The sports industry is using its uniquely powerful cultural influence to help provide much-needed business leadership in ecologically sustainable practices. Following the lead of professional sports, college sports are also adopting greener practices, and, in so doing, are engaging millions of college sports fans in nonpolitical public education about environmental protection. Collegiate sports venues across the country, the hearts of our nation’s centers of higher learning, are becoming champions of the sports greening movement. Collegiate athletic departments (comprising intercollegiate varsity sports) and recreation departments (encompassing club and intramural sports and gym facilities) are adopting environmentally intelligent operations and procurement policies in response to student demand, campus sustainability commitments, and bottom-line business practices modeled by professional sports venues. College sports greening programs reduce emissions of global warming pollution, protect habitat, save energy and water, reach millions of fans with environmental messages, and train future business leaders in environmental stewardship.
College football is among the most popular sports in the United States, with as many followers as America’s pastime, professional baseball. More than 103 million adults, or 44 percent of all adults in the nation, describe themselves as college football fans. College football is featured on every major media sports outlet, including CBS, ESPN, ABC, Fox College Sports, FX, NBC Sports Network, and many conference-based, regional and local networks. In fact, IMG, the leading collegiate multimedia, marketing, and brand management company, reports that the media industry has committed $25.5 billion in college sports broadcast fees over the next 15 years.

Ultimately, collegiate athletics and recreation programs exist principally for students. Of all facilities on campus, athletic venues and recreation centers welcome the broadest cross-section—and the highest percentage—of students. More than 75 percent of college students participate in recreation department programs, according to a study by NIRSA: Leaders in Collegiate Recreation. There are also an estimated 5.5 million club sport athletes, who participate in non-varsity intercollegiate competition on campuses all over the country. Approximately 453,300 varsity athletes represent 1,096 schools across the three NCAA divisions nationwide. Collegiate athletic events frequently draw tens of thousands of fans, students and nonstudents alike.

Over the past decade, an increasing number of collegiate athletic and recreation departments have initiated or expanded environmental programs, often as part of a broader campus environmental initiative. Collegiate sports programs are partnering with experts in facilities management and sustainability across their institutions to integrate environmentally progressive features into their buildings and operations, often saving money while becoming more ecologically responsible.

As the following case studies illustrate, collegiate sports greening efforts have often been spurred by student demand in combination with institutional leadership that prioritizes sustainability. Students are increasingly interested in environmental studies and sustainability in business. According to a Princeton Review survey, 62 percent of 14,125 prospective students (and some parents) representing all 50 states said that a college’s environmental commitments would “strongly” or “very much” contribute to their assessment of the school.

A 2012 survey conducted by UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute found that 26.5 percent of entering students (from 283 institutions surveyed) reported feeling it is “essential” or “very important” to help clean up the environment. Close to 40 percent of first-year students believe it is “very important” or “essential” to adopt green practices to protect the environment. To address growing student demand, in 2009, the Princeton Review launched a new guide, “The Princeton Review’s Guide to Green Colleges,” that profiles the green efforts of hundreds of colleges and universities.

This report documents college sports’ growing embrace of recycling, composting, energy efficiency, renewable energy, water conservation, alternative transportation, safer chemicals, environmentally preferable procurement, and greener building practices. The movement to green college sports has the potential to educate millions of college students across the United States, future leaders of our nation and the world, about the importance of protecting the environment and ecological services on which we all depend. Through their leadership, college athletic and recreation departments are showing their students, their institutions, and their surrounding communities cost-effective solutions to some of our planet’s most critical ecological issues, encouraging them to be better environmental stewards.

Collegiate sports greening helps address urgent environmental pressures that threaten the future of sports and the communities in which sports are played. To engage in or simply enjoy the sports we love, we need clean air, clean water, and a healthy climate. The ecological threats we face are real. According to a senior writer for Sports Illustrated, Alexander Wolff, in his article “Going, Going Green,” these threats are already transforming when, where, and how we play sports. “As global warming changes the planet, it is changing the sports world…. Global warming is not coming; it is here. As temperatures around the globe increase, oceans are warming, fields are drying up, snow is melting, more rain is falling, and sea levels are rising. All of which is changing the way we play and the sports we watch.”

Athletic and recreation facilities are often the centerpieces of college campuses, where students come together and school spirit is built. Consequently, college sports can serve as a valuable messenger promoting environmental stewardship. Moreover, as the “doorstep of the university,” athletics often has the greatest influence among campus departments on the visibility, culture, and brand recognition of a college or university outside the campus gates.

According to Doug J. Chung at the Harvard Business School, “The primary form of mass media advertising by academic institutions in the United States is, arguably, through its athletics program.” And it goes without saying that athletics attracts students to colleges, even academically superior students. Says Professor Chung, “Athletic success has a significant impact on the quantity and quality of applicants that a school receives. And schools become more selective with athletic success.”

More Americans follow college sports than ever before, and its popularity continues to grow. According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), 181 million viewers tuned in to at least one of the 2013 NCAA Division 1 men’s college basketball tournament games on television or online. The NCAA also reports that college football games received 352 million views in 2012, with 216 million tuning in during the regular season and 126 million watching the postseason bowl games. Approximately 49 million fans in the United States also attended at least one college football game in 2012, the third-highest season attendance ever.

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College sports offer an opportunity to bring sustainability into mainstream campus culture. Sport transcends political, social, cultural, and socioeconomic divides. It can also transcend campus cliques based on majors, classes, extracurricular interests, or Greek society. Loyalty to sports teams is one of the few things tens of thousands of students can agree on.\textsuperscript{19} And this trend is true beyond campuses: Only 13 percent of Americans say they follow science,\textsuperscript{20} while 63 percent identify themselves as sports fans.\textsuperscript{21} By modeling sustainable practices to thousands of students and fans, college sports hold the potential to help sustainability cross departmental boundaries and social divides to become part of daily campus life.

College sports greening programs provide many benefits for athletics and recreation departments alongside advancing campus sustainability. They can reduce operations costs, provide a healthier workout environment to promote athlete performance, attract new sponsors and donors, enhance the athletics brand, increase fan loyalty, bolster interdepartmental collaboration, foster community ties, and provide an important informal form of education. These programs also help coaches and admissions departments recruit students who are looking for robust campus-wide sustainability programs. High-performance sports facilities designed to green building standards can help give athletics departments a competitive edge during recruiting.

Campuses have long relied on sports achievements to help define and promote their institutional identity. Increasingly, environmental stewardship is also becoming part of a college or university’s brand. Sports greening can integrate sustainability into some of the institution’s strongest marketing and communications platforms.

Sports can be a powerful engine for social change. Billie Jean King’s epic defeat of Bobby Riggs in their 1973 exhibition match was a big step toward pay equality for women. Jackie Robinson helped to break the race barrier in Major League Baseball. The passage of Title IX created new ways to finance and support women’s sports.\textsuperscript{22} By modeling sustainable practices to thousands of students and fans, college sports hold the potential to help sustainability cross departmental boundaries and social divides to become part of daily campus life.

Greening collegiate sports, like greening any organization, is the process of reviewing operations and procurement policies with an eye toward reducing environmental impacts. Greening incorporates environmental considerations into decisions made about the products and services purchased and offered, along with other factors such as cost, product quality, and availability. It is an ongoing enhancement process that all businesses should engage in to improve their long-term performance and to advance sustainability. Greening is helping to bring the sports industry into the 21st-century marketplace, where environmental considerations are part of managing business risk, responding to consumer interests, and promoting corporate social responsibility, all of which are essential for achieving high-performance buildings and systems.

Now collegiate sports industry leaders are enhancing how business is done and helping to expand students’ expectations about sustainability. This is helping to shift the environmental movement from scientific discussions of climate change or biodiversity loss to mainstream conversations about the future of our energy, food, and medical systems. The environmental crises we face are as serious for the future of our economy as they are for the survival of thousands of species, human cultures, and natural ecosystems around the globe.

There is no single business undertaking or law that can solve our many ecological problems. Rather, addressing these issues will require countless contributions from every corner of society. However small our day-to-day actions may seem, our collective decisions add up to meaningful regional and global impacts. Most individuals and businesses can do only relatively small things, whether it’s buying products made with recycled content, purchasing energy-efficient appliances, recycling, or conserving water. What is clear, however, is that everyone has to do something to address the environmental pressures we collectively face. And the many small ecological initiatives being implemented throughout the world of sports are adding up, sending an important environmental message to students and the broader American public. It offers hope that we can turn current ecological trends around.

The growing collegiate sports greening movement is providing college students with the awareness, values, and skills that will help build a more sustainable society. As the many examples of collegiate sports greening in this report illustrate, college sport is a uniquely effective tool for building a strong, sustainable, and resilient future.
Endnotes

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5 Ibid., at 4.
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10 www.footballfoundation.org/tabid/567/Article/53380/Passion-for-College-Football-Remains-Robust.aspx#sthash.zOKDs40u.dpuf. Among adult college football fans, 61 percent are male and 39 percent female. Twelve percent are age 18–24, 18 percent are 25–34, 19 percent are 35–44, 20 percent are 45–54, 16 percent are 55–64, and 16 percent are age 65 or over.
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