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UC San Diego Campus Gets Greener

Solar trees are sprouting on top of parking structures. Renovated dorms feature new, sustainable furniture and carpet. Students can eat with compostable plates and utensils in dining halls.

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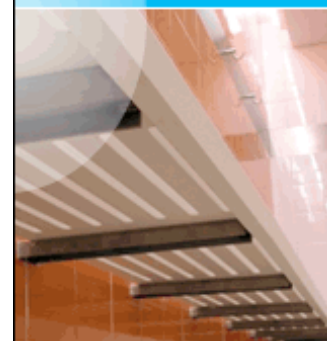
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Students use compost made on campus to fertilize the organic community garden at Sixth College. Photo courtesy of UC San Diego.

More than 28,500 students who came back to [UC San Diego](#) this year found a campus that is getting greener every day, as the university solidifies its position as a leader in sustainability among the nation's higher education institutions. This fall, sustainability initiatives have come to fruition in several areas, including facilities, housing and dining. Several student organizations also are helping make the campus greener.

"It's wonderful," said Maggie Souder, UC San Diego's campus sustainability coordinator. "We're excited to share what we're doing and we'd like students to get involved and become stewards of the planet as well."

This fall, officials will release the results of a campus wide sustainability assessment, Souder said. The campus also is developing a climate action plan, she added. The plan, to be released later this year, will set a date for the university to become climate neutral and outlines steps to reach that goal.

Green dorms and restaurants
Students coming back to campus are seeing some of steps that are already in place. For example, a \$4.5 million renovation has outfitted dorms at Sixth College with furniture and carpet made from recycled materials. The dorms also are equipped with solar thermal heating. "UC San Diego is committed to becoming one of the most sustainable college campuses in the

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country and we in Housing and Dining Services feel it is part of our mission to be at the forefront of that effort," said Mark Cunningham, executive director of the department.

On a recent Wednesday afternoon, Nick Stavros, a resident advisor at Sixth College, showed off the sustainable fixtures in his suite. He pointed to the carpet made of recycled fiber and the low-energy compact-fluorescent lights in the living room, the low-flow shower head in the bathroom and the recyclable cups in the kitchen.

"It's good to know that the university is doing all this," said Stavros, a third-year student who is majoring in world literature with a minor in environmental studies.

The university did even more. Students moving into apartments received a basket of certified green cleaning supplies, including a multi-purpose cleaner and instructions on how to use it. During orientation, students moving into campus housing also received a reusable water bottle. Warren College alone will save more than 2,000 plastic water bottles from ending up in the trash, along with the 3,000 liters of water and 500 liters of oil that would be used to manufacture the bottles.

Housing and Dining also addressed a long-standing concern this year by switching to compostable plates and utensils from plastic versions of the same. "As a program, we house more than 10,000 people and serve more than 3.4 million meals," said Cunningham. "That translates into a very large carbon footprint that we want to shrink as much as we can for our community and our world."

Composting

Student organizations also have launched new initiatives this academic year to help make the campus greener. A group of students is picking up kitchen waste at the Sierra Summit dining hall to turn it into compost. At 7 p.m. every day, they truck their loot to a site on the East Campus and compost it there, using worms and a tumbling bin. The

efforts yield 100 pounds of compost a day, which students plan to hand out to landscaping services and to the community gardens at Sixth and Warren colleges, said Michelle Kizner, a fourth-year ecology major who is involved in the effort. She spoke during a sustainability social put on by student organizations Sept. 23 at the Student Services Center. A similar event will take place Oct. 15 at The Loft @ UCSD.

Vice Chancellor Steven Relyea toured the composting facility and encouraged students to persevere, said Souder, the campus sustainability coordinator. The hope is to try and expand the program, she added. Souder also encouraged students to get involved and provide their feedback and ideas to the administration.

"We hope that students will get involved and become as enthusiastic and passionate as we are," she said.

Renewable energy

This spring, UCSD officials announced a major drive to make the campus a leading user of renewable energy. This fall, students will find solar panels on several campus buildings and canopies holding solar panels on campus parking structures. Fuel cells will make their appearance in 2009 and the campus also will be buying power generated by wind farms. The goal is to generate 7.4 megawatts of green energy and provide 10 to 15 percent of the campus' annual electrical usage from renewable sources.

Solar panels already are up on the Gilman parking structure, the EBU II building at the Jacobs School of Engineering and the campus' facilities management building. Workers are installing panels on the RIMAC Arena, the Price Center, the Hopkins parking structure and the Birch Aquarium. By December, the panels will be set to produce one megawatt of power, said David Weil, assistant director of facilities management, whose mandate includes sustainability.

The university also has signed a

power-purchase agreement that will bring two fuel cells to campus next year. The cells, which will stand near the East Campus utility plant, just east of the Shiley Eye Center, will produce 2.4 megawatts of power and will be powered by renewable methane. The methane will be trucked to campus from the Point Loma Waste Water Treatment Plant, where it is produced.

The project not only will produce green energy that replaces carbon-based energy, but also will remove pollutants from local air, since the methane is currently flared into the atmosphere at the sewage plant. The campus is partnering with Borrego Solar, Envision Solar, Kyocera, Solar Power Partners and The Linde Group for these efforts.

UC San Diego's goal is to eventually remove an equivalent of 7,000 tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere each year by producing power from renewable sources. That's the equivalent of removing 1,000 cars a year from the roads, Weil said. An agreement to purchase wind power will further increase these numbers, he said. The university also plans to add another megawatt of photo-voltaic power later on.

"It's really exciting," Weil said. "If you go around campus, you can see a lot of it is already in place. It's looking really good."

Posted 24th November 2008

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