

Campus as Sustainability Research Classroom

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Su Wild-River is Deputy Manager of the Australian National University Sustainability Office within its Facilities and Services Division. This office works to deliver environmentally responsible world class infrastructure for the university. Su has been with the ANU Sustainability Office since its inception over 10 years ago, and leads sustainability initiatives in environmental risk management, statutory and internal reporting. Since 2009 Su has also been a manager of the ANU Green Precincts Project, providing a showcase of sustainability leadership. Su runs an annual GreenSteps program, teaching practical sustainability skills to students. She also works as a teacher and researcher and in those roles has convened courses, supervised internships and higher degree research, led research projects and published results. Her work across these areas has brought several grants and many awards to the ANU, including two prestigious international awards and a string of ACT Sustainable Cities Awards

For more than a decade, The Australian National University (ANU) has actively used its campuses and surrounding communities as interactive classrooms where students research and learn about sustainability in practice. Sustainability projects have encompassed all disciplines and every level of the university curriculum and have focused on diverse environmental issues. The university has benefited by gaining student insights into genuine sustainability questions, while students have gained skills, knowledge and practical experience in tackling real world challenges. The Campus as Classroom approach is a winning blend involving students and other people in environmentally sustainable facilities management. The results have benefited the ANU brand, bringing international acclaim and promotional benefits including a contribution to the ANU Green Precincts Project.

The paper will present case studies of the application of the campus as classroom concept. It will describe the right blend of people, leadership, environment which give provide a quality student experience that enhances facilities management and benefits the university brand.

Case studies will include projects focused on sustainability in facilities management across each of the following areas:

- Undergraduate courses including energy and water saving projects,
- Higher degree research, including honours, masters and doctoral projects,
- GreenSteps internships including both internal and external placements,
- Paid internship projects focused within ANU and
- Paid internship projects undertaken through the International Alliance of Research Universities.

Some classic elements of the projects include:

- Interaction with 'real life and real time' data,
- An ensuring challenge in dealing with incomplete information with academic timeframes,
- An incredible willingness and capacity of 'Gen Y' students to take up these challenges and deliver high quality outcomes,
- An exciting learning experience for the students.

Some of the key pitfalls that can undermine benefits for people include poor:

- Scoping of projects with boundaries set too wide,
- Communication of the topic and constraints between academic supervisors, facilities managers and students,
- Agreement of the report format, including the need for an executive summary, costings and disclaimers.

Where those challenges have been resolved, the benefits have included highly beneficial cost effective reports which identify realistic options for implementation. Among the practical benefits delivered at ANU through student projects are:

- Leadership skills among students, who start to actively promote responsible use of the university campus,
- Local, sustainable food served regularly in some halls of residence,
- Data, including waste audits that have helped to reduce reliance on disposable cups,
- Technology, including an I-phone App developed to help students reduce energy and water usage in halls of residence,
- Knowledge of community views on campus values including waterway management and a wide range of environmental management initiatives,
- Proud, confident, skilled-up students who have already made a transition to work through active contribution to the campus environment.

As an example of cost-effectiveness, recent feedback indicated that an ANU GreenSteps project report was "as useful and well written as one [the host] paid \$60,000 for". The students had undertaken the project for less than \$3,000, and ANU is to bill the host \$5,000.