



High Sustainability Ratings for UC Davis

Student-run environmental groups have the biggest impact

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Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who's the greenest of them all? Soon the answer could be UC Davis if the campus maintains the high rankings that have helped it receive accolades from environmental groups.

UC Davis was recently ranked among the top 10 campuses nationally by Greenopia, an organization that rates universities based on a seven-part sustainability criteria including sustainable architecture, recycling and composting. The College Sustainability Report Card scored the campus with a B as a "campus sustainability leader," and Sierra Magazine scored it with an A-, rated 24th out of 135 colleges in its Cool Schools survey.

It is the dedication of sustainability groups on campus that make it possible for UC Davis to achieve such ratings, with nearly all of the work falling on the shoulders of students. For example, R4 Recycling, run by Program Manager Lin King and a team of eight students, works to provide recycling services and reduce waste throughout campus as well as educate students and staff on waste management practices.

R4's largest projects are zero-waste events in which everything, including plates, cups and silverware, is compostable. Last Friday night's Buzz and Aggie football games are the most recent zero-waste events, and the group hopes to collaborate with the ARC to add Aggie basketball games to the list.

Though zero-waste events are a large part of the effort that gives UC Davis such high sustainability rankings, R4 staff assistant Brandon Dutra says peer education is the most important.

"Don't be afraid to educate your friends on what is recyclable in Davis," Dutra said. Or, he adds, "to pick on your friends for throwing something in the wrong bin."

Another environmental, albeit somewhat unknown, group is the recently reenacted Campus Center for the Environment. The CCE assists and collaborates with other environmental groups by working as a hub for all environmental organizations on campus and by providing them with the contacts that can help their visions come to fruition.

Most recently the CCE acted as the campus organizer for America's Greenest Campus, coordinated a Greek Week recycling drive with the Pan-Hellenic Society and R4, and created internships through the organization.

One of the positions at CCE is a research internship in which students will research downtown Davis businesses to assess which have the best environmental practices.

"Hopefully our interns will talk to business owners to find out where food has come from, where it is going, and if it was farmed organically," said Will Klein, co-director of CCE. "We want to produce a guide to show consumers which businesses in downtown Davis have good business practices."

In the midst of the enthusiasm over UC Davis' recent ratings is the reality of the state budget crisis and cuts in funding. As a result, R4 experienced a budget cut and had to reduce its student staff.

"We want the campus to see the value in investing in a program that is consistently making sure that we educate and promote waste reduction and recycling, which also saves the campus money," King said. "Whether or not we're going to be able to continue leading the nation in sustainability is the question."

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