No Planet B
Students know that it’s A-plus time for higher ed’s efforts to help preserve our earth

In February 2022, the United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued a report on the perilous and wide-ranging alterations to nature resulting from human-caused climate change. Even incremental increases in global temperature, the report warned, will lead to more diseases, deaths, and disasters, with the repercussions more calamitous for poorer countries than for wealthier ones. Indeed, the communities and places least ready to adapt to a warming world are already dealing with effects of climate change and will continue to face worsening conditions. African nations, as the Washington Post notes, will experience more extreme heat exposure than other areas of the world and will require large investments in adaptation projects. Despite the dire nature of the report, however, scientists say that it is still possible to prevent the planet from becoming uninhabitable. Humans, though, must act now.

From producing cutting-edge research to educating students to understand environmental challenges, institutions of higher education have one of the most important roles to play in tackling climate change and other threats to our planet. Moreover, students, concerned about the future, are leading environmental activism efforts. In this issue’s Research Corner, we look at how current and future college students from around the world view the challenge of climate change and the roles their education and their institutions are playing in sustainability efforts. We also look at how ready educators from around the globe think their institutions are to tackle the challenges ahead. Colleges and universities have always been leaders of scientific innovation and social activism. Those endeavors might be more important now than they have ever been. The very existence of life on Earth is at stake.

Is your campus ready for the global challenge? Educators from 45 different countries weigh in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is your institution prepared to teach climate change-related concepts?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have you received or pursued training on educating for climate change?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes, received</th>
<th>Yes, pursued</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Not yet, but future training in progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>41.9</td>
</tr>
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</table>

At least 217 higher education institutions have established internal green revolving funds to invest in sustainable changes. Cost savings are used for future environmental initiatives.

“In our core demand is access and representation and to uproot the system. Young people are angry. . . . [We are] so often excluded from these conversations in which all these huge decisions that directly impact us are happening. It feels like we’re watching the world burn while we’re locked out of the conversation over what to do about it.”

—Liv Schroeder, Pitzer College student and national policy coordinator for Fridays for Future USA, told Sierra magazine in September 2021.

“We’ve become so good at specialization in STEM education that we divide knowledge into smaller and smaller pieces, and we understand those little pieces exceptionally well. But it’s not enough. We need to equip citizens and scientists to think bigger, to think outside and across the boundaries of their disciplines.”

—Peter Mahaffy, professor of chemistry at King’s University in Edmonton, Alberta, told Time in April 2021.

“If climate change is presented as a separate subject, we run the risk that students won’t relate climate change to their daily lives and their professional fields. . . . Natural scientists are learning the science of climate change, but engineering students in Spain are still learning about the internal-combustion engine as if it were still viable in a few years.”

—Serafín Huertas, an educator at Spain’s Centre for Environmental Education of the Valencian Community, told Time in April 2021.

Future fears
75% of college students worldwide say they are worried about climate change and their future, while 11% are relaxed, 8% indifferent, and 6% don’t know how they feel.
Higher ed students are seeking a green learning experience

More students are looking at sustainability efforts when considering which college or university to attend. In a 2022 Princeton Review survey, 74% of prospective students and their parents said a campus’s commitment to environmental concerns would affect their enrollment decisions. Here’s what current students have to say about their education and sustainability:

92% of respondents to a 2021 Students Organizing for Sustainability International survey of higher ed students around the world say all higher ed institutions should actively incorporate and promote sustainable development. 85% say they want to learn more about sustainability, and 73% say all courses should cover it.

48% say their institutions offer opportunities to engage in action on sustainability. 46% say their campuses do enough to limit its effects on the environment and society.

50% Almost 50% know about the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, which aim to enhance health and education, decrease inequality, and propel economic growth while also working to address climate change and preserve the earth’s oceans and forests.

**Successful outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>No Opinion</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>79%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My studies are helping me learn how I can have a positive impact on the world around me.
My studies are helping me learn how to make changes to my lifestyle to help the environment.

**Thinking ahead**

Future and current college students are motivated to tackle global challenges

76% of Generation Z adults in the US say climate change is a top concern for them. Today’s children are expected to live through three times as many extreme climate events as their grandparents.

67% of students aged 13–19 worldwide believe many major issues, including climate change, poverty, and economic inequality, will be worse by 2030.

**It’s personal**

Students are taking individual steps to help the planet. In the United Kingdom:

76% of undergraduates say it’s important that shopping brands work to tackle climate change.
59% always or often minimize the number of flights they take.
50% belong to a group working to address climate change at university or are interested in joining one.
44%, at least some of the time, maintain a vegan diet, and 68% maintain a vegetarian diet.

College students worldwide are ready for political leaders to do more to combat climate change

“Young voters are not interested in having a debate about whether climate change is real, because they see it’s happening everyday,” Stephen Perkins of the American Conservation Coalition told Sierra in 2021. Indeed, students around the globe want governments to act:

**The mental toll**

Climate change is causing mental health problems among college students, notes Tufts University’s Office of Sustainability. Some reasons:

- Immediate or long-term experiences with climate change can create anxiety about the future.
- Climate change can cause a sense of grief for an altering world.
- Climate change can create anxiety about the future.

**Educational resources**

University of Maine’s Climate Change Institute climatechange.ume.edu/climate-matters/climate-education-resources
Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Climate Portal climate.mit.edu
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration climate.gov/teaching
US Global Change GlobalChange.gov
NASA Wavelength resources collection science.nasa.gov/learners/wavelength

**Sources:** (1) 2021 Environmental Sciences Europe report (2) Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (3) 2021 Students Organizing for Sustainability International survey (4) 2021 Students Organizing for Sustainability International survey (5) 2021 Pew Research Centers survey (6) 2021 American Conservation Coalition report (7) 2020 Cambridge International Global Perspectives survey (8) 2021 Students Organizing for Sustainability International survey (9) 2020 Cambridge International Global Perspectives survey (10) 2021 Students Organizing for Sustainability International survey