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Boldly Sustainable: Hope and Opportunity for Higher Education in the Age of Climate Change (Book Review)

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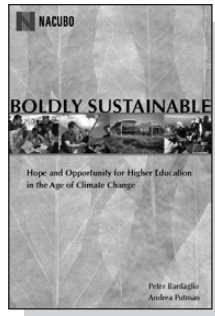


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Boldly Sustainable: Hope and Opportunity for Higher Education in the Age of Climate Change

by Peter Bardaglio and Andrea Putman
National Association of College and University
Business Officers (NACUBO) 2009
256 pages
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Reviewed by Mary Finley-Brook, Breana Coleman, and Kaitlan Lawrence

Peter Bardaglio and Andrea Putman's groundbreaking book, *Boldly Sustainable*, provides a powerful strategy for colleges and universities to achieve renewal and relevance in the 21st century through innovation, academic rigor, and pragmatism. The book combines a refreshingly optimistic message of hope and opportunity with an honest critique of higher education, highlighting the need for transformative change. Case study examples throughout the book show how sustainability initiatives can stimulate excellence in teaching and learning while also encouraging improvements in physical operations. With a broad range of cases from public and private institutions of various sizes and rankings, the authors convincingly demonstrate how the creation of a campuswide *culture of sustainability* brings many benefits in addition to positive ecological impacts. With forethought and effective planning, sustainability efforts can save money

and increase efficiency while helping a university carve out a unique niche in order to recruit the best students, attract and retain top faculty and staff, and encourage alumni and donor support. The authors argue that designing a path to sustainability can provide any campus with an overarching framework to clarify and focus institutional identity. The strategies put forth provide a foundation to reinvigorate and unite faculty, staff, and students through collaboration on a shared goal.

The holistic analysis put forth by these two sustainability experts builds on their extensive experience in higher education and green business. Educated as a historian, Peter Bardaglio researched and taught for two decades as a faculty member and later worked in university administration before his appointment as a senior fellow with Second Nature, a Boston-based nonprofit organization focused on accelerating sustainability in higher education. Andrea Putman worked in the renewable energy field and in the private sector before joining Second Nature, where she is currently director of corporate partnerships. Putman contributes practical advice on how to finance campus sustainability initiatives through grants, rebates, loans, student fees, private sector collaboration, and other sources.

Bardaglio and Putman place campus-based initiatives in the context of broader global and local climate governance. The cumulative emissions of higher education institutions are currently quite large: a typical four-year college produces 8,000 to 12,000 tons of carbon per student annually, while emissions from major research institutions can reach as high as 30,000 tons per student annually. As of April 2011, 677 university leaders

have signed the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment (ACUPCC). ACUPCC signatory schools exist in all 50 states and enroll 30 percent of the total U.S. university population. Participating schools conduct greenhouse gas emissions inventories and formulate climate action plans to reduce waste and mitigate pollution as they design a path to achieve carbon neutrality in campus operations.

When presenting methods to lower emissions, Bardaglio and Putman move beyond narrowly-defined transitions to a low-carbon future. The authors place their strategies for change within broader paradigm shifts occurring in higher education. Universities increasingly incorporate sustainability, resilience, and social responsibility into their mission. In defining environmental objectives, Bardaglio and Putman highlight the need to avoid piecemeal or fractured approaches; sustainability, they argue, "has to be more than a tagline and a logo" (p. 50). It has to be adopted as a central organizing strategy, not as "marginal to the real business of colleges and universities or as an add-on" (p. 170). Given the educational objective of schools, the authors advocate for the implementation of sustainability efforts across the curriculum and within the entire campus community, rather than tailoring efforts for a small number of specialized disciplines or toward behind-the-scenes changes to equipment and operations. Initiatives involving administrators, staff, faculty, and students inspire meaningful exchanges that can create bridges between the disciplinary and task-oriented "silos" often evident in higher education institutions.

Among a variety of benefits, campus sustainability initiatives help to:

- Develop a signature curriculum and enrich the learning environment.
- Integrate campus operations and experiential learning pedagogy.
- Enhance organizational effectiveness: cut waste and encourage innovation.
- Foster creative leadership and civic responsibility.
- Build partnerships with green firms, nongovernmental organizations, and state agencies.
- Develop media coverage as well as public and donor relations.

While Bardaglio and Putman present roadmaps to success, they acknowledge that every college has its own unique path to social and ecological sustainability. Furthermore, tailoring the process to an institution's distinctive mission, history, location, and culture is likely to improve the success of efforts. The authors suggest, however, that most educational institutions need to better prepare students for the challenging future they face—and this preparation should often involve sustainability literacy. Another recommendation is to infuse training in practical skills into the curriculum, including but not limited to leading and managing projects. Student-led renewable energy or agricultural projects provide rigorous and transformative educational experiences. Hands-on sustainability projects offer ideal environments for students to work with academic and professional mentors to gain the experience necessary to become knowledgeable and empowered leaders with a sense of civic mission. Experiential learning initiatives on

campus and in surrounding communities bring positive social and ecological impacts while facilitating sustainable development partnerships with outside institutions.

If one seeks to engage students, cut waste, protect the environment, save money, improve public relations, or create bridges with the local community, *Boldly Sustainable* provides rich, practical evidence from institutions that are successfully doing so. The authors share lessons from dozens of pioneering schools and include helpful reference materials. Readers will want to update their specific interests since many areas covered in the book—such as information technologies, green architecture, and renewable energy—are growing and transforming quickly. While Bardaglio and Putman present several examples of energy projects, our recent research on campus renewable energy projects has uncovered many new commitments and additional success stories. Current information can be found in online databases, such as that of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE).

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