

# **Sustainability in International Education**

## **Recommendations for Education Abroad Administrators and Faculty**

Report of the Task Force on Environmental Sustainability in Education Abroad

Submitted to the Education Abroad Knowledge Community of  
NAFSA: Association of International Educators

April 14, 2008

# NAFSA: Association of International Educators

## Task Force on Environmental Sustainability in Education Abroad

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### Endorsements

This report has been reviewed and endorsed by the following organizations or by key members (\*) when official endorsement needed to wait until the next Board Meeting.

- Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (<http://www.aashe.org>)
- University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (<http://www.ulsf.org/>)
- US Partnership for the Decade of Education for Sustainable Develop. (<http://www.uspartnership.org>)
- Second Nature (<http://www.secondnature.org>)
- \*Higher Education Associations Sustainability Consortium (<http://www.heasc.net>)
- \*Disciplinary Associations Network for Sustainability (<http://www.aashe.org/dans>)

# Introduction and Overview

International Education exposes students to the world. It also exposes the world to the environmental, economic, and social impacts of travel and program activities. For example, a round-trip flight from Boston to London emits over three tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> - per person!<sup>1</sup> Program decisions about transportation, accommodations, food, and even recreational activities affect not only the integrity of students' experiences, but also the integrity of local economies and natural resources.

Given the growing awareness and concern around climate change, population growth, resource depletion (notably oil), and global inequities – and the growing number of students involved in education abroad – NAFSA is increasingly becoming a key player both in terms of its global environmental and social impacts and its potential to create positive change. Climate change and resource scarcity will increasingly pressure the field of international education to run programs more efficiently and "lightly". At the same time, the growing awareness of these issues will likely increase demand for programs to incorporate more environmental curricula and practices. Given its inherent cross-cultural nature, international education is also uniquely positioned to contribute to the search for and sharing of sustainable solutions within diverse societies.

There are two fundamental questions for NAFSA members to consider:

- (1) **How can education abroad programs be both high quality and low impact?**  
What impacts do students and programs have on local environments and communities over the short and long term? As an industry dependent on travel, it would behoove us to be aware of our ecological footprints and to become as 'climate positive' and low impact as possible.
- (2) **How can education abroad contribute in general to the movement towards greater environmental awareness?**  
As Cornell president, David Skorton, recently put it: "Sustainability is no longer an elective." A growing number of schools such as Ithaca College, Middlebury, and Oberlin have been "going green" and new organizations are supporting campus sustainability, including Focus the Nation ([www.focusthenation.org/](http://www.focusthenation.org/)), The Campus Climate Challenge (<http://climatechallenge.org/>), and the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment (<http://www.presidentsclimatecommitment.org/>). Few of these initiatives, however, consider international education. The global nature of these issues requires that sustainability efforts expand to include off-campus programs and that respect for global resources become a central element of all efforts to "internationalize" home campuses.

Within the international education community there is growing interest and commitment to incorporating sustainable principles and practices. For example, Abroad View (<http://www.abroadview.org/>), has developed a web site on sustainability and education abroad, and is pioneering a Green Passport program (<http://www.abroadview.org/green/passport.htm>) that encourages students to commit to environmental actions while abroad. Increasing numbers of programs such as those offered by the School for Field Studies (<http://www.fieldstudies.org/>), School for International Training (<http://www.worldlearning.org/>), Living Routes – Study Abroad in Ecovillages (<http://www.LivingRoutes.org>) and Earth Education International (<http://www.earthedintl.org/>) are exposing students to issues related to sustainability; and a listserv called "SustainabilityAbroad" (<http://lists.livingroutes.org/mailman/listinfo/sustainabilityabroad>) has drawn over 150 members since its inception in February of 2007.

While encouraging, these initiatives are still rather few and far between in the growing field of international education. This NAFSA Task Force on Sustainability was therefore created to offer recommendations for how NAFSA's leadership and members can develop new relationships, resources, best practices, and educational opportunities within the field of international education.

As Lao Tsu said, "The journey of a thousand miles, begins with a single step." Only here, we are talking about hundreds of millions of miles that students travel every year to pursue education abroad. Together, NAFSA and collaborating organizations have a real opportunity to help green the field of international education, support local ecosystems and economies, educate and empower students about their environmental impacts, and, ultimately, help create a more sustainable future.

<sup>1</sup> e.g. [http://www.carbonplanet.com/shop/flight\\_emissions\\_calculator](http://www.carbonplanet.com/shop/flight_emissions_calculator)

# Sustainability Recommendations for NAFSA

The following recommendations are offered to the Education Abroad Knowledge Community (EAKC) with the intention of keeping the topic of sustainability "on the table" at NAFSA and to develop new resources and opportunities over time. Some recommendations will be easy and cheap to implement; others might be more difficult and resource intensive; and some may seem out of the parameters of the Education Abroad Knowledge Community. Our goal was to cast a wide net and to encourage the EAKC to consider how to best support and/or forward specific recommendations. For example, recommendations regarding Conferences and Workshops may best be reviewed by NAFSA's Annual Conference Committee and many recommendations under Networking, Resources and Standards could be folded into a Working Plan for a Sustainability Network or MIG if one is established. We view these recommendations as a "jumping off point" and are confident that consequent efforts will continue to evolve and attract a growing support network over time.

## Organization:

- Establish a Sustainability Network within NAFSA's Education Abroad Knowledge Community.
- Consider how sustainability can be incorporated into NAFSA's mission, vision and values.
- Create a Sustainability Member Interest Group to continue dialogue among interested members.

## Networking:

- Promote the SustainabilityAbroad listserv as a way to inform/engage the NAFSA membership with these issues.
- Encourage practitioners to submit articles and news items to sites and publications such as NAFSA's International Educator ([http://www.nafsa.org/publication.sec/international\\_educator\\_1](http://www.nafsa.org/publication.sec/international_educator_1)), Frontiers Journal (<http://www.frontiersjournal.com/>), the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (<http://www.aashe.org>), the International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education (<http://info.emeraldinsight.com/products/journals/journals.htm?id=ijshe>), the Campus Ecology Yearbook (<http://www.nwf.org/campusecology/>), Glimpse (<http://www.glimpse.org/>), Abroad View (<http://www.abroadview.org/avmag/>), IIE Networker Magazine (<http://www.iienetwork.org/?p=34243>), etc.
- Explore organizational relationships with AASHE, Natural Step, University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (ULSF), U.S. Partnership for the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (USPDES), etc.
- Develop a Speakers/Consultants Bureau within NAFSA and perhaps maintain a larger list of colleagues available to be contacted about sustainability efforts at their institutions.

## Conferences/Workshops:

- Devote a NAFSA national conference to the theme of "Sustainability in International Education."
- Create workshops/trainings around sustainability in international education to be offered at regional and national NAFSA conferences.
- Support national and regional conferences to create themes and tracks related to sustainability.
- Encourage workshops and sessions within "non-NAFSA" conferences relating to sustainability in international education.
- Create a national award for programs, organization, and schools utilizing best sustainable practices in education abroad.
- Create Sustainability Guidelines for national and regional conferences (e.g. <http://www.yale.edu/sustainability/sustevents.htm>) that would aim to raise awareness and reduce impacts from energy use, transportation, waste, printed materials, food, and accommodations.

## Website/Online Resources:

- Create a "Sustainability in Education Abroad" resource section on the NAFSA website and an online forum to allow education abroad offices/providers to post and comment on relevant projects/ideas.
- Create a "How-to" resource guide for International Program Offices to become more sustainable and promote sustainability within their programs.
- Create or link to resources supporting students and programs to measure, reduce, and offset their greenhouse gas emissions.

**Standards:**

- Collect and highlight “best practices” in sustainability for office management, marketing, program design, and student opportunities. (See Appendix A).
- Collaborate with the Forum on Education Abroad to develop standards and best practices in the field. (Note: A Working Group within The Forum's Standards Committee was formed on April 3, 2008 to explore how to incorporate sustainability concepts into the *Code of Ethics* and *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad* documents. Brian Whalen, President and CEO, and Michael Steinberg, Chair of the Standards Committee, have both been very supportive of this effort and Daniel Greenberg has been nominated as Chair, which will provide continuity with this Task Force).
- Develop a system for rating sustainability practices on education abroad programs. Possible collaborators include AASHE and their *Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System* (<http://www.aashe.org/stars/>) and Sustainable Travel International and their *Sustainable Tourism Eco-Certification Program* ([http://www.sustainabletravelinternational.org/documents/op\\_steplearn.html](http://www.sustainabletravelinternational.org/documents/op_steplearn.html)).

## **Appendix A**

# **Standards of Good Sustainability Practices for Providers of Education Abroad**

**DRAFT (April 14, 2008)**

### **Office Management**

- Give preference to recycled over virgin materials.
- Recycle resources (paper, cans, inter-office envelopes, packing materials) as much as possible.
- Print on both sides of paper and have this be the default setting on printers whenever possible.
- Create paperless application and enrollment processes.
- Create an online bill paying system.
- Send program handbooks and guides as PDFs rather than hard-copy documents.
- Collaboratively edit documents online using resources such as wikis or Google Docs instead of using hard copies.
- Purchase local materials and products whenever possible.
- Replace incandescent bulbs with CFLs and recycle dead bulbs when possible.
- Turn off lights when people leave a room. Install motion detectors to turn on/off lights automatically.
- Make sure computers are shut down at night and in sleep mode when not in use during the day.
- Purchase Energy Star® appliances when available.
- Turn down/off heating and air conditioning and install a programmable thermostat to adjust temperature automatically at times when the building is not being used.
- Install low-flow faucets in sinks and low-flush toilets in bathrooms.
- Use only non-toxic cleaning supplies.
- Consider tele- and/or videoconferencing as an alternative to program-related travel.
- Create internal carbon off-setting systems to help offset necessary work-related travel or contribute to external carbon offsetting programs.
- Conduct an environmental audit of office practices.
- Create an office/program policy incorporating best practices that is clear and accessible to staff, faculty, and students.

### **Office Management Overseas**

- Assist overseas staff to understand and meet the criteria stated above for "general office management".
- Provide opportunities for two-way sharing and to improve general office management through lessons learned overseas.
- Support overseas faculty to be aware of sustainability concerns and ask them to infuse their curricula with related themes.
- Create opportunities for students to do an 'environmental audit' for overseas sites and to offer sustainability recommendations.

### **Conferences**

- Print conference programs, signs and displays on recycled paper and reuse materials from previous events when possible.
- Encourage program participants to have one name tag that they bring to all conferences and collect and reuse name tag holders.
- Make conference proceedings available via the web and email as opposed to printed copies.
- Choose conference sites and hotels based on their proven commitment to sustainability (Hotels can be asked if they belong to any Sustainable Hotel Certification systems) and the availability of public transportation between sites.
- Ask participants ahead of time if they need print outs of materials, so that too many extra hard copies are not produced.

- Offer virtual conferencing options for attendees who are not local.
- Use as much local and organic produce in meals as possible and coordinate with local service organizations to receive left-over food.
- Calculate carbon footprints of conferences and purchase offsets to account for CO2 emissions.
- Provide conference registration discounts for participants who carpool, request paperless information, etc.

### **Marketing**

- Create "resource-light" marketing materials and direct students to the websites rather than giving out hardcopies whenever possible.
- Don't give out unnecessary and unsustainably made "shwag" (water bottles, luggage tags, bags, clip boards, etc.).
- Engage program alumni to attend local events and fairs rather than flying out office staff.

### **Program Design**

- Advance the study of and cultural sustainability through existing and new courses and extracurricular activities by incorporating sustainability minded discussions, experiential and service learning projects into existing programs.
- Educate students regarding their carbon footprints and provide opportunities for off-setting.
- Go Local. Stay in locally owned accommodations, eat at locally owned restaurants, hire local guides, and buy locally produced products.
- When hiring a tour agency, ask about their sustainability practices (e.g. what do they do with garbage generated, who do they employ, who is the agency owned by?).
- Encourage students to travel in environmentally and socially responsible ways when they travel on their own or with the group. Encourage less travel and more locally based exploring.
- Consider incentives for using public transportation for program-related activities when possible.
- Encourage students to participate in the Green Passport Program (<http://www.abroadview.org/green/>).
- Offer grants to students to pursue internships, volunteer positions, research, and service learning opportunities with NGOs working on environmental and social issues such as climate change and sustainable development. One possible template is Ithaca College's Global Footprint Grant (<http://www.ithaca.edu/oip/>).
- Network with faculty in host institutions/countries within related disciplines to provide opportunities for students to pursue independent research projects.
- Give students resources/information on how to get involved in advocacy campaigns related to local environmental and social issues upon returning to their home campus/community.

### **Student Opportunities**

- Enroll in the Green Passport Program.
- Go Local. Stay in locally owned accommodations, eat at locally owned restaurants, hire local guides, and buy locally produced products.
- When staying with host families, learn about and support issues that impact their well-being (e.g. water and electricity use, recovery of endangered species and ecosystems, etc.).
- Carbon offset through external carbon offsetting organizations.
- When using a guided tour through a tour agency, ask about their sustainability practices (e.g. what do they do with garbage generated, who do they employ, who is the agency owned by?).
- "Recognize and preserve the traditional knowledge and spiritual wisdom within [host] cultures that contribute to environmental protection and human well-being" (from the Earth Charter).
- Contribute something to the place or community you are visiting beyond just the money you are spending to get what you want. Donate some money to a good and relevant cause either before, during, or after your visit. Plan ahead to contribute some time, and volunteer at an organization that you deem worthy. It would be wise to research what organizations exist and contact them to inquire whether they receive volunteers before you leave.
- Choose destinations based on their demonstrated commitment to sustainable practices including their human rights record, environmental conservation record, commitment to peace, etc. Check with Ethical Traveler about this (<http://www.ethicaltraveler.org>).
- Get involved with sustainability projects on your home campus/community when you return, thus utilizing knowledge gained from the education abroad experience. Advocate for environmental/social justice, based on lessons learned from time abroad.