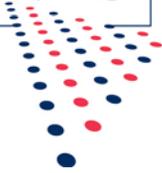


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– ESSAY 9 –

Sustainability and Campus Dining

**DR. PHILLIP D. CREIGHTON**  
President, Pacific University

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*President, Pacific University*

Once, when describing the dining experience on most college and university campuses, admissions councilors joked about the “freshmen 15” and the “sophomore six.” Now, their marketing and promotional materials trumpet wholesome foods that are locally purchased and produced by sustainable food service practices. Such is the sea change on campuses as more and more nutritionally and environmentally aware students make decisions about the foods they eat, and colleges and universities across the country respond. In context of a larger move to sustainable practices on campuses, food service providers are rapidly changing what, how, and where foods are purchased, and how these foods are prepared and presented.

Underlying these changes are students’ preferences for organically and socially responsible grown foods and a growing awareness of sustainability issues. Many campuses have been quick to recognize that a move to sustainable practices is a critical initiative that can improve food quality and freshness, enhance the nutritional value of foods served, reduce organic waste, help support the local and regional economy, and be an important complement to the curriculum. As a result, programs such as Farm to Fork, Green Cuisine, and Just4U have developed—not only as a way of responding to the changing preferences, but also as a way of better educating students about the nutritional content and the origin of foods they consume. Components of sustainable dining programs, of course, vary from campus to campus, but most involve purchasing locally, offering organic food choices, and providing vegetarian and vegan alternatives. Attention is also placed on recycling organic waste and reducing other associated waste.

To completely understand the interplay of these concepts, a few definitions are needed. At the heart of sustainable food practices is the larger system’s context that focuses on reducing overall energy and resource consumption, and sustaining environmental health and stability. The goal of sustainable practices is to “borrow” resources in ways that do not jeopardize supply for future generations. Often coupled with this basic concept are holistic aspects of contributing to the local and regional economy, and demonstrating responsible practices that improve society. “Organic” implies a food that is grown without the use of pesticides, herbicides, or additives, such as hormones and antibodies. Again, there is a broader, implied context to choosing organic foods that ties it back to sustainability—organic foods are produced through soil and water conservation practices that also promote wildlife habitats, and are grown in ways that provide safe and socially responsible working conditions and humane care of livestock.

Buying locally, or local sourcing, is more than an opportunity to buy fresher food and save transportation costs. It also helps cement the institution's relationship with its extended community through investing in the local and regional economy—an opportunity being recognized by campuses across the United States. The definition of what “local” entails varies in different regions of the country, but generally “local” implies a radius of 50 to 150 miles from the campus. At last count, there are more than 200 campuses with some form of a local sourcing program, more than twice the number of just five years ago.

Whenever possible, Pacific University's food service provider purchases local produce, dairy products, and meats from either independent producers or from local companies. Because necessary foods may not always be available locally, we have taken a regional approach (foods from the northwest are generally within 150 miles of the campus). Our provider at Pacific has also formed a partnership with the Food Alliance, a Portland-based nonprofit food service network that certifies sustainable practices by the growers used by the Food Alliance, and links regional food producers with food service providers, thus helping to smooth out availability challenges.

Over the course of an academic year, a residential student at Pacific eats over 600 meals prepared by our service provider. Regardless of how varied the menus are or how well the food is prepared, there is, after a time, an element of familiarity with institutional food. The commitment to provide more organically and locally grown foods has provided a nutritional and welcomed alternative within the menu. Satisfaction, as expressed in regular food surveys, has increased by over 20 percent with the adoption of our sustainable food practices.

There may be associated costs with adopting a sustainable food practice on campus. For example, in a classic demonstration of quantity versus quality, the number of entrée choices may be reduced, or there may be difficulty in obtaining specific foods or necessary quantities of those foods locally. There are

also real cost issues associated with additional labor when using fresh ingredients in food preparation instead of using pre-prepared foods. These costs need to be balanced against the benefits of a more nutritional diet and reduced transportation expenses.

To be ultimately successful, sustainability has to become part of the ethos of the campus. For example, at Pacific University, sustainability was a central component of our strategic plan: “Tradition, Transition, Transformation.” In this plan, we recommitted ourselves to a larger role in reducing the University's impact on the environment, while enhancing local economic development and being increasingly socially responsible for our region's well-being. We pledged to build green buildings (four new buildings are constructed or being constructed to meet the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED certifications); to adopt sustainable practices in our food services and use of resources; and to promote curricular and co-curricular changes that demonstrate sustainability practices to our campus and our local community.

An increasingly important educational component of campuses embracing sustainable food practices is the start of campus gardens or farms (a recent *Time* magazine article mentioned that 45 colleges and universities have started campus farms). In collaboration with our campus food service provider and the City of Forest Grove, Pacific University has started the B Street Farm. This project, organized by two faculty members, is designed to demonstrate the advantages of recycling food waste from the campus (as well as grass clippings, wood chips, and leaves from landscaping services) as a method of augmenting garden soils.

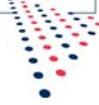
Students are heavily involved in all aspects of food production at the B Street Farm—from cultivation to educating local school children about the benefits of sustainability. One particularly significant outcome was partnering with Adelante Mujeres, a local organization whose mission is to help low-income Latina women and their families gain economic security through the development of small businesses.

Members of Adelante harvest fruits and vegetables from the B Street Farm, sell the produce at the Forest Grove Farmers Market, and use the proceeds to buy school supplies for low-income families.

Education has led transformation change since its formal beginnings, and the opportunities and solutions to issues of sustainability are appropriate foci for us to adopt and embrace. Our lessons are distinctive and direct. By subscribing to sustainable practices in our campus dining and throughout our colleges and universities, we not only demonstrate good stewardship, but we also have the potential to instill in our students an appreciation of the best practices for sustainable eating and living.

*Dr. Phillip D. Creighton assumed the position of Pacific University president on August 1, 2003. Previously, he served as president of Eastern Oregon University (EOU), where he took office in 1998. Prior to becoming president of EOU, Dr. Creighton served in a number of positions at Salisbury University, Salisbury, Maryland, including provost and vice president of academic affairs from 1995 to 1998. He also served at Salisbury University as dean of the Richard A. Henson School of Science and Technology. Dr. Creighton holds a Ph.D. in ecology, a master's degree in zoology, and a bachelor's degree in biology.*

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