

## **Putting Sustainability in Action at Florida A&M University**

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### **The Roots of Sustainability**

'If you're looking for a big opportunity, seek out a big problem.' This guidance by H. Jackson Brown Sr. speaks to the many opportunities and challenges we have experienced at Florida A&M University (FAMU) in finding a home for the cultivation, integration and expression of our interests in environment and society. The big opportunity is to institutionalize sustainability in the context and framework of FAMU's rich and storied relationship to the environment rooted in its history, its people and community, and its recognition as a pioneering academic institution. FAMU was founded in October 1887 and is an 1890 land-grant institution 'dedicated to the advancement of knowledge, resolution of complex issues and the empowerment of citizens and communities.'

The effort to formally prioritize environmental issues and sustainability began in 2007 when the student-led FAMU Green Coalition petitioned then President James H. Ammons to create and implement a sustainability program. When asked why he signed the American College & University Presidents' Climate Commitment in 2013, Interim President Larry Robinson replied: "It was the consensus of the students, faculty, staff, administration and stakeholders for FAMU to publically declare its actions and commit to an environmental leadership role in accord with our historic mission and vision in collaboration with other higher education institutions."

### **Institutionalization**

Established and charged in 2008 by former President James H. Ammons to develop and implement an integrated strategic plan, interdisciplinary in scope, the FAMU Environment and Sustainability Council embarked upon a comprehensive and integrated approach to institutionalize sustainability and make FAMU a well-recognized green and sustainable campus. Today, council members facilitate dialogue and collaboration among university and community stakeholders on environment and sustainability issues within the framework of university administration, construction and facilities management, teaching and research, and community engagement. Sustainability and environmental issues have become emphasized across the curriculum including agriculture and food sciences; allied and public health sciences; architecture and engineering technology; engineering; environmental science and studies; history and political science; business, law and journalism. The department of sociology recently initiated the development of a degree program in environmental sociology.

In 2013, the Board of Trustees adopted a University Energy Policy that promotes a commitment to energy efficiency and conservation that benefits students, faculty, staff, the campus community and the environment. Trustees also approved the establishment of a Student Green Fee, initiated by the Green Coalition, that supports educational, structural, research or service-learning projects to improve energy efficiency, sustainability and environmental literacy of the FAMU community and supported the April 2013 signing of the President's Climate Commitment.

The efforts of the FAMU Green Coalition culminated with the establishment of the Sustainability Institute by President Elmira Mangum in 2014.

### **Special Role for HBCUs in the Sustainability Dialogue**

A renowned member of the 105 historically black colleges and universities across the country, FAMU and its stakeholders, have worked together in various settings. This journey has blossomed into a vision that fuels our momentum to move forward. We are pleased to have been recognized in 2011 and 2012 by The Princeton Review's Guide to 322 Green Colleges; and the 2014 HBCU Green Report. But for sustainability initiatives to be, well, sustainable at FAMU, there must continue to be top-down and bottom-up commitment. We need to engage even more faculty, staff, students and administrators in championing transdisciplinary collaboration and sustainability initiatives, especially as some of us graduate or retire. We are not there yet, but we are striving to fully embrace sustainability as the compass for an integrated teaching, research and community engagement approach that can address grand challenges such as global climate change; environmental health and justice; and food-energy-water security. With census projections that minorities will soon account for half of the nation's population, it is vital for minority-serving institutions to operate in the fullness of their purpose. FAMU is committed to *'Putting Sustainability in Action'* by producing a cadre of scholars, social entrepreneurs and workforce professionals who bring a diverse cultural lens to sustainable community solutions. This vision founded our existence, fuels us today and will guide us in the future.