From the OEP Director

‘Tis the season to count our blessings and give thanks. That starts with thanking all of you in the UConn community and OEP’s sustainability team for your hard work and commitment to best practices, as reflected in UConn’s latest green campus rankings. UConn is #7 among 600+ colleges in the new GreenMetric World University standings, and, after a rigorous audit, #4 overall among 2017’s Top Performing Institutions for Sustainability, as published last month in the Chronicle of Higher Educ.

I was also grateful for the largest turnout yet, about 200 people, at what was the third annual Higher Education Networking Event, held at the U.N.’s annual International Climate Summit and Conference of the Parties (COP), this year in Bonn, Germany. I was proud to represent UConn in welcoming our colleagues as founding co-host of this reception.

Part of the rationale for Americans attending COP23 in Bonn was to tell the rest of the world that “We Are Still In,” and committed to the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement, despite the Trump Administration’s decision to withdraw from it by 2020. That message came through loud and clear from the enthusiastic crowd of U.S. college students, faculty, staff and friends who had gathered at the 2017 reception.

“`The decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement does not mean that we as a university should abdicate our own responsibility to do what we believe is best for our state, the nation, and the world with respect to our environment.”’ - President Susan Herbst, We Are Still In webpage
An Environmental Metanoia

In keeping with the UConn tradition of Metanoia, the University has designated the Spring 2018 semester as a period of interdisciplinary exploration of sustainability and environmentalism. Since 1970, the University has held over a dozen Metanoias – periods of campus-wide reflections on our University’s and community’s relation to global events. Preparation for the next Metanoia has involved both faculty and student groups, including ECOalition and USG, who are brainstorming ways to engage the campus through a number of events and lectures. The UConn community can expect an intersection of the natural and social sciences, social justice and climate policy, and the physical and natural environment. Stay tuned to the spring semester to participate in and attend the upcoming events!

UCONN@COP

An incredible cohort of fourteen students, four faculty members, and two sustainability staff traveled to Bonn, Germany, to attend the UN’s annual Climate Change Conference (COP23) this past November. The group observed a number of stimulating climate policy discussions, interacted with other universities at networking events, explored the city of Cologne, and dined on delicious German delicacies. For details about the UConn@COP23 experience, check out the OEP blog.

Shooting for the STARS

UConn received yet another GOLD rating in its 2017 AASHE Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS) report. This report measures sustainability in higher education by rating environmental, economic, and social sustainability. The University achieved its greatest score yet on the 2017 STARS report, and showed significant strengths in research, engagement, and water, as seen in the AASHE 2017 Sustainable Campus Index.

UConn also ranked #4 in The Chronicle of Higher Education’s Top-Performing Institutions for Sustainability in 2017, and #7 in the 2017 UI GreenMetric World University Ranking.

A Bright Semester

4,000 students were given stylish and efficient LED desk lamps at the start of the Fall 2017 semester thanks to the collaboration of Eversource, EnergizeCT and UConn. Not only did this promotion raise awareness about energy efficiency among incoming students, it furthered our GHG emissions reduction goals outlined in UConn's Climate Action Plan and 2020 Vision Plan. For more details, check out EnergizeCT’s promotional video.
Impressive Milestones in the HEEP

The Hillside Environmental Education Park (HEEP) now contains 165 acres of forest, wetlands, and recreational trails, thanks to our recent 101-acre expansion. The remediation process is nearly complete, as the former landfill now contains a healthy landscape. These impressive milestones will be celebrated by the UConn Administration and OEP with a dedication ceremony in Spring 2018!

In preparation for this event, the OEP partnered with faculty, staff, and students from EcoHouse and EcoHusky to revitalize the trail system. Led by wetland scientist, Chris Mason, and an OEP staff environmental professional, Paul Ferri, the students cleared overgrown trails, removed invasive species, and gave the trails new markings during a number of service days.

Students in EcoHouse’s Service Learning Course researched the history of the Park’s land use and learned about the large variety of plants and animals in the area. This information was incorporated into new interpretive trail signs, with the help of more than a dozen faculty and staff members from the Green Campus Academic Network (GCAN), who provided further information on the park’s ecology. The signs will be installed early in the upcoming semester.

Revamped EcoCoin

EcoCoin, an updated version of the previous Wooden Nickel initiative, is a way to give back while promoting sustainable practices on campus. Starting soon, customers at the UConn bookstore will receive an EcoCoin every time they say “no” to a plastic bag at the register. This coin, which represents five cents, the cost of a plastic bag, can be dropped into one of three local charity boxes on their way out of the bookstore: CLiCK Willimantic, UConn’s Campus Sustainability Fund, or Habitat for Humanity.

Dining Services is also conducting a pilot program in Putnam Dining Hall with Quantum Biopower, an accelerated composting process that converts organic material into renewable biogas energy.

UConn Accomplishes Four of its 2020 Vision Goals by 2017

- 100% of purchased power system-wide consists of renewable energy
- Daily potable water use has decreased 30% since 2005
- 40.1% of electronic purchases are EPEAT Gold-rated
- All 8 dining halls at the main campus are Green Restaurant Certified
EcoHusky Meets President Herbst

Fall 2017 has been a busy semester for EcoHusky! In September, President Herbst invited the student group, along with other environmental student leaders on campus, to join her in the President’s box at Rentschler Field for the UConn Football game v. ECU. Students were given the incredible opportunity to discuss with her their efforts to improve campus sustainability and environmental stewardship, and thanked her for her continued leadership on these issues, especially climate action. The visit included an inspiring pep talk from UConn Hall-of-Fame Basketball coach, Jim Calhoun.

Led by Office of Environmental Policy interns, EcoHusky volunteers paraded around Rentschler Field tailgaters to collect their recyclables and promote a culture of sustainability at the Football Green Game Day. The students also had a presence at the Hartford Marathon where they helped racegoers compost correctly, and ran an interactive recycling and composting game. In the late fall, they hosted a film screening of *The Age of Consequences*, a new National Geographic documentary focused on the relationship between climate change and national security.

Stop the Drop is Back!

Call it a comeback semester: Stop the Drop is also back in a combined effort between EcoHusky, ResLife, FOBS, and the OEP. Stop the Drop stickers are rolling out in restrooms across campus, featuring three different ways to report leaking faucets, showerheads, or other water lines, in an effort to conserve water. Keep an eye out for Stop the Drop stickers and remember to report leaks immediately to Facilities Operations!

Recycling Patrol is Underway

This semester, the OEP began to collaborate with Facilities Operations and Building Services (FOBS) and EcoHusky to update and homogenize recycling throughout campus. Through EcoHusky’s ‘Recycling Patrol’ initiative, students identified key waste areas on campus that needed to be correctly coupled and bagged. With that information, the OEP has worked with FOBS to roll out new single stream recycling bins, and communicate with staff to ensure uniformity of bins throughout campus.
A Competitive EcoMadness

Congratulations to Hanks, Grange, and Buckley residence halls, this year’s winners of the annual EcoMadness competition! Held early in the fall semester to encourage water and energy reduction, the month-long event was filled with active education, increased environmental awareness, and—for the winners—a free Dairy Bar ice-cream party. Thank you to all of the participants, EcoCaptains, and ResLife staff for their hard work!

10 More Offices Go Green

This fall, 10 offices have become newly certified as “Green Offices” by taking part in the Green Office Certification Program. This initiative engages faculty and staff at UConn to reduce their environmental footprints in the workplace and beyond. By completing the comprehensive survey, office members can learn about and practice more sustainable behaviors. Recently, the OEP held its first Green Office learning workshop in Wilbur Cross for the Office of the Registrar, a newly-certified silver office on its way to getting the gold!

Tackling Waste

This year’s Football Green Game Day v. Memphis was accompanied by the 2nd annual GGD Fraternity Competition. Volunteers from EcoHusky, EcoHouse, and the Environmental Sustainability Honors UNIV class worked hard to encourage tailgaters to recycle, while collecting recyclables throughout the stadium parking lots. The Fraternity Competition was successful in reminding student tailgaters to recycle cans and bottles. For the second year in a row, Alpha Sigma Phi won the competition with the greatest number of bags recycled!

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