

# Colleges in Oregon get high grades for green

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Stephanie Yao/The OregonianAt Lewis & Clark College, Rachel Young gives out information on [powervote.org](http://powervote.org) in an effort to get students to vote based on clean energy principles.

The school year has just begun for Oregon's colleges and universities, but several already are bragging about their report cards -- and we're not talking about law school admissions or party life.

The University of Oregon was listed among the nation's top green universities by The Princeton Review. Oregon State University received the same accolade from the Kaplan College Guide.

Meanwhile, Willamette University was recognized as first in the nation by the National Wildlife Federation for engaging in the most sustainable activities.

And the Sustainable Endowments Institute timed the launch of its [greenreportcard.org](http://greenreportcard.org) for the start of classes. Students can check out how their schools rate on a range of practices, from transportation to energy to endowment transparency to investments.

Oregon, Oregon State and Willamette each earned high grades from the institute.

Higher education leaders say students expect their schools to follow sustainable practices and vigorously work to reduce the amount of carbon they release into the atmosphere. National recognition, in the form of green report cards, is an additional recruiting tool.

"We recognize that more and more students across the country are paying attention to these ratings and the opinion of their peers," said Steve Mital, director of sustainability at the University of Oregon. "It's become a way to differentiate yourself."

Green is definitely the color on Oregon's campuses.

Most of the state's higher ed presidents have signed the American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment -- accepting deadlines to inventory greenhouse gas emissions and develop an action plan for becoming carbon neutral by 2050.

But campuses are not newcomers on the green wave.

"Once upon a time, it was just called recycling," Mital said. "We've been doing that for a good 20 years. For 15 years, we've had free bus passes for students, faculty.

"There are new things that leapfrog past recycling programs and transportation programs. The big thing these days is reducing carbon. That's a huge challenge, especially for a large, older institution."

Oregon was one of 11 schools on The Princeton Review's inaugural green "honor roll," which surveyed schools' environmental responsibility, quality of campus life and academics that prepare students for employment in a clean energy economy.

The review cited the UO for its 200 courses related to sustainability, its first-in-the-nation curriculum in public interest environmental law and the \$100,000 the associated student body dedicates yearly to sustainable programs.

Oregon hosted the first sustainability conference for administrators, staff and students in the Oregon University System earlier this month.

Kaplan College Guide listed Oregon State University among its Top 25 "green colleges," based on efforts toward long-term sustainability, courses offered and quality of campus life.

In 2007, Oregon State students voted overwhelmingly to impose an \$8.50 per-term fee on themselves to purchase wind, biogas and biomass energy. The purchased renewable energy equals about 75 percent of the total campus electrical consumption -- and earned OSU recognition as a "green power" leader from the Environmental Protection Agency.

"It's amazing that we've cut so much of our greenhouse gases so quickly," said Brandon Trelstad, who coordinates Oregon State's Office of Sustainability. "The next few years will include more conservation, more solar. I'd love to see even our old buildings with solar."

The university's commitment to reducing waste and its carbon footprint, combined with academic programs in solar energy engineering, hydrology, organic agriculture and other courses related to sustainability, is a draw to students, Trelstad said. And more.

"All of these pieces -- the EPA, the Kaplan Report -- there's not fallout from any of it directly, but once the ball starts rolling, I've seen an increase in the phone calls, the e-mails, asking us how we do it," Trelstad said.

Oregon Institute of Technology will install two geothermal power plants that will make the Klamath Falls campus the first in the world to provide all of its electricity from a local, renewable source. Drilling on a high-temperature, 1.5 megawatt plant is scheduled

to begin in December, with the plant coming on line in late 2009. A low-temperature, 280 kilowatt plant, using existing geothermal wells, will be on-line by late January 2009.

Lewis & Clark College has a long history of championing environmental correctness and advocacy, from its building practices to its tough-knuckled environmental law center. Still, Jim Proctor, head of Lewis & Clark's environmental studies program and recent chairman of the school's sustainability committee, says colleges and universities have yet to address the full definition of sustainability.

Most nations, he said, have adopted the United Nation's Brundtland Commission report from 1983 that defines true sustainability as a three-legged stool that gives equal importance to ecological, social and economic issues. But most colleges have focused on ecology, the easiest and most visible component of sustainability.

For now, however, that's what getting noticed most.

And four-year schools aren't the only ones pursuing green practices.

[Clackamas Community College](#) received \$375,000 from the Governor's Strategic Investment Fund to develop job training and education related to alternative energy, the engineering and manufacturing industries and recycling.

**Clackamas** and the state's other community colleges have increased their course offerings to prepare students for careers in sustainable practices. **Clackamas** has teamed with the Oregon Institute of Technology and Portland State University to offer courses that will help students move seamlessly into sustainability studies at the four-year schools.

For every new building that receives the highest environmental rating, there are green practices that are a quiet reality everyday campus life.

Willamette has adopted such low-tech practices as using compost tea to feed its lawns and vinegar spray on weeds. For years, crews have left clippings on the lawn to add nitrogen.

The result isn't golf-course perfect, but it is healthy.

"There's a reason a golf course looks like a golf course, and it takes a lot of chemicals and it takes a lot of work," said Jim Andersen, the university's grounds manager. "I kind of like the weeds. I'd rather see that than a pristine lawn, because I know what went into keeping that lawn pristine."

The National Wildlife Federation praised Willamette for "energy efficiency and conservation, greener transportation, environmentally friendly landscaping practices, as well as to orienting personnel and faculty to the sustainability goals of the campus."

Prospective students want to know about Willamette's sustainable practices, said Madeleine Rhyneer, vice president of admissions and financial aid.

"Most colleges have great academic programs and a solid faculty," she said. "Once they ascertain that you have a strong academic program, they look to see if you have the additional pieces that round out the college experience for them.

"Sustainable practices are very important for them, and they ask about it," Rhyneer added. "For students, it is the range that's appealing for them. The education we have for them coming into the community. The vehicles we have on campus. The environmental practices we use in maintaining the grounds."

The university was a national leader when it added a sustainability certificate through its College of Law. It will offer a sustainability track in its business administration graduate program in 2009.

"We're not this insulated university community," said Joe Bowersox, director of Willamette's Office of Sustainable Communities and a professor of environmental policy. "We have this responsibility to the broader community outside of our 72-acre campus.

"We're not going to be OSU and develop wave regeneration," he said. "But we can look at what sort of new partnerships in sustainability are on the horizon between the academic community, the business community and the public sector."

But going green should just be a part of campus sustainability, said Lewis & Clark's Proctor.

While he applauded the green efforts at Lewis & Clark and other campuses, Proctor wondered when academic leaders and students would address their roles in social and economic issues.

"I'm actually at a point where I'm confused where we ought to go -- we at Lewis & Clark and we in the larger education community," said Proctor, who just finished organizing Lewis & Clark's 11th symposium on environmental affairs. "If it's just about green campuses, that's not at all what sustainability was envisioned to be."

During the symposium, one speaker addressed international gender inequity, while a panel discussed the role of labor in the local food movement.

"We need to know what it means to practice sustainability," Proctor said. "We've kind of collapsed 'sustainability' into just doing good green things. The lesson with sustainability is we may not be able to sustain those if we go bankrupt, if we don't attend to the economic leg. Or if we don't address the social leg."

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