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The Way Forward

WILSON G. BRADSHAW and JOSEPH SHEPARD

The mission statement at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) commits the university to the pursuit of academic excellence and the promotion of environmental sustainability. One of the university's guiding principles recognises that 'informed and engaged citizens are essential to the creation of a civil and sustainable society.' Our goal is to instil in students 'an environmental consciousness that balances their economic and social aspirations with the imperative for ecological sustainability' (Florida Gulf Coast University 2002). Beyond the notion of environmental sustainability, FGCU embraces other methods of educating for sustainable development that are included in our guiding principles:

Connected knowing and collaborative learning are basic to being well educated. The University structures interdisciplinary learning experiences throughout the curriculum to endow students with the ability to think in whole systems and to understand the interrelatedness of knowledge across disciplines. Emphasis is placed on the development of teamwork skills through collaborative opportunities. Overall, the University practices the art of collective learning and collaboration in governance, operations, and planning.

Diversity is a source of renewal and vitality. The University is committed to developing capacities for living together in a democracy whose hallmark is individual, social, cultural, and intellectual diversity. It fosters a climate and models a condition of openness in which students, faculty, and staff engage multiplicity and difference with tolerance and equity.

FGCU further believes that assessment is necessary for improvement and continual renewal. Under our leadership, the university has reaffirmed its commitment to actualise our environmental and sustainability goals.

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The university community is demonstrating its commitment in other ways including, but not limited to, the following:

- 1 Encouraging and supporting faculty and student research and scholarship in the areas of climate change, renewable energy and environmental sustainability within the university's service region of southwest Florida.
- 2 Leading by example through incorporating best practices in sustainability in the university's construction, infrastructure and the preservation of our natural surroundings.
- 3 Increasing public awareness of environmental issues and fostering the development of green technologies. Such technologies would include those practices that advance carbon neutral position and would include opportunities for LEED construction, Earth Charter standards and food sustainability practices. Additionally, renewable technologies would include photovoltaics, wind, ocean thermal and biofuel, including algae. Research in both Environmental Science and Environmental Engineering would advance these goals.

Implementing environmental sustainability at FGCU will continue to be a collaborative process including all stakeholders. FGCU enjoys environmental leadership from its faculty, staff and students through such traditional forums as the Faculty Senate, the Staff Advisory Council, the Student Government Association and the Center for Environmental and Sustainability Education. The university also gets important insights from the President's Environmental Stewardship Advisory Council. This Council, which is advisory to the president, has broad representation from across the campus and the community at large. Research (Shriberg 2002) suggests that the involvement of all levels of the campus community is a more effective strategy for the successful implementation of environmental sustainability initiatives than a top-down approach. This inclusive approach of the campus community and the community at large has been, and will continue to be, critical to FGCU's success.

While Florida Gulf Coast University has made tremendous strides in environmental sustainability, there is still much to do. We need to enhance our data collection and evaluation systems to ensure that continuous and measurable progress is being achieved, making adjustments in our approaches as necessary. These adjustments must be data driven. The institution needs to increasingly become a working laboratory that promotes the most efficient and effective techniques in education, research and modelling practices for achieving our environmental objectives. Finally, FGCU's greatest environmental asset is its community of scholars, students and staff who are committed to the principles of environmental sustainability. In order to continue to be successful, it is imperative that leadership continues to emphasise inclusiveness by involving all stakeholders in the process. This will ensure that the fundamentals of environmental sustainability are not just empty statements but that they come to life in all we do.

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