

TAKING INVENTORY

A new environmental impact audit of the college measured energy consumption and waste patterns

BY ELAINE REGUS



Top: The college's Chitra Perera, Jenesie Hardyman and Shelley Doonan each worked with the Lyle Center team to research all facets of the college for the inventory.

Bottom: (from left) Regenerative Studies graduate students Kate Redman, Elektra Grant and Cristina Halstead worked with Debbie Scheider, the Lyle Center's project coordinator and Dr. Kyle Brown director of the center, to conduct the inventory. Graduate student Lindsey Stuvick, who is not pictured, also contributed to the report.

THE COLLINS COLLEGE OF HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT is the first college at Cal Poly Pomona to seriously examine its carbon footprint as part of its commitment to sustainability. The college teamed up with the Lyle Center for Regenerative Studies to inventory the carbon emissions generated at the college and will continue working with the center to find meaningful ways to reduce the environmental impact of its overall operations.

The Environmental Impact Inventory prepared by the Lyle Center with help from Collins College faculty, staff and students found that electricity and natural gas accounted for 77 percent of the overall greenhouse gas emissions, followed by food purchases (14 percent), waste (4 percent), consumables like paper and plastic (4 percent) and water (1 percent). Overall, the college produces an estimated 766 metric tons of greenhouse gases annually.

By understanding the impact it is having on the environment, the college can develop systematic ways to cut emissions through changing behavior, new technologies and incorporating sustainability into the curriculum. It can also serve as a model for the hospitality industry and other colleges with similar programs that are interested in addressing their environmental impact and commitment to sustainability.

"Part of our responsibility as a leader in hospitality education is to think critically and to provide solutions to challenges that face our industry," said Dean Andy Feinstein.

Feinstein said one of the seven goals in the college's strategic plan is to be "an environmentally conscious college committed to

“PART OF OUR RESPONSIBILITY AS A LEADER IN HOSPITALITY EDUCATION IS TO THINK CRITICALLY AND TO PROVIDE SOLUTIONS TO CHALLENGES THAT FACE OUR INDUSTRY,” SAID DEAN ANDY FEINSTEIN.

sustainability.” The first step toward reaching that goal is the report, which established a baseline to begin working from.

“We are now developing a sustainability action plan and identifying strategies that will assist us in reaching this goal,” Feinstein said. “Also, several Collins faculty members are partnering with faculty in Regenerative Studies to examine opportunities for collaborative sustainability research.”

Cal Poly Pomona’s commitment to reducing its carbon footprint began in earnest in 2007 when President Michael Ortiz became one of the first university presidents in the nation to sign the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment pledging to “eliminate their campuses’ net greenhouse gas emissions in a reasonable period of time as determined by each institution.”

Cal Poly Pomona was one of the first CSU campuses to conduct a campus-wide climate action inventory that was completed in 2007. The university created a Climate Commitment Task Force and subsequently completed a climate action plan in 2009 based on the original inventory. The university-wide goal is to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.

Dr. Kyle Brown, director of the Lyle Center, and co-chairman of the Climate Commitment Task Force, said the plan set 17 benchmarks and charged the various colleges and units on campus to develop strategies to meet those benchmarks. Key benchmarks on the academic side include integrating sustainability into the curriculum and supporting research and outreach efforts related to climate change and reducing the impact on the environment.

“Collins was the first college on campus to make meaningful progress in the area of reducing the environmental impact of its operations,” Brown said. “By taking a systematic look not only at its curriculum but also at its operations, Collins is taking a key step toward doing that.”

Four graduate students from the Lyle Center spent nine months preparing the report with assistance from Collins College students, staff and faculty. They conducted extensive research and literature review, identified lifecycle analysis calculators that calculate greenhouse gas emissions for anything from prime rib (12,447 grams per plate) to a chocolate torte (176 grams per plate), conducted audits and analyzed their findings.

Debbie Scheider, project coordinator with the Lyle Center, said one of the surprising findings from the research was that buying local does not necessarily reduce one’s carbon footprint because 83 percent of the greenhouse gas emissions from food occur before it even leaves the farm or ranch. How a particular food is produced makes more of a difference in terms of climate impact than how far away it is grown. For example, the cumulative emissions from a hothouse-grown tomato are greater than for a tomato that is conventionally or organically grown.

Scheider said the same goes for conventional versus grass-fed beef. The differences in emissions between the two are huge.

“The impact of food and purchasing choices on food was very, very surprising,” Scheider said. “Small changes can have a very big impact.”

Graduate student Kate Redman concentrated on the waste portion of the report. Working with students in Shelley Doonan’s Introduction to Professional Cooking class, she delivered an hour-long presentation on waste in the restaurant industry and talked about green restaurant certificates and how to conduct a waste audit. Then, she took them behind the restaurant and they dug through four dumpsters containing a week’s worth of kitchen garbage. They sorted, weighed and quantified every scrap from a half-full bottle of white truffle oil to still-packaged deer meat.

“For someone like me, who really cares about sustainability, it was shocking,” Redman said.

Doonan said the biggest impact on her students was seeing how many plastic tasting spoons and buckets of latex gloves used for plating food the college goes through in a week.

“For the rest of the quarter, they did a very good job of getting the food waste in the composting pile, the green waste in the green waste bins and the recyclables in the recyclable containers,” Doonan said. “It definitely changed their behavior.”

Doonan, who trained at Chez Panisse in Berkeley, is a good model for commitment to sustainability.

Each of her classes is required to design a sustainable and seasonal menu. She encourages them to bring their own containers in if they want to take food home instead of passing out Styrofoam containers. And, she uses standard flatware instead of disposable spoons for tasting and washes it between tastings.

“It’s ingrained in me to be sustainable and seasonable,” Doonan said. “That’s really who I am.”

It takes a clear understanding of one’s consumption and waste habits to make major changes, Feinstein said.

“It was dirty work, literally for our students to help with the emissions audit, but that hands-on discovery led to a change in behavior,” he said. “We can study and analyze all we want, but unless changes in behavior occur, we haven’t completed our goal.”

Read the full report online by scanning the QR code



PHOTOS BY TOM ZASADZINSKI