

D R A F T
4.10.12

NIRSA Commission for Sustainable Communities
Valuing Sustainability Within Collegiate Recreation
The Why and Why Now
Talking Points

As NIRSA embarks on the next phase of strategic planning, including developing areas of focus, sustainability has emerged as a critical lens to view our work and ensure we meet our full potential as “Leaders in Collegiate Recreation.” This will provide a framework through which our work will be more “sustainable” and successful, all contributing to healthy people and healthy communities [the NIRSA sweet spot]. Natural synergies will develop with other strategic topics, which will assist in accelerate the awareness, understanding and actions to move the NIRSA culture into a more holistic view of sustainability. The initial focus will be internal to our members and guide the work of the association.

Today, there are more than 18 million students in colleges and universities in the United States alone, and if they graduate with the skills to help societies develop more sustainably, higher education will have indeed played a key role in leading us in a new direction. Thus, in order to create conditions that will ensure a more sustainable future, higher education will have to provide college and university graduates with the skills, background, knowledge, and habits of mind that will prepare them to meet the challenges presented by the future.

There are many reasons why collegiate recreation should play a critical and active role in these efforts. Students are engaged in sustainability at a greater degree than ever before. They are seeking campus partners to advance their efforts and recreational sports programs have always been open to such collaborations. When considering the environmental, economic, and social implications, these relationships and the social and political capital we gain are critical to our long term success. Sustainable enterprises such as recreational sports and higher education as a whole can only be attained through the combined efforts of all. As a member of that society, Recreational Sports has an institutional, if not a social responsibility to be engaged in this endeavor.

The Why

- Most social change movements have been initiated or have flourished by the engagement and leadership from a younger generation often found on colleges campuses [Peace Movement, Women’s Rights, Civil Rights].
- As a vital part of students’ lives, campus recreation is positioned to engage and become involved in students’ efforts - in which students have great expectations of their partners and collaborators.

- Conversely, campus recreation has developed and nurtured positive and respectful relationships with students and they are very willing to support our work when it aligns with their values, initiatives, and expectations.
- NIRSA professionals can create a living and learning environment by role modeling support for healthy and sustainable communities.
- The engagement with students will build social and political capital that will serve us well in the future.
- Campus recreation has:
 - one of the largest carbon footprints on campus,
 - uses a disproportionate amount of energy,
 - manages large financial operations, and
 - interacts with more of the campus population than nearly any other entity
- Efforts in sustainability will assist us in developing better individuals and building better communities.
- This broad perspective will allow us to increase diversity and become more inclusive in addressing all aspects of health and wellbeing of our institutions.

Why Now?

- Sustainability is becoming the core of many campus' master planning and strategic decision-making. This is occurring in part because students are demanding it; and society's challenges are demanding it.
- As educators, we have an obligation in assisting students in learning about and applying sustainability and support the future leaders of the world. NIRSA and campus recreation already supports healthy individuals, and sustainability is a new lens to focus their efforts in an intentional way.
- NIRSA must educate its members on what sustainability means and develop a framework and understanding within which the profession can grow.
- The current financial uncertainties will require us to be better stewards of our resources if we are to maintain our ability to effectively manage facilities and deliver programs and services.
- It is important in our efforts to remain relevant in a rapidly changing environment, we need to position NIRSA and NIRSA members as co-curricular higher education leaders in sustainability.

Sustainability is a lens through which collegiate recreation professionals can view their work and strive for their fullest potential. When making good decisions and practicing in all areas of sustainability, NIRSA professionals will hit the "sweet spot," leading to healthy people and healthy communities.