

THE Current

April 16, 2012

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UC Santa Barbara Scores Three Statewide Best Practice Awards for Sustainability

Continuing its tradition of setting the bar for sustainability, UC Santa Barbara has received three Best Practice Awards in the annual Energy Efficiency and Sustainability Awards competition sponsored by the California Higher Education Sustainability Conference. Santa Barbara tied with UC Berkeley for most awards in the 2012 contest that typically lauds one UC and one CSU campus in each category.

UCSB won top honors in three categories: Student Sustainability Program, for the Plastics Pollution Coalition; Sustainable Foodservice, for Root 217 Café at the University Center; and Sustainability Innovations, for the South Coast Sustainability Summit.

"Earth is finite, and while sustainability is a global concern, all efforts at preserving resources for future generations ultimately start at home," said Bruce Tiffney, dean of the College of Creative Studies and co-chair of the Chancellor's Sustainability Committee. "These awards are a well-deserved testament to the ongoing efforts of students, faculty, and staff, often working with members of the public, to make our campus and community a model for local and cooperative innovation."

The student-driven UCSB Plastics Pollution Coalition, a local chapter of an international alliance, aims to reduce, and eventually eradicate, use of disposable

plastics on campus through education, policy initiatives, and the promotion of sustainable alternatives. The coalition recently marked a major milestone with its inaugural Day Without A Bag event, in which the UCSB Bookstore halted handing out plastic bags for a full day, and instead distributed 3,500 reusable canvas bags in their place. The student group raised \$5,000 for the collaborative effort with Housing and Residential Services and several off-campus partners.

"A lot of these global environmental issues feel so big and out of our hands, but plastic bags -- this is something we can fix. We can actually do something about it," said Erica Aguilera, 22, a fourth-year environmental studies major and co-chair of the UCSB Plastics Pollution Coalition. "Winning this award has been amazing and extremely validating. We've put in so much time and effort. It's great to see people recognize that, and to see what we're doing as important."

Inspired by similar events in other cities, Aguilera said the student group decided to launch its Day Without A Bag at the bookstore, on the first day of spring quarter, to maximize visibility for the cause. Later this spring, the UCSB Bookstore will permanently replace plastic bags with compostable alternatives -- making Santa Barbara the first UC campus to offer such sustainable bags.

"The UC Santa Barbara campus has always been known as a leader in sustainability, and I think one of the reasons for that is the collaboration between the faculty and staff and students -- but particularly led by the students," said Ron Cortez, associate vice chancellor of administrative services and co-chair of the Chancellor's Sustainability Committee. "They are very environmentally conscious and really involved in sustainability efforts. They have the ability to really move the campus forward in a positive direction, and these awards are an indication of that."

Sustainability is literally on the menu at Root 217 Café, a recent addition to the campus's lineup of dining options. The UCen-located walkup features almost exclusively organic foods -- from grass-fed, hormone-free beef and free-range chicken to salad fixings, juices, and frozen yogurt -- much of which is grown or produced locally. In addition, nearly all the café's waste is compostable, right down to the beverage cups and utensils. Cortez credited dining services director Sue Hawkins with the vision that brought 217 Café to life, and further pushed sustainable foodservice to the forefront.

Also atop UCSB's growing list of sustainability goals is fostering relationships with sustainability decision makers and officials from municipalities and organizations locally -- and eventually, perhaps statewide, Cortez said -- with an eye toward sharing ideas, best practices, proven approaches, and, potentially, resources. Such was the focus of the campus-created South Coast Sustainability Summit, held for the first time in fall 2011 and headed for a possible reprise this October.

"We've really tried to focus on community engagement here, and the outgrowth of that was the summit," said Jasmine Syed, conference organizer and campus sustainability coordinator. "It was a real success in bringing leadership together along with staff to talk about what we're doing and how we can learn from each other. These awards highlight that core strength, and really show our students and our leadership really caring about this university and wanting to make it an inspiring place to study and work and research."

UCSB will officially receive the awards at the annual California Higher Education Sustainability Conference, June 18-22, at UC Davis, where sustainability representatives of the winning entries will make presentations about their programs.

Related Links

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