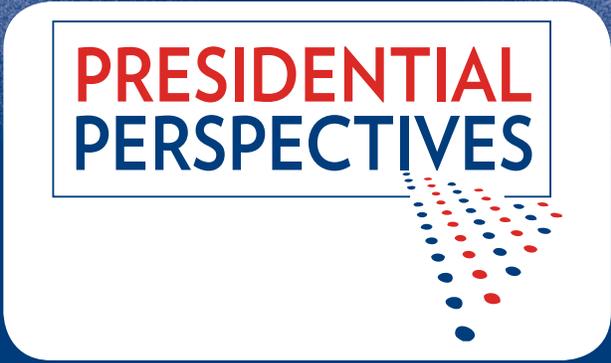


# PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES



A HIGHER EDUCATION  
PRESIDENTIAL THOUGHT  
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*2013-2014 Series:*

## **Elevating Sustainability Through Academic Leadership**

CHAPTER

# 7

### **The Imperative:**

*Ensuring a Sustainability Goal in  
the University's Strategic Plan*

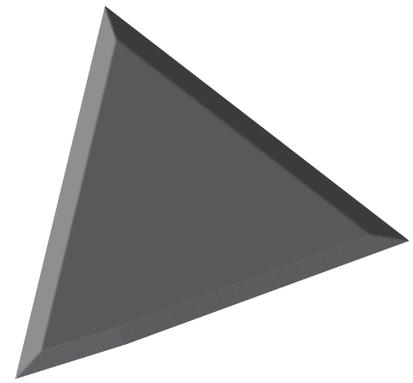
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PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES

## The Imperative:

### *Ensuring a Sustainability Goal in the University's Strategic Plan*



Dr. Harry L. Williams: President of Delaware State University

When I first arrived at Delaware State University as its new provost and vice president of Academic Affairs in 2008, it was common for the lights of the four-story Administration Building that contained my office to shine brightly each night long after its employees had ended their work days.

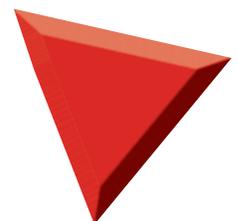
Five years later – three years after I was elevated to assume the presidency of the University – motorists driving by the campus along DuPont Highway in Dover, Delaware, now see a largely dimmed building in the evening hours with only low-intensity security lights showing through the windows.

This energy conservation measure is representative of not only similar steps taken in other DSU buildings, but also how sustainability has become a governing principle throughout the operation of the 356-acre campus located in Delaware's state capital.

Given the course that Delaware State University has set toward becoming a top institution among Historically Black Colleges and Universities, it has been clear to me and other DSU officials that being a trailblazer in many areas is a prerequisite to fulfill that goal. In addition to establishing a consistent high-performance track record in research, academic programs, and the campus life it provides, the University must also be an institutional example of how its carbon footprint can be significantly reduced in a campus setting.

It is one thing to claim an appreciation for sustainability and the desire to be a stellar institutional environmental steward, but it is another thing to make a commitment toward addressing such global needs in the 21st century. DSU has taken concrete measures that demonstrate its priority to be a part of the solution in the face of global warming.

“*Therefore in my regular meetings with faculty, staff, and student leaders, I maintained DSU's environmental stewardship pursuits as a constant agenda item.*”





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The University's first steps took place in the summer of 2009 when it became a signatory of the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment (ACUPCC), through which hundreds of institutions of higher education committed to significantly reducing all global warming emissions that come from their campuses.

Under the leadership of then-acting President Claibourne D. Smith, DSU immediately launched into a process that evaluated the campus to determine where sustainability gains could be made; educated faculty, students, staff, and administrators on the global challenge and importance of DSU reducing its carbon footprint; and then launched earnestly into work.

"DSU understands that global warming is one of the greatest environmental challenges of our time," said Dr. Smith, chair of the DSU Board of Trustees, who served as acting president in 2008-2009. "Because human activities are responsible for the problem, it will now take humans working together to solve it. Serious actions are necessary to halt pollutants that are causing increased global warming, and DSU is committed to playing a vital part in this work."

A DSU Go Green initiative was established that engaged all sectors of the University in a working executive committee and underlying subcommittees. Through their work, sustainability has become an integral part of how DSU conducts its operations and does business. The initiative facilitated the buy-in of all DSU stakeholders, through which the concept of energy conservation was embraced, sustainable procurement practice was implemented and many environmental stewardship habits changed for the better.

When I became the president of DSU in January 2010, the initial foundation for the University's sustainability pursuit had already been set. In embracing the work that had begun, it was evident to me that simply supporting the sustainability efforts was not enough. As president I also had to be a major source of encouragement in this direction. Therefore in my regular meetings with faculty, staff, and student leaders, I maintained DSU's environmental stewardship pursuits as a constant agenda item, providing the latest updated information and encouraging everyone to be a part of the University's Go Green initiative.

It was especially imperative that we engaged our student body in this effort. Because students are an important key to achieving the specified sustainability goals, it was critical to establish environmental stewardship leaders among them. Thus, the Green Ambassadors student organization was born. Since its formation, members of this organization have been an inspirational example among their peers, prompting many students to participate in activities that promote sustainability.

The Green Ambassadors have also been an active part of the University's sustainability "think tank," providing some fresh ideas for improvements. Whether it was supporting student sustainability gardens, assisting in the environmental education of their fellow students, participating in national student sustainability organizations, or engaging in a residential hall energy conservation competition, students' elevated roles in this work have enhanced the University's efforts.

We also understood that the education process had to involve curriculum offerings that enhance students' knowledge about sustainability and help prepare them to work in an environmentally conscious global society. In taking an inventory of course offerings that had an environmental stewardship focus, we were pleased to find that some faculty were already interweaving sustainability into their coursework. They, in turn, were examples who encouraged other professors and instructors to incorporate such environmental teaching into their courses.

One outcome of this curriculum emphasis has been the development of an interdisciplinary minor in environmental management that is close to being approved by the University.



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It became clear to our best sustainability thinkers that not only could DSU help the environment through its stewardship practices, but that it could improve the University's bottom line where energy costs were concerned. The University was invited in 2011 to become a part of the Obama Administration's Better Buildings Initiative, which supports job creation by catalyzing private sector investment in commercial, industrial and institutional building upgrades to make America's buildings 20 percent more efficient over the next decade. That goal was already consistent with the University's direction to address conservation needs.

With DSU's energy conservation initiative led by Amir Mohammadi, executive vice president and University treasurer, and assisted by state of Delaware energy performance resources, DSU selected Johnson Controls Inc. to perform a comprehensive investment-grade energy audit on the entire campus. Johnson Controls analyzed the most cost-effective energy conservation measures for campus facility systems, including – but not limited to – envelope, lighting, HVAC equipment, domestic hot water, and other water-using systems and building automation controls.

The findings led to technology installations and upgrades that conserve energy. One example is the motion-sensitive lighting system that shuts the lights off after people depart from rooms and automatically turns them back on when they return. The conservation analysis also prompted some behavioral changes such as recycling and the total shutdown of computers at the end of the workday. There have also been reductions of resource allocations for non-sustainable activities such as having a printer on every desk and choosing to centralize office printing instead.

The challenge President Barack Obama set forth in the Better Buildings Initiative called for participating entities to reduce their energy consumption by 20 percent by 2020. With the above-mentioned work, DSU has already achieved a 26 percent reduction by 2013 in the Phase I portion of the project – seven years ahead of the president's challenge goal. The Phase II portion will also reduce energy consumption by 7-14 percent – achieving a total reduction of 33-40 percent by the year 2015 for the entire campus.

The big challenge was how to finance for the energy conservation upgrades. This is a concern for most universities and is a roadblock for many in instituting costly energy-efficient equipment. Through the innovation of Mr. Mohammadi and the University's finance staff and auditors, and in cooperation with the state of Delaware, we were able to make the energy-efficient investment by using a DSU-coined model of On-Balance Sheet-Off Debt Capacity. This involved working with elected state officials to craft legislation that ensured the University's debt capacity limits would not be a roadblock. This concept is now being presented at industry conferences as a viable means to commit to such a project without negatively impacting the debt capacity of a university.

To help other institutions understand this financing strategy, the ACUPCC's Financing Committee has enlisted Mr. Mohammadi and myself to serve as working members. Additionally, the National Association of College and University Business Officers has also tapped Mr. Mohammadi to serve on its Advisory Panel.

While the University's investment to do the energy conservation upgrades will be just over \$19.3 million over 20 years, the energy savings that is guaranteed by Johnson Controls will be \$24.6 million during that period, resulting in a net revenue of \$5.3 million from the Phase I part of the implementation.

A visitor cannot go anywhere on campus without seeing the energy conservation measures that have been installed at DSU. Visibility of the sustainability initiatives on campus is part of the consciousness raising that will continue with each new class of students and incoming new employees. As a confirmation of the University's decision to pursue these sustainability initiatives, ACUPCC honored DSU with the 2011 Climate Leadership Award, and the Arbor Day Foundation recognized DSU as a Tree Campus USA® in 2012 and 2013.



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We are currently in the process this year of finalizing the University's new strategic plan – PRIDE 2020: Personal Responsibility in Delivering Excellence. Out of the six goals being recommended for adoption in the document, one of them is sustainability.

Because so many constituents in the DSU family had been involved in “go green” efforts, the strategic working teams proposed “sustainability” stand alone as its very own goal—“to enhance and extend the University’s environmental stewardship through education, research, outreach, conservation, and innovation.” The objectives focus on developing transformational learning opportunities, expanding interdisciplinary research and scholarship, implementing campus-wide sustainable environmental practices and policies that include carbon neutral conservation measures, and engaging the external community through partnerships. Action steps, champions to oversee the goal and metrics are being fine-tuned to be unveiled with the full DSU strategic plan.

By incorporating sustainability as a primary part of the strategic plan, the DSU community felt that the emphasis would be ongoing, focused, and targeted for human and financial resources. By doing so, it gives purpose and connectivity to the efforts developed. It sends the message that DSU is making the ultimate commitment by elevating sustainability to the highest level of University planning and Board of Trustees commitment. Moving forward, it ensures that at Delaware State University, sustainability is a part of the legacy we are building in the 21st century.

At this writing, the Board of Trustees has wholeheartedly agreed and the complete DSU strategic plan, including sustainability, is slated to be approved prior to January 2014.

The planet needs good environmental stewardship leaders to protect its vital resources. If universities can collectively reduce their carbon footprints, just think of the lessons our students will learn about their roles in carrying forward the life practices that will sustain our planet.

It should be the responsibility of every university and college to generate the support and develop the resources needed to elevate sustainability on campus. We must be models and provide models for our young professionals to embrace and emulate. Integrating sustainability right into the overarching strategic plan as a major goal does just that.

As South Africa’s Nelson Mandela said, “You can never have an impact on society if you have not changed yourself.” We here at DSU understand that very well where the University’s impact on sustainability is concerned. Though we have just begun to scratch the surface on this topic, we are committed to transforming our institution for the betterment of the environment – and we know that our efforts will be sustained for years to come.

*My thanks to my colleagues Amir Mohammadi, Executive Vice President and Treasurer, and Vita Pickrum, Associate Vice President for Development and Chair of the Go Green Committee efforts, for assistance with the contents of this article.*

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**Dr. Harry Williams** is the 10th president in the 120-year history of Delaware State University. He assumed the top post in January 2010, after serving 18 months as DSU's provost and vice president of Academic Affairs. Prior to this post he established a new General Education Program, a Distance Education Strategic Plan, and a Middle States Monitoring Report Plan, and reaffirmation of DSU's 10-year accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

During his DSU tenure, Dr. Williams has led a dedicated effort to establish sound environmental practices on campus and reduce the institution's carbon footprint through its Go Green initiative. Such activities were strongly validated by the presentation of the Second Nature Leadership Award from the American College & University Presidents' Climate Commitment in the summer of 2011. Under Dr. Williams' leadership, DSU became part of President Obama's Better Building Initiative in late 2011, which recognized DSU energy upgrades project that will save the University \$5.3 million in energy costs over the next 20 years.

Under Dr. Williams leadership, DSU has continued to expand its research portfolio — particularly in the Optics and Neuroscience programs, which have attracted more than \$25 million in grants and state capital project funding during his first three years and resulted in the development of DSU's first two intellectual properties.

The foundation for Dr. Williams' career in academia was established at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, where he earned a 1986 Bachelor of Science Degree in Communication Broadcasting and a Master of Arts in Educational Media. He later earned an Ed. D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from East Tennessee State University.