yet, but it is happening now." Momentum picked up in 2007 after Greenberg launched a listserv for international educators to brainstorm ideas, collaborate, and present jointly at conferences.

Those relationships spurred the establishment of a 13-person task force commissioned by the NAFSA's Education Abroad Knowledge Community of NAFSA. To explore two questions:

- How can education abroad programs be both high quality and low impact?
- How can education abroad contribute in general to the movement toward greater environmental awareness?

In its April 2008 report to NAFSA's Education Abroad Knowledge Community, the task force recommended green practices ranging from purchasing local products to creating green office programs to choosing

conference sites based on commitments to sustainability to online bill paying systems. It isn't enough for only so-called 'environmental' programs to look at sustainability issues, Greenberg adds. "Honestly, we're still in kindergarten when it comes to how we need to be living in 40 years," he says.

The forward motion in sustainability in education abroad, however, is expected to continue as the Forum on Education Abroad incorporates sustainability into its "Standards of Good Practice" and a special pre-conference workshop on sustainability took place at NAFSA 2009 Annual Conference & Expo May 24–29 in Los Angeles. "It's only a question of time and resources," Greenberg says, "and how can we prioritize this." **IE**

CYNTHIA BANKS is founder and executive director of AustrLearn/AsiaLearn/EuroLearn—Educational Programs of GlobalLinks, a provider of education abroad programs across the globe. **STACEY HARTMANN**, AustrLearn researcher and writer, also contributed to this report.

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