

## Merging Academics and Operations in a Statewide University Consortium

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### ABSTRACT

Clemson, the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, and the University of South Carolina are now in the fourth year of a productive partnership — the Sustainable Universities Initiative. In 1998, the presidents of the three schools signed a pledge to cooperate in leading the way toward a more sustainable future through teaching, research, community service and facilities management. In 2000, the state’s General Assembly appropriated one-time funds to expand the program to other state-supported institutions of higher education. To date, 13 four-year and technical schools have joined.

Early in the life of the consortium, we realized that with a very limited staff we would need to find creative ways to bring our message to large numbers of students. This article describes three efforts that creatively combine academic learning with enhancing sustainability on campus.

The first two involve the incorporation of service learning related to the campus environment into English classes. At the University of South Carolina in Columbia, approximately 90% of the incoming freshmen are required to take English 101. Using a mini-grant from the Sustainable Universities Initiative, faculty have developed ten sections designated as “environmental” which include a service learning component. Last year, the courses resulted in thousands of hours of volunteer service to over 30 campus and community organizations. This year, students have requested, and received English 102 courses geared toward environmental literature. At Clemson University, a similar program has involved students in 11 business or technical writing courses, all of whom have accepted “clients” from among campus administrators with an environmental project or message to develop.

Another innovative program is the inclusion of a living-learning center in the new USC West Quad Residence Hall, currently under construction and slated to be a LEED Silver certified building—one of the first college residence halls to receive LEED certification. Students have already been involved in the development of documentation for the project, as well as in the design of a phytoremediation project for stormwater generated during construction. Once constructed, the building’s fuel cells, photovoltaics, “green roof” and other features will become fodder for class projects in the nearby School of Engineering. At the same time, the 500 students living in the building will be exposed on a daily basis to modeling of good habits that will stay with them for a lifetime and to new technology to enhance conservation of resources that will inspire them to be life-long learners.