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Sustainability: Turning Awareness Into Action

11.15.10

Around the world, people are intensifying their focus on sustainability-on the idea of being "green." At Northeastern University, we are translating this heightened focus into action. This is reflected in how we operate the University, and in the challenges many of our brightest minds are choosing to solve.

Recently, the Sustainable Endowments Institute, one of the most rigorous assessors of sustainability practices on college campuses, awarded Northeastern one of the highest ratings in North America on its 2011 College Sustainability Report Card. Northeastern received a grade of A-, which is the highest of any Boston-based university and a significant increase from our C- grade in 2007. The report card also named Northeastern an Overall College Sustainability Leader and, for the fourth year in a row, a Campus Sustainability Leader.

This recognition is the result of our collective efforts. The outstanding expertise of our colleagues across campus, including at the Office of Sustainability and Energy Management, created policies and practices that led to the significant reduction of carbon emissions and energy consumption. The passion of our students can turn into constructive actions with measurable results as illustrated by the work of various groups on campus. When it comes to sustainability, we are indeed a model for others to emulate.

But this commitment goes beyond our physical campus-it also infuses our mission. Along with health and security, sustainability is one of three national imperatives that serve as focal points of our ambitious research agenda. We have much to be proud of in this domain:

- Under the direction of chemistry professor **Sanjeev Mukerjee**, Northeastern's Center for Renewable Energy Technology (NUCRET) recently received six highly competitive federal grants-totaling more than \$8 million-to develop affordable, energy-efficient electric cars and consumer products.
- Supported by funding from the National Science Foundation, **April Gu**, assistant professor of civil and environmental engineering, is conducting research that will yield cost-effective ways to remove industrial pollutants from water; **Akram Alshawabkeh**, professor of civil and environmental engineering, is pioneering new approaches to remediate the impact of harmful contaminants on the soil.
- Marine biologists and ocean engineers at Northeastern's internationally recognized Marine Science Center are studying how marine organisms function and cope with environmental stress.
- Recognizing that solutions to complex problems often occur at the boundaries of disciplines, the College of Science and the College of Engineering have established the Center for Urban Environmental Studies.
- As is everything we do, our sustainability efforts are global. International-affairs major **Lauren Strelbel** is working for the Foundation for Sustainable Development in Bolivia. Recently, **Corey Allard**, a biochemistry major and the first Northeastern student to conduct research in Antarctica, wowed his fellow students and guests-including me-with a presentation about his co-op studying the impact of climate change on fish embryos. **Kevin McMorrow** is one of the students in Northeastern's Engineers Without Borders chapter who drilled wells and built a rainwater catchment system in a Ugandan village this summer.

Our commitment to advance sustainable practices is also reflected throughout our curriculum across multiple disciplines. Our students are learning about sustainability in environmental science, policy, justice and society across our colleges. At the College of Engineering, students in our Energy Systems

graduate program are integrating the technological development of energy systems with the financial planning needed to implement them effectively.

Leading research universities have an opportunity-and an obligation-to develop solutions to today's grand challenges. This is particularly true with multifaceted problems such as those that threaten the sustainability of our planet. I hope everyone in the Northeastern community-students, faculty, staff, alumni-will join in these vital efforts.

Joseph E. Aoun
President

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