

By Linda Kogan

It's Not All About the Ratings

But it doesn't hurt. I recently shared with our University Advancement and Media Relations some recent national sustainability achievements for UCCS:

- 1 of the top 26 schools in Princeton Review Green Honor Roll
- Ranked 24 out of 279 for Sierra Cool Schools
- 9th for Energy Performance in AASHE Sustainable Campus Index (This is due to over 70% of our electricity being offset by renewables.)
- 6th in Overall Top Performer among Masters' Level institutions – AASHE Sustainable Campus Index

What is exciting about this list is that it represents excellence in sustainability commitments and actions across the entire campus. It includes diversity and affordability programming, academic coursework, student engagement, health and wellness programming, and numerous operational achievements in energy, food, buildings, waste diversion, transportation and much more.

These achievements can only take place when staff, faculty, and students in many different departments contribute their energies, ideas, research, and actions to increase sustainability. The Campus Sustainability Committee, consisting of faculty and staff, and Students for Environmental Awareness and Sustainability, SEAS, have made considerable contributions through governance, campaigns, lobbying, and education. Also crucial to this success is continued UCCS leadership, supporting 3 Sustainability Strategic Plans and a Climate Action Plan, and significantly and meaningfully incorporating sustainability into overall university strategic plans and campus master plans. The Sustainability Office started 13 years ago and staff such as Kimberly Reeves, and over 50 student employees, have been integral to UCCS progress.

A sample of specific highlights of what earned UCCS these national rankings include:

- a new bus pass for all students,
- the Pedal Perks bike incentive program and being a Silver level Bike Friendly University,
- waste diversion rates of over 50%,
- an on-campus greenhouse and farm that provides local and organic food to our eateries,
- completion of 13 LEED Gold Buildings,
- a directory of all sustainability research including that of students,
- a requirement that all undergraduate UCCS students complete a sustainability course
- an improved rating on the Campus PRIDE Index to 4.5

I must also recognize the Green Action Fund for their significant contributions. In 7 years, this committee of students, managing a \$5 per student semester fee, has granted over \$600,000 toward sustainability projects on campus, many of which would not have occurred without this funding.

In this era, there are numerous national concerns, threats, and obstacles to achieving sustainability, and I for one can get downright discouraged. UCCS still has significant progress to make in many areas from operations to social justice. We still need to grapple with our role in how sustainability research and practices can be better applied in our communities, states, and nation.

But, for today, let's celebrate the journey that UCCS has undertaken and our identity as a national sustainability leader.

For further information on these rankings visit:

<https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/cool-schools-2018/cool-schools-2018-full-ranking>

<https://www.princetonreview.com/college-rankings/green-guide/green-honor-roll>

http://www.aashe.org/sustainable-campus-index/?utm_source=presrelease&utm_content=aashe