

Sustainability

Campus Laboratory

This year, students in the Sustainability Seminar, one of the courses in the Sustainability Certificate program, began exploring the question, “What is a college campus?” Is it limited to the buildings, land, and physical structures upon which learning takes place? What about vehicles, fuel, heating and electrical systems, water, and food? Or the people and places that provide them?

Challenged by this question posed by Sustainability Coordinator Ms. Jess Gerrior, students practiced looking at the Rindge campus not as a static collection of concrete, wires, trees, and soil, but as a living laboratory – a dynamic teaching tool and testing ground for ideas. Beginning with a guide called “The Campus as a Living Lab: Using the Built Environment to Revitalize College Education,” published by the US Green Building Council’s Center for Green Schools and the Sustainability Education & Economic Development (SEED) Center, students designed their own campus tour that included landmarks where sustainability was the focus. Among the elements were engaging the right campus participants, integrating sustainability into the curriculum, and engaging support beyond the campus.

Students researched their chosen landmarks and presented them to classmates. Along the way, they explained why each site – whether a natural feature, an office, technology, or other point of interest – either embodied sustainability or offered an opportunity to learn more about it. Some sites were highly visible, such as the silos containing wood pellet fuel. The students discussed how the wood fuel is locally sourced, which cuts down on green-house gas emissions from fuel delivery, and how it burns efficiently, thus reducing the demand for non-renewable fossil fuels. Single-stream recycling bins, which many students cited as increasing recycling rates on campus, were also highlighted.

Other sites were not as obvious and required students to think creatively about how sustainability becomes a socially oriented practice in their “living laboratory.” Students identified the campus



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garden, the green bulletin board in Marcucella Hall, and the dining hall in the campus center as places where community members could gather and exchange information or engage in action. The students described possibilities for how these campus features could provide opportunities for community service, experiential education, and finding out how their classroom learning relates to larger regional and global issues.

Aside from the student-designed sustainability tour, a collaborative project of the Sustainability Center and the Fitzwater Center for Communication is another example of how the Rindge campus is becoming a living lab. “Voices: Engaging Communication for Sustainability” is a year-long media campaign, funded by a New England Campus Sustainability Forum mini-grant, that is helping students “find their voice” in campus sustainability. Through public forums and communications “boot camps,” and radio, television, and print media, students are developing the knowledge and professional skills needed to exercise their voice in the campus sustainability movement.

The Sustainability Certificate program and the “Voices” campaign are just two of this year’s sustainability successes. The Sustainability Council also saw new growth both in terms of the number of attendees and the level of student leadership. The Sustainability Center continues to build relationships with facilities, dining services, athletics, residential life, and academic programs. For more information, call (603) 899-4175, send an email to sustainabilitycoordinator@franklinpiercedu, or receive updates at [Facebook.com/SustainableFPU](https://www.facebook.com/SustainableFPU).

~ By Jess Gerrior, Sustainability Coordinator