Not so long ago, the green movement on U.S. college campuses involved putting out recycling bins and maybe reducing the amount of Styrofoam used in the dining hall. Nowadays, steps like that are just the tip of the iceberg.

“Green thinking” has moved into classrooms, where students earn degrees specifically focused on sustainability studies or add an Earth-friendly spin to more traditional majors.

There’s also been a shift from a handful of sustainability-focused programs in architecture or business, says Meghan Fay Zahniser, director of programs at the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). “It’s now really spread throughout the curriculum,” she says. “Whether you’re studying to be a history teacher, a biologist, any sort of profession, there’s going to be a need for people to at least have an understanding of sustainability.”

Colleges and universities have added green studies because of a real commitment to environmentalism, but also because it makes business sense, Zahniser says. “Institutions are recognizing ... that these are not only programs that we

Eco Grades
College classrooms turn out experts in the Earth

BY STACY CHANDLER

Not so long ago, the green movement on U.S. college campuses involved putting out recycling bins and maybe reducing the amount of Styrofoam used in the dining hall. Nowadays, steps like that are just the tip of the iceberg.

“Green thinking” has moved into classrooms, where students earn degrees specifically focused on sustainability studies or add an Earth-friendly spin to more traditional majors.

There’s also been a shift from a handful of sustainability-focused programs in architecture or business, says Meghan Fay Zahniser, director of programs at the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). “It’s now really spread throughout the curriculum,” she says. “Whether you’re studying to be a history teacher, a biologist, any sort of profession, there’s going to be a need for people to at least have an understanding of sustainability.”

Colleges and universities have added green studies because of a real commitment to environmentalism, but also because it makes business sense, Zahniser says. “Institutions are recognizing ... that these are not only programs that we

Furman University student assistant Ryan Richardson teaches orientation skills to students Livi Tant and Claire Campbell during a trip to Yosemite National Park and the Sierra Nevada mountains.

SUSTAINABILITY STUDIES
These programs take a holistic view of sustainability, focusing on social systems, economics, politics and more. The degrees often require courses in several departments. Furman University’s program is an example, and Arizona State University led the way with a first-of-its-kind School of Sustainability in 2006.
need to create to best equip our future leaders with the information and solutions that they need to best solve the world’s problems, but also this is going to help differentiate one institution from another.”

Furman University, a private liberal arts college in Greenville, S.C., launched its sustainability science major in 2011 as an outgrowth of its Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences (EES).

“We had put a lot of effort in really understanding the processes behind environmental issues,” says Weston Dripps, associate professor and EES department chair. Sustainability had long been part of Furman’s outlook, and in 2008 the university launched the Shi Center for Sustainability, which aims to infuse the credo throughout the curriculum. Sustainability science students explore connections between the environment, economics and social systems.

Learning takes place in and out of the classroom. Students work closely with local firms doing environmental work. The campus, Dripps says, is “a living learning laboratory.”

Students crunch data on transportation, consumption habits and water use and think about solutions. “They’re interested in being agents of change,” Dripps says. “And they want a mechanism where they can be.”

Colleges have been steadily adding green majors. Here’s a look at a few programs:

**SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE**
People are becoming more aware of where food comes from and how its harvest can impact the environment. Sustainable agriculture programs, such as one at the University of California, Davis, train students to farm in more eco-friendly, efficient ways.

**ENVIRONMENTAL TECH**
Students learn how to measure environmental indicators and monitor ecosystems. They might focus on engineering, hazardous waste response or data analysis. North Carolina State University and the University of Maryland are among schools doing this.

**ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION**
This path trains students to spread the word about sustainability, whether to children in schools or adults in government and the corporate world. Some programs, such as the University of Minnesota Duluth, add an outdoors component. A few, such as the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, work with graduate students earning their teacher certification.

**URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES**
Urban planning is crucial. Programs at Bard College in New York, Birmingham-Southern College in Alabama and the University of California, Berkeley, look at ways humans can live in harmony with the Earth.

**FIND YOUR MAJOR**
The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) keeps a database of sustainability-focused academic programs.

The searchable list includes more than 1,400 programs at 475 colleges + universities.
Check it out at aashe.org/resources/academic-programs

---

**ECOFASHION**
Fashion design majors at schools like Parsons The New School for Design and the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York and California College of the Arts in San Francisco learn how to make beautiful clothing from materials and via practices that are easy on the planet. Whether it’s a specific degree program or simply a curriculum-wide emphasis, sustainability is something tomorrow’s designers will style.