

Sustainability and the future

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I'm the last person who has to be reminded that times are tough. College leaders around the state are watching developments at the Legislature with legitimate concern and well-chewed fingernails. Sometimes we even find ourselves wondering how we will manage to sustain our high-quality offerings in the face of the breadth and depth of cuts currently being considered by the Minnesota House and Senate.

To add to the challenge, service organizations like North Hennepin Community College and other public colleges and universities really can't indulge in worrying exclusively about the present. Instead of focusing on the economic downturn and resulting budget crisis alone, I argue we must continue to concern ourselves with budgets and with our long-term vision for sustainability.

As a public institution and as a college that is responsible for educating the next generation of leaders and consumers, we need to think beyond our current challenges and remember the need to practice and teach environmental sustainability. In fact, a focus on efficiency and accountability during tough times makes this point even more relevant.

With this in mind, and in conjunction with a dynamic Earth Week celebration, North Hennepin will soon unveil a new plan for sustainability. While students often are the driving force in raising interest in caring for the environment, at North Hennepin our faculty, staff and students quickly joined forces and gained impressive momentum when it came to raising awareness of environmental issues and incorporating sustainability into campus culture, facilities and curriculum.

Specific actions such as reducing the college's carbon footprint through recycling and waste management, improving the efficiency of heating and cooling systems, and helping students explore alternative transportation options go a long way toward long-term environmental impact and internal efficiency. These steps build on previous important college efforts, but move us forward at a faster pace.

North Hennepin's sustainability plan is part of a larger community effort. Community partnerships between the college and Brooklyn Center High School and Osseo Junior High School have resulted in EarthFest and an American Indian traditional feast and powwow. Poetry readings and prose from local and visiting nature writers, a screening of the award-winning documentary "For the Next Seven Generations," presentations from energy and green-building experts at a Green Fair and live animal and bird

presentations are all part of an extended North Hennepin celebration of Earth Week.

North Hennepin unveiled its sustainability plan April 18 prior to the Earth Week keynote address by Arctic explorer Will Steger. Earth Week activities continue through April 30.

For more about the sustainability plan presentation, contact Carmen Shoquist at cshoquist@nhcc.edu or 763-424-0902 .

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