

A Brief Summary of ACS Environmental Programs Accomplishments, 1997-2013

The following report provides a very brief summary of some of the environmental programs and activities undertaken by ACS colleges and universities over the past 12 years, with primary emphasis on the years 2001 through 2009.

Since the inception of the ACS environmental initiative, ACS institutions have made great strides, augmenting environmental citizenship in every aspect of campus life, including 1) physical operations, 2) student development and engagement, 3) campus-community partnerships, and 4) the academic realm. The origins of our “green” blossoming can be traced as far back as 1997, to seeds planted by the V. Kann Rasmussen Foundation’s initial support of the initiative. More recent support from VKRF (ending in 2003) and from the Jessie Ball DuPont Fund (2005-2006), as well as ongoing support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, gave further impetus to ACS universities’ and colleges’ forward movement. Today, our funding focuses exclusively on academics (the Environmental Post-Doctoral Fellows program), but the blossoms are “perennials” in the other areas mentioned above.

Evidence of ACS environmental success is everywhere. Throughout the course of the environmental initiative, we have attracted the most motivated and dedicated faculty, students, and staff to participate in our programs, including more than 131 Faculty Fellows, 16 Facilities Fellows, 269 Student Interns, and 180 Alliance members. We have also hosted or supported 42 conferences and/or workshops, with a total of over 1000 participants. In the past 12 years, we estimate that at least 7000 ACS faculty, students, and staff, and several hundred members of the surrounding communities, have been affected by a wide variety ACS Environmental Programs projects and activities, many of which grew out of our conferences.

We are proud to note that, as a result of participation in our programs, ACS institutions are making permanent physical and cultural changes that emphasize “green” thinking. One highly visible example: ten out of sixteen ACS presidents have signed the American Colleges and Universities Presidents Climate Commitment (ACUPCC), an act which assures the rest of the world these institutions are serious about achieving “climate neutrality” within a reasonable time period (for more information, go to www.presidentsclimatecommitment.org/). Faculty and staff members now working to carry out ACUPCC requirements for their presidents are those very same faculty and staff who acted as Faculty Fellows and Facilities Fellows, who attended ACS environmental conferences and workshops, and who played a key role in ACS environmental alliance and grant activities.¹ Clearly, these ten signatory presidents made the commitment because of the influence of ACS Environmental Programs in Sustainability and the Environment (ACSPSE). More details about campus environmental progress can be found below.

I. Physical Operations

A. Workshops for campus change

Raising environmental awareness of facilities staff is a crucial step in the movement towards change, and between 2001 and 2009, ACS facilities and grounds personnel have implemented sweeping campus changes while working toward large and small goals, from recycling to limiting greenhouse gas emissions. ACSPSE conferences and workshops have helped educate facilities personnel about a number of environmental issues, including ways to develop energy-efficient, environmentally-friendly, and climate-neutral buildings and grounds. In the past 12 years, ACSPSE hosted 15 conferences that included a “greening the campus” focus. At these gatherings, facilities managers and staff from all over the south discussed best practices and received encouragement and advice from experts and peers, sharing information about managing issues such as water scarcity, recycling challenges in the south, waste reduction, native and organic landscaping, energy conservation, and much more. (For more information, please see our conference archives at <http://www.colleges.org/enviro/workshops/index.html>.)

¹ The testimony of ACS faculty at a recent Academic Deans meeting demonstrates that the highly successful ACS environmental initiative has greatly changed ACS campuses for the better (to read this testimony, please go to http://www.colleges.org/enviro/supporting_ACSPSE.pdf).

B. Spreading the good news about campus practices

Great ideas are contagious: to name one example, products and practices such as waterless urinals and integrated pest management have spread throughout the consortium after ACS facilities staff learned at our conferences how these practices were being managed at Rollins College.

C. LEED buildings

Similarly, green building practices “caught on” after facilities managers attended ACS green building charettes, LEED presentations at conferences, hired LEED student interns, listened to Green Building Council speakers, and the like. Today, our colleges and universities have progressed from none to twelve campuses with LEED or LEED-like structures, and more such buildings are on the way. One of these (Furman) was the first LEED building in South Carolina, and another (Spelman) was the first LEED building at a Historically Black College/University.

D. Alliance-supported physical operations projects

In addition, the ACS “Campus as a Lab for Sustainability” Alliance encouraged facilities staff to work with faculty and students to create innovative environmental projects that changed their campuses for the better. Since 2001, ACS supported more than 27 physical operations projects, from recycling, to waste reduction, to water conservation, to alternative fuels/energy, to native/organic landscaping, to composting, to green residence halls, to name only a few.

- i. Some example project titles include Alternative Fuel Vehicles (Richmond), Solar Shingles (Rollins), Sustainable Landscaping (Southwestern), Grey Water Recovery (Trinity), Biodiesel Production (Furman), and Green Bikes (Rhodes).
- ii. One very exciting project that ACS helped initiate is Washington and Lee University’s cafeteria waste composting endeavor. ACSPSE provided a few thousand dollars for composting tubs, and put the major players in touch with composters across the consortium. WLU’s passionate staff, faculty, and students then created such a successful program that the university got involved, assigning part-time, then full time staff to the project, and finally purchasing upgraded equipment. That one little compost operation now recycles up to 19,000 pounds of “prep food” waste annually.
- iii. A visit to WLU to learn about its composting operations encouraged and inspired the Trinity facilities manager to purchase TWO composting tubs and begin the process at that campus as well.

II. Student Development and Engagement

A. Workshops for students

Between 1998 and 2009, the ACS Programs in Sustainability and the Environment brought students together from all over the south for 11 workshops and conferences, educating them and providing an opportunity to share information and network about environmental research, career options, leadership, internships, and ways to change their campus culture. (For more information, please see our conference archives at <http://www.colleges.org/enviro/workshops/index.html>.)

- i. Through an ACS collaborative workshop, for example, ACS spread the practice of creating an environmental residents program, adding a “green” student to each housing facility on several campuses. The most striking success is Sewanee, which dedicated an entire program to the ERs, as they are called, with a special residence

hall, green materials library, an ECO-Cup challenge, and various programs like the Green Graduation Pledge (see <http://ers.sewanee.edu/>).

- ii. Other campuses that have replicated aspects of Sewanee's ER program include Hendrix, Rhodes, Millsaps, and Furman.

B. Alliance-supported student projects

Because of ACS conferences, and with support from the "Student Development and Engagement" Alliance (SDE), ACS students have developed more than 89 on- and off-campus projects since 2001.

- i. To name a few projects ACS has supported in the past eight years: student-advocated pedestrian and bicycle alternatives to automobiles (Sewanee); tire pressure check events (Rhodes); paper flier elimination drives (Morehouse); food waste limits (Richmond); fair trade and organic/local meals in cafeterias (Furman); environmental film festivals (Trinity); and lake-, river-, and ocean-clean ups (Furman, Centre, Rollins).
- ii. Some other representative projects include Stomp Out Styrofoam (BSC), GeoCorps internship at Denali National Park (Sewanee), Permaculture Feasibility Study (Millsaps), Green to the Last Drop coffee (BSC), and Carolinas Clean Air Coalition internship (Davidson).

C. Student environmental research

The SDE supported student environmental research as well, including creating conference venues at which student research could be presented.

- i. One particularly interesting research subject was a senior thesis by a Davidson interdisciplinary studies major (environmental concentration). She compared green facilities management at ACS campuses, using interviews with the managers (whom she met at an ACS Green Campus conference), as well as statistics and other information provided by those managers.
- ii. Another fascinating study supported by SDE was a multi-campus hybrid car demonstration by a Rollins student. He drove throughout the 12 ACS states in a Toyota Prius, giving campus demonstrations and test drives to students and faculty (this project was undertaken soon after the Prius first came out). The student then compared his mileage statistics with average driving stats for students at the campuses he visited.
- iii. Both the Environmental Summit at Morehouse (2005) and the Undergraduate Environmental Research and Faculty Development Conference at Spelman (2004) devoted considerable tracks to student papers and posters. The ACS Student Environmental Leadership workshop, which met at the Southeast Student Renewable Energy Conference (UNC Chapel Hill), also provided opportunities for students to share research, this time with an even larger audience. (For more information, please see our conference archives at <http://www.colleges.org/enviro/workshops/index.html>.)

III. Campus-Community Partnerships

A. Community partnership conferences and workshops

Between 1998 and 2008, ACS hosted 10 conferences and workshops that focused on, or had tracks involving, campus-community partnerships. (For more information, please see our conference archives at <http://www.colleges.org/enviro/workshops/index.html>.)

B. Alliance-supported projects in the greater communities

In the last eight years, ACSPSE has encouraged students, faculty, and staff to reach out to the non-academic communities in our states, in the region, and across the world. Via the “Campus-Community Partnerships” Alliance (CCP), we helped to create more than 39 partnerships to conserve wetlands, create ecoscapes, plant community gardens, implement urban planning and storm water management, monitor and improve water quality, and enhance trails and bird blinds at wildlife refuges.

C. Other partnership projects

- i. A few representative titles of campus-community partnerships include Native Gardens in Winter Park (Rollins), Shenandoah Land Conservation (Sewanee), and Brown Springs Ecoscape (BSC).
- ii. One project, “Service Learning and Water Purification in the Dominican Republic” (<http://tars.rollins.edu/int-programs/water.html>), is now an ongoing, annual community partnership that may soon be replicated in South Africa, via a consortial partnership with FOTIM ([Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis](#) of South Africa). In addition, this project may be taken to Haiti, to help survivors of the devastating earthquake in 2010.
- iii. Birmingham-Southern’s (BSC) special environmental focus has always been partnering with the community, whether through service learning or via its own Southern Environmental Center (www.bsc.edu/sec/). The Center is the largest educational facility of its kind in Alabama and can handle groups of up to 200 visitors at a time. In addition to its award-winning Interactive Museum and EcoScape Gardens, the SEC has initiated a number of model partnerships targeting water quality, smog, and urban sprawl. Many of its activities were supported by grants from the Campus-Community Partnership alliance.
- iv. Another helpful partnership is Davidson’s ongoing *Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Outreach* (http://www.bio.davidson.edu/people/midorcas/herpconservation/herpcons_home.htm), which identifies our scaly animal friends for North Carolinians, educating them to value and help protect the animals. This partnership was first conceived via a grant from the CCP.

IV. Academia

A. Workshops and conferences that changed the curriculum

In the past decade, ACS hosted or supported 17 conferences and workshops involving environmental teaching, curriculum, and research, including two conferences specifically designed to assist campuses in creating an environmental studies major, minor, program or concentration. (For more information, please see our conference archives at <http://www.colleges.org/enviro/workshops/index.html>.)

- i. In 2001, only three of our institutions had an environmental studies major, minor, or concentration. With ACSPSE encouragement, over the years that number has risen

steadily. Today, all 16 ACS schools have at least one academic program focusing on the environment, and some have multiple programs.

B. Alliance-supported teaching/faculty projects

Between 2001 and 2008, the “Curriculum and Faculty Development” Alliance supported at least 77 curriculum and/or faculty development projects, motivating professors to bring the environment not only to their science courses but to those in the humanities and social sciences as well, designing curricular and co-curricular programs in the U.S. and abroad.

- i. A few interesting titles include African Ecology (Morehouse), Green Physics (Trinity), Religion and Animals (Hendrix), Indigenous Perspectives (Rhodes), The Art of Civic Design (Rollins), Island Biogeography and Species Conservation: Science and Literature (WLU), and Russian Environmental Politics (Centre).
- ii. ACS also supported numerous international courses. The most visible and long-lived example (2000-2006) was Rollins’ inter-institutional, interdisciplinary summer course, Sustainable Development in Costa Rica, team taught by professors from several different ACS institutions, and attended over the years by students from almost every ACS school (<http://www.colleges.org/enviro/programs/costarica.html>).

C. ACS Environmental Postdoctoral Fellows Program

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation board awarded ACS \$3.5 million to support 24 Post-doctoral Fellows in environmental studies between late 2008 and 2013. The program provides a strong boost to environmental initiatives on the campuses and in the consortium. The Postdoctoral Fellowship Program will help prepare new PhDs for successful careers as interdisciplinary teachers and scholars in environmental fields. Fellows will receive a rich, productive introduction to teaching and research in topnotch small college settings with high teacher-student ratios, mentored by some of the best liberal arts professors in the country. Twelve Fellows are in place on campuses for fall 2009 through spring 2011, and a second flight of twelve will be hired for fall 2011-2013.