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UNH Expands Sustainability Leadership with Alignment of Investments and Values

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DURHAM, N.H.—The University of New Hampshire Foundation has recently completed the transition of 16 percent of its investable assets—\$37 million—into ESG-qualified (environmental, social and governance) investments, making it one of the few higher education institutions in the country to take this approach to aligning its investments with its values of sustainability.

“I am incredibly proud that the foundation board has moved swiftly and decisively to align our investment strategy with our mission,” said UNH Foundation President Debbie Dutton. “We continue a primary focus on generating the best return possible to benefit the university, and we believe that investing in entities that are highly successful and committed to operating sustainably and responsibly just makes good sense.”



MEDIA RELATIONS

Defined as a collective commitment to human dignity for all people and ecological integrity in all places, sustainability has long been at the heart of UNH’s mission and values. Rooted in the university’s 150-year history and its mission to contribute to the public good, UNH was one of the earliest higher education pioneers to focus on sustainability. Its Sustainability Institute is the oldest endowed sustainability program in higher education in the U.S., and UNH was one of the first universities to consider concepts of sustainability when shaping its approach to education, research, and practice.

UNH is a recognized leader in the field of sustainability in higher education is one of only five institutions of higher education to earn the STARS Platinum rating from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. UNH is also ranked #2 on the Sierra Club’s “Cool Schools” list.

The UNH Foundation, which manages the university’s \$225 million in endowed funds, has made a concerted effort over the past two years to bolster the ESG portion of the endowment and the university’s sustainable investing focus more broadly. A fast-growing segment of the investment field, ESG investing is an approach that is rooted in the idea that all investments have health, environmental and societal impacts, and that those impacts can help or harm financial returns. ESG investing seeks to ensure that all risks are priced correctly and to enable investors to be intentional about all impacts of their investments.

UNH has also dedicated \$5 million to community impact investing with investments in the NH Community Loan Fund (NHCLF).

“It is one of those rare opportunities for the foundation to find a truly ‘local’ investment that also fits well in the portfolio,” said Erik Gross, UNH foundation treasurer. “Because of the mission and admirable track record of the NHCLF to ‘serve as a catalyst, leveraging financial, human, and civic resources to enable traditionally underserved people to participate more fully in New Hampshire’s economy,’ our investment allows the foundation to support the university’s commitment to serving the public good in New Hampshire, as well as supporting the institution financially.”

The initial spark for sustainable investing at UNH was spearheaded by student groups associated with the fossil fuel divestment and sustainability movement several years ago. This latest transition in UNH's sustainable investing practices has been guided by the Committee on Investor Responsibility (CIR), established in 2017. Comprised of UNH students, faculty, staff, alums and investment industry professionals, the CIR was formed to advise the foundation's investment and finance committee on how the university might better align its endowment practices with the concept of sustainability.

"The members of the CIR have been valuable partners in developing our approach to aligning our endowment portfolio to the mission of the university while preserving our overarching goal of generating strong market returns," said UNH Foundation board member and Investment and Finance Committee chair Ned Dane. "Their engagement and commitment have helped us see a path forward, resulting in a meaningful percentage of our endowment moving into ESG aligned investments."

UNH also joined the Intentional Endowments Network and became a signatory to the Principles of Responsible Investing in 2018. PRI is an international framework that asks member organizations to actively promote and demonstrate sustainable investing principles.

"Higher education is the only sector capable of creating the broad scale and necessary change in mindset, skills and values of government, business and other professional leaders," said Georges Dyer, executive director of the Intentional Endowments Network. "Society looks to higher education to identify solutions to major problems, anticipating future challenges, and developing innovative strategies and models that will enable progress – to be a role model for what society might look like. UNH's leadership on sustainability is exemplary and has been for years. Their decision to engage so deliberately both internally and externally on sustainable investing puts them in the vanguard of colleges and universities creating a more healthy, just, and sustainable society."

The University of New Hampshire inspires innovation and transforms lives in our state, nation and world. More than 16,000 students from all 50 states and 71 countries engage with an award-winning faculty in top-ranked programs in business, engineering, law, health and human services, liberal arts and the sciences across more than 200 programs of study. As one of the nation's highest-performing research universities, UNH partners with NASA, NOAA, NSF and NIH, and receives more than \$110 million in competitive external funding every year to further explore and define the frontiers of land, sea and space.

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