16th Place in Sierra Club Rankings

UConn rose to 16th place nationally in 2011 rankings, up from 49th place in 2010 in the Sierra Club’s Cool Schools survey. This ranking measures sustainability efforts at hundreds of colleges and universities, including large, small, public and private schools. UConn placed ahead of all other Big East institutions and is ranked among the top 10 “greenest” public universities.

The survey evaluates energy usage, carbon footprint, purchasing, dining services, academic programs, financial support, outreach, and leadership efforts. UConn’s greatest gain was in efficiency, where our 2010 score of a 6 (out of 10) rose to a 9.5 in 2011, partly attributable to a broad retro-commissioning initiative that will reduce energy usage on campus by one million kilowatt-hours annually. Only three other schools had an equal or greater rating in this category.

UConn also rose to a 9.5 in academics and experienced a 1.5 point increase in waste management, which can likely be attributed to the 2010 opening of the Ag waste composting facility and waste reduction efforts by Dining Services. To see the rankings, click here.

McMahon Mural: Greening the Visitor’s Tour

In order to increase student awareness of UConn’s environmental successes, the Office of Environmental Policy worked with Communications, ResLife and a graphic design firm over the summer to develop an informative display for the campus. The result is a wall-size mural featured in the newly renovated community area of McMahon Residence Halls. The display is a collage of pictures and short text paragraphs explaining what UConn is doing to reduce its environmental impact. Installed in October, it is strategically placed in a high-traffic location near the McMahon model dorm room, where tour groups of prospective students, their parents and other visitors pass by several times a day.

Elements of the piece are three dimensional, increasing visual appeal and making it possible to remove and update content in each section. For example, a section of the mural is dedicated to student involvement and showcases the EcoHouse learning community and EcoHusky student group. The OEP has also conducted training sessions for orientation tour group leaders on several of the green campus highlights featured in the display. Click here to see a PDF of the mural.
Sustainable Depictions Art Show

Awareness comes in many forms - and sustainability can be expressed in many ways. These were the driving ideas behind the Sustainable Depictions Art, Photography, and Poetry Competition held by the OEP this fall. The OEP solicited submissions from UConn students, staff and faculty, as well as from regional and even international groups and individuals. More than 75 entrants competed in three categories.

“Nature and the Environment” was intended to celebrate the natural world, and we received entries depicting streams in Alaska, rainforests in Central America, cicadas, flowers in New England, sunrises in Connecticut, wildlife, fall foliage, fractal geometry of ferns, and endangered plants, to name just a few. “People in the Environment” was intended to depict people interacting in the natural world, and we received entries dealing with gardens and farms, ships, wildfires, children playing in ponds, hikers, and kayakers. “Environmental Awareness” was a broad category covering ecological concerns and activities, and entrants regaled us with their work depicting conservation efforts in Guatemala, effects of pollution and littering, oil spills, and unseasonal weather changes. A category for “Recycled 3-D Art” showcased a tree made from found objects, a hat knitted from plastic bags, and a sculpture about inequality from an 11 year-old, our youngest entrant.

Submissions were judged on artistic merit, technical skill, emotional impact, and judge’s preferences. First place winners in each category will receive their prizes this semester All winners and runners up were invited to attend the opening reception at the Willimantic Art Space on Friday, December 6th. More than 120 people attended the event to view the entries, discuss art, and talk about the themes raised. We were amazed at the high quality of entries we received, and the attendees had high praise for the efforts of all involved.

Smaller showings of winning and runner-up entries will be held on-campus throughout the spring semester at the Connecticut Natural History Museum and Homer Babbidge Library. You’ll also see winning photos, artwork, and poetry excerpts throughout our web pages, and the winning entries can be viewed here.

2011 EcoMadness Competition Brings Out the Best in Students

Fall semester has come and gone at UConn, along with yet another successful EcoMadness, the month-long energy and water conservation competition among more than 20 dormitories that house mostly first- and second-year students. The contest harnesses the competitive spirit of student residents and uses the campus-wide sub-metering program for real-time measurement of energy and water consumed in each participating dorm, or cluster of dorms. The goal is to raise environmental awareness among students in order to instill more sustainable habits for conserving energy and water in their daily lives. Working with energy management staff in Facilities, RAs and hall directors in ResLife, and student volunteer “Eco-Captains,” the OEP tracks the sub-metering data and updates the dorm standings once a week during the competition. Winners are announced in four categories: largest per person reduction of energy and water usage and lowest per person amounts of energy and water consumed overall.

The winners of this year’s competition were:
- Buckley for a 6.5% energy reduction,
- Hollister (EcoHouse) for lowest overall daily energy use at 3.45 kWh per person,
- Chandler/Lancaster for a 20.2% water reduction, and
- Hicks/Grange for lowest overall daily water use of 29.1 gallons per person.

These winning dorms were awarded offset certificates in their respective categories and celebrated with ice cream parties featuring popular flavors from UConn’s renowned Dairy Bar.

Over the course of the competition the university prevented five metric tons of CO2 emissions, based on energy conserved, and saved more than 45,000 gallons of water.

Click here to read the Daily Campus article about EcoMadness this year.
Bike-Sharing Rolls Out

This fall, the new campus bike-sharing program, “UConn Cycles,” completed its first semester in operation. With the simple objective of increasing the use of healthy, zero-emissions alternatives to car transportation around campus, the program ran on a trial basis from September to mid-November, offering 20 Raleigh Circa i8 bikes for hourly or daily use, free of charge, to anyone with a valid UConn ID.

UConn Cycles operates from the circulation desk in Babbidge Library and is overseen by an advisory group consisting of representatives from the Library, OEP, Transportation Services, EcoHusky, EcoHouse and USG. Working together in the interests of sustainable transportation, this group has produced promotional, instructional and bike safety materials for the program. UConn Cycles proved to be popular this fall, with an average of 46 checkouts a day, according to Library staff.

If the high demand continues, officials will consider making the program permanent and expanding it, with more bikes and checkout locations. A number of universities around the country have adopted similar programs. As the biking culture on campus continues to grow, the University has also installed more outdoor bike racks and created more indoor bike storage areas, and has recently designed a campus bikeway pavement marking and signage plan that will be ready to roll out this summer. UConn Cycles is off-line for the winter season but expect to see the bikes back in action this spring.

Car-Sharing Too!

Late last semester, Transportation Services unveiled UConn’s first car-sharing program, which will be managed by Hertz, a familiar name in the car rental business.

Hertz on Demand (HOD) provides students, faculty and staff at the Storrs campus with the ability to rent a car for either an hourly or a daily rate. The program took off quickly, with 274 members signing up in less than two months. This made UConn the fastest growing HOD program in the nation for the month of November. UConn’s program is already in the top 25 for number of active users and, as of December, boasted a 7.8% utilization rate.

The program provides renters with the choice of four ultra low emissions vehicles (ULEVs) - one of which is an SUV - parked at four convenient locations around campus: the Field House, Northwest residence halls, the T lot at Towers, and off of Gilbert Road in West. An hourly rental rate ranging from $8 - $9 an hour covers gas, insurance and maintenance, along with a navigation system, Bluetooth technology and 24-hour roadside assistance. Registration with HOD is free and the minimum age is eighteen. So leave your car at home, avoid the campus parking permit fee and save on gasoline costs by taking advantage of this new ULEV option for getting where you want to go off-campus.

To register for the program, click here.

Mark your calendars!

On March 26-29, UConn will host a series of events entitled “Climate Impact, Mitigation and Adaptation (CIMA): A Reflection on Our Future.” President Herbst will kick-off the week, which includes presentations by DEEP Commissioner Dan Esty, award-winning IPCC climate scientist, Michael Mann, and climate change journalist and author, Mark Hertsgaard.

UConn illustrator, Virge Kask, designed this lovely lily pond painting that was entered in the Sustainable Depictions Art Show.
Adapting to Climate Change

On December 15th, a roomful of UConn, faculty staff and students, including representatives from two regional campuses and the law school, and representatives from the Town of Mansfield, gathered to discuss UConn’s leadership role in helping the state and region adapt to climate change pressures. Individuals with expertise in biology, sociology, psychology, marine ecology, economics, health & safety and environmental law talked about the future with representatives from churches, local planning boards, and community decision-makers. The group formed UConn’s ad-hoc Climate Adaptation Task Force under the auspices of our Environmental Policy Advisory Council. The goal of the meeting was to solicit ideas that will frame a completely new adaptation section of UConn’s already comprehensive Climate Action Plan (CAP).

Past efforts under the CAP have focused mostly on what is known as climate change “mitigation” strategies for creating overall reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and otherwise reducing the carbon footprint of the University. The inclusion of a climate change “adaptation” piece will bring us into new territory - seeing the University tap its resources that monitor, document and describe climate change impacts that are already occurring, and are projected to occur. This important research by our scientists and economists is increasingly needed as major decisions are made at the community and state level. Everything from community stormwater management, to valuation of farmland, to summer electric grid capacity, will be impacted by climate change.

As a major land-grant University with a strong focus on natural sciences, UConn is well positioned to provide expertise that will be crucial in making statewide and regional land-use policies, upgrading infrastructure, making recommendations on energy and grid usage, augmenting emergency response and providing the tools for improving sustainability in local economies. The vision of the ad-hoc task force is to build off of our great resource base in order to maintain, improve and expand on UConn activities that comprise the nuts and bolts of local, state and global climate change adaptation strategies. When President Herbst renews UConn’s commitment to the CAP in March (see CIMA events notice page 3), she will be ushering in a new era of thinking about climate change. UConn will be among the first major universities to incorporate an adaptation section into its CAP.

UConn’s nomination for the award focused on the Avery Point-based Connecticut Sea Grant program. CT Sea Grant is a locally-based program funded jointly by UConn and the Sea Grant Office of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which is part of the US Department of Commerce. Thus, CT Sea Grant has involvement on the local, regional, national, and even global, levels. While the focus of CT Sea Grant is on issues that affect local marine ecosystems, each of its projects include climate change in some way. Faculty and staff involved also make sure that outreach is a large component of each project.

CT Sea Grant’s projects are numerous and varied. They include research on how climate change and eutrophication are affecting the marine ecosystems and natural resources of Long Island Sound. They also include workshops for educators on how to include marine and climate sciences in elementary school science curricula. CT Sea Grant actively participates in numerous regional efforts, including the Long Island Sound Study, the Greater New York Regional Information Bight, the Gulf of Maine Ocean Science Initiative, and a joint project with the New York Sea Grant office to monitor climate change indicators in the Sound.