

# How Syracuse University is trying to become a more sustainable campus

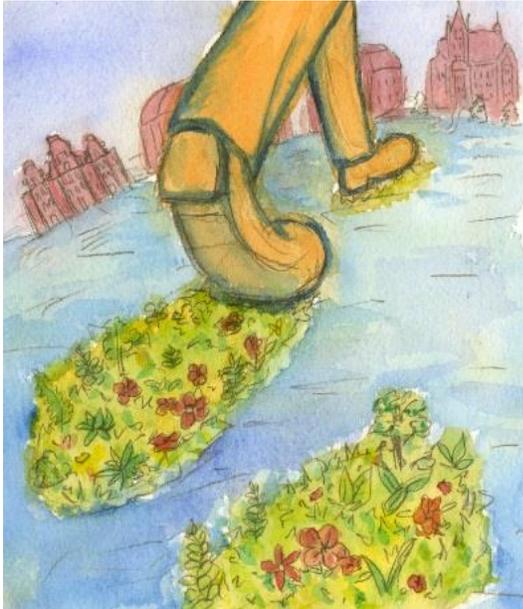


Illustration by Devyn Passaretti, February 15<sup>th</sup> 2016

By [Brigid Kennedy](#) Asst. Video Editor  
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Syracuse University is a recognized front-runner in the international movement toward sustainability, and its long-term Climate Action Plan is positioned as the driving force behind its success with sustainability.

The CAP, established in 2007, is the university's official framework and master plan to become carbon neutral — or not produce carbon emissions beyond zero — by the year 2040, said JoAnne Race, senior administrator of the Office of Sustainability Initiatives.

If all goes well, gross emissions should be reduced by at least 65,000 metric tons, according to the CAP. Any emissions remaining after Dec. 31, 2040, will be offset by the university.

Funding is built into the CAP — which means the university expects its investments in energy-saving initiatives to eventually pay for themselves. The predicted offset should begin in fiscal year 2023, with “positive program-to-date cash flow being achieved from fiscal year 2030 forward,” according to the CAP.

“When you have projects that have a payback period into the future, you actually will be saving future money that the university would be spending on maintenance or energy,” Race said. “And so they have a financial system in place where they’re investing money into sustainability projects with the understanding that actually, they’ll get some of that money back over the long term.”

Race added that SU was one of the first colleges to sign such a plan into effect, a testament to the university's long-standing commitment to sustainable living and teaching.

Sustainability is inking into every school and college here and everything that we do. Hopefully, it will just become part of the normal mindset of everyday living.

*JoAnne Race*

With the recognition SU is receiving for its sustainability efforts, this goal may not be so far off.

Best College Rankings ranked SU No. 13 for teaching sustainability. The United States Environmental Protection Agency included SU in its list of top 30 largest green power users among higher education institutions, a ranking received as a result of the university obtaining 35 percent of its power from wind energy, Race said.

She added that of this list, SU is ranked number one out of the schools in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

This interest in the green movement is not new — sustainability has been toward the top of SU’s agenda since 1972, when the university first called for energy conservation in reaction to the international energy crisis of the 1970s, according to the Office of Sustainability website.

Years later, in 1990, SU initiated its first campus recycling program. In 1993, the Environmental Finance Center was established. And in 1995, the Hendricks Chapel Lutheran Campus Ministry began its Ten Tons of Love program, which promotes the reuse of clothing and household items in the Syracuse area.



Margaret Lin | Staff Photographer

“Back through the ’90s and into the 2000s, there have been a few things we’ve accomplished each year in terms of sustainability and its just grown,” Race said. “Now, we’re up to pages of accomplishments every year.”

For example, a bike share program that the university piloted last spring is expected to expand soon. Under this program, students will be able to rent bikes for 24-hour periods from locations across campus. The official locations will be unveiled this spring, but are expected to include residence halls, the Schine Student Center and South Campus, Race said.

She added that a rainwater harvesting system on the roof of the Carrier Dome has also been implemented and has already seen positive results. As part of this project, two 25,000-gallon cisterns collect dripping rainwater from the top of the Dome, and then use it to flush the toilets inside.

“That was a successful project where we engaged engineering and (College of Visual and Performing Arts) students,” Race said. “Engineering students were involved in the planning and design and construction. Also VPA students designed the signage.”

Further examples of sustainable initiatives already on campus include the Climate Change Garden next to the Life Sciences Complex, the 240 solar thermal panels used to heat water on South Campus and the compost of all pre- and post-consumer food waste from all eight university dining halls, according to the website.

Although the exact details of the Fast Forward initiative’s Campus Master Plan have not yet been released, Race said she believes that sustainability will “absolutely” be incorporated into the plan, which is being developed by both Sasaki Associates — a design firm operating out of Massachusetts — and the SU administration.

Melissa Cadwell, marketing manager for the sustainability division at SU, said she “truly believes the administration values sustainability.”

Her faith, she said, results from the presence of the university’s campus sustainability committee — a group of students, faculty and staff that meets several times a semester to communicate sustainability issues and goals.

Representatives from the campus community that specialize in purchasing, dining and construction attend the meetings, Cadwell said.

To get that amount of people from the university to come together and talk about sustainability, to me, tells me they believe in it and they want to see the university succeed in making it a sustainable campus.

*Melissa Cadwell*

But a large and looming issue in campus sustainability lies in informing the generally uninformed student body, a task Maria Dombrov, president of Students of Sustainability, said is “really difficult.”

Dombrov said she and the other members of SoS work closely with the Office of Sustainability Initiatives to ensure SU students are aware of on-campus climate initiatives and university programs.

“Our organization is very involved with the university aspects of bridging students organizations with university programming,” Dombrov said.

To further help the cause, SU has undertaken an effort at curriculum advancement as part of the CAP.

The Sustainability in the Curriculum Task Force, created in fall 2008, is charged with “reviewing selected models of sustainability education, evaluating the current state of educational opportunities at SU . . . and preparing possible revisions to existing curricula and introduction of new academic programs,” according to the CAP.

“Climate change in general is our world’s most challenging, important problem of our time at the moment,” Race said. “I feel like the whole future of our planet is at stake, and I just feel that the more exposure students have, the more they seem to understand.”