

A Matter of Common Sense

If we don't take care of the earth, and our culture, who will?

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IT MAKES SENSE that the endowment for UNH's sustainability program—the first of its kind in the country—came from a farmer. The late Oliver Hubbard '21, who gave the university \$10 million in the mid-'90s, grew up on a New Hampshire farm long before the words "organic" and "sustainable" were in vogue. But that's what those early farms were all about.

"We didn't call it that," says Charles Schwab, a UNH professor of animal and nutritional sciences who was also raised on a farm. "But that's what it was. It was about taking care of the soil to produce good feed to take care of the animals—who then took care of you. You learned to work the entire system without a lot of supplements and chemicals... Sustainability is a matter of common sense."

It also is a matter of defining what really sustains human civilization and understanding the interdependence of systems—not just on a single farm, but globally. Not to mention good business practices and wise use of resources.

"Hubbard understood that a university is all about intellectual, critical learning and pushing the edges of how the world works," says Peter Lamb '76, a University System of New Hampshire trustee who helped secure the sustainability endowment. "He recognized sustainability as a concept that could change the entire university long term." And he understood the role universities play in changing the world.

Because of the Hubbard endowment, sustainability initiatives have been reaching most parts of campus for more than a decade, bringing people together across disciplines, departments and colleges, and setting UNH on the path to being recognized as a sustainable learning community in the same way that it's known as a land-, sea- and space-grant institution.

At UNH, sustainability initiatives cut across what Tom Kelly, UNH's chief sustainability officer, has coined the CORE—curriculum, operations, research and engagement with the state and region.

"Greening—the old environmental notion of being more efficient and getting rid of chemical pollution—covers only the 'O' of CORE," says Kelly. "It's important, but we could make a campus 'green' and never think about what and how we're teaching and researching and whether or not it's responsive to the challenges of sustainability."

According to Kelly, that challenge involves maintaining the integrity of four broad, interlocked systems: biodiversity, climate, food and culture. At UNH, the scope of those four systems takes in just about everything—whether it's public art or a pipeline that will soon deliver methane to UNH from a Rochester landfill. In fact, there's a list of 32 sustainability initiatives on the University Office of Sustainability's extensive web site, and many link to a network of related projects.

"If you look around, the whole university is organized around sustainability, and it's not the cheap, 'Hey, recycle your cans and everything will be fine' kind," says Stephen Trzaskoma, associate professor of classics. At Kelly's suggestion, the classics department helped create an interdisciplinary, interactive exhibit in the MUB, connected to photovoltaic panels on the roof, which explored the science of the sun and its central role in the Earth's existence, art, culture and mythology.

Another example is parking—the one issue Kelly was warned to avoid when he arrived on campus in 1997. Instead he brought together campus, town and regional officials to develop a transportation management strategy. Wildcat Transit ridership has doubled since 2000, parking permit requests have leveled off and the Environmental Protection Agency has declared UNH a Best Workplace for Commuters every year since 2004.

Campus parking, of course, remains a favorite source of grumbling. "But a year or two from now, if fuel is even more expensive, people are going to be able to adapt and change more easily because there's an infrastructure," says Lamb.



"THE OLD WAY WAS TO ISOLATE A PROBLEM AND TRY TO SOLVE IT," SAYS KELLY. "WITH SUSTAINABILITY, WE DON'T ISOLATE PROBLEMS; WE PUT THEM IN THE CONTEXT OF A WHOLE SET OF RELATIONS."

"Thanks in large part to Tom Kelly's tutelage and vision, UNH has been establishing itself as America's most sustainable learning community—we just haven't been making a lot of noise about it," says President Mark Huddleston. "Our impact on campus ripples out into the state and even the nation as our graduates take their knowledge and experience with them—helping to guide and educate their new communities in the ways of sustainability."

AN ESSENTIAL PART of sustainability is a wariness of single-factor analyses. Kelly speaks of "carbon blindness"—measuring everything only in terms of reducing carbon emissions, or disregarding the impact carbon-emission reduction might have on other life-sustaining systems. "Climate change is a mega-issue and must be addressed. But there are equally urgent issues," he says. For instance, switching to biofuels might reduce carbon emissions, but using crops to produce those fuels is also seriously affecting the world's food system. "With sustainability, we don't isolate problems," says Kelly. "We put them in the context of a whole set of relations."

That kind of critical, synthesizing, cross-disciplinary thinking is—or should be—the heart of a liberal arts education, along with a discussion of the common good and how to define "the good life," according to Kelly. Mimi Becker, chair of the natural resources department and an early sustainability advocate at UNH, agrees: "Sustainability means people conduct their relationships with their environment, life support systems and each other in such ways that enhance, rather than diminish, the quality of life."

KELLY IS "A BRIDGER who understands strategic alignment and knows how to lean on a concept and move a system," says Lamb. Kelly, who holds a doctorate in international studies plus degrees in musical composition and conducting, works toward sustained change by bringing people together to identify a problem, understand its context, develop a policy framework and—only then—initiate action. It's not always a fast

process: "I told everyone when I interviewed for this job that just to reach the first plateau of sustainability would take 10 years."

The next plateau, Kelly hopes, will include maintaining and deepening UNH sustainability programs, with a continued focus on collaborative, cross-disciplinary work. There also is discussion of creating a Sustainability Academy at UNH, building more partnerships that reach beyond campus, and positioning UNH as a national model in sustainability.

As Sara Cleaves, associate director of the sustainability program, notes, "Our mission is to work with everyone at UNH until sustainability on campus becomes like water to a fish and is integral to who we are, how we see ourselves in the world and where we are headed." ~

Gold Stars for Sustainability

IN 2006, RESIDENCE HALLS at UNH were the first to receive the Energy Star rating from the EPA.

UNH WAS ONE OF 25 universities in the nation to be named a Campus Sustainability Leader by the Sustainable Endowments Institute's 2008 College Sustainability Report Card.

IN BUSINESS NEW HAMPSHIRE MAGAZINE'S first Lean and Green Awards, published this year, UNH received the top honor.

UNH WAS NAMED in a 2008 National Wildlife Federation report of approximately 100 colleges that demonstrated leadership in responding to global warming with best-practice strategies.

SINCE 2004, UNH has been named a Best Workplace for Commuters by the EPA.

WILDCAT TRANSIT WON the Federal Transit Administration's Success in Enhancing Ridership Award in its category in 2008.

THE ANNUAL UNH LOCAL HARVEST DINNER won an award for themed dinners in 2007 from the National Association of College and University Food Services.

ALUMNI



University of New Hampshire

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