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NEW SECTION: News about the Environment

Higher Learning Adapts To a Greening Attitude

Students Lead Drive Reshaping Curricula

By [Susan Kinzie](#)

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Sunday, June 22, 2008; Page A01

The environmental fervor sweeping college campuses has reached beyond the push to recycle plastics and offer organic food and is transforming the curriculum, permeating classrooms, academic majors and expensive new research institutes.

The [University of Maryland](#) teaches "green" real estate strategies for landscape architects. The [University of Virginia](#)'s business graduate students recently created a way to generate power in rural Indian villages with discarded rice husks. And in a [Catholic University](#) architecture studio last week, students displayed ideas for homes made from discarded shipping containers.

"It should be part of everything we do," said Ligia Johnson, a Catholic student whose plan for the Kenilworth neighborhood in Northeast Washington included roofs that collect rainwater and grow plants and trees.

What was once a fringe interest, perhaps seemingly a fad, has become fully entrenched in academic life, university officials say, affecting not just how students live but what they learn and, as graduates, how they will change workplaces and neighborhoods.

At [George Washington University](#) last month, many students pinned green ribbons on their graduation robes or their recycled-cotton caps and signed pledges to take their commitment to environmentalism into their jobs.

Concern about the environment has waxed and waned in the past few decades, said GWU President [Steven Knapp](#). But with fears of climate change and high gas prices, "the situation has become dire enough that people are focused on it," Knapp said. "Energy is costly enough that people are focused on it. We really think this time, it's here to stay."

For years, student activists have demanded environmentally friendly changes, prompting university officials to reevaluate how they heat classrooms, water campus greens and buy light bulbs. Frostburg State University in Western Maryland, for instance, has a wind-powered generating station. [Johns Hopkins University](#) is planning to build its own heat and power generator.

Students are also driving the academic push that is infusing curriculum and research with an environmental consciousness.

For those who are skeptical about global warming and think that the current trend is often too alarmist, the changes carry risk. "It discredits science," said Richard Lindzen, a professor of



Catholic University student Sara Lotz prepares photo ideas for building homes from discarded shipping containers in an architecture class. (By James M. Thresher For The Washington Post)

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meteorology at [MIT](#). "It's propaganda," he added, with opposing viewpoints rarely explored.

"I think it's getting a little out of proportion, the emphasis on the environment," said Donald J. Boudreaux, chairman of the economics department at [George Mason University](#). He said people increasingly look at environmental issues almost as a religion, with unquestioning belief, rather than thinking critically about scientific evidence or economic issues.

But many school officials say there's a growing consensus about climate change. "Three or four years ago, I would hear that from people, that global warming's a fraud," said Randall Ott, architecture dean at Catholic. "I don't hear that at all now," especially from students. In his view, he said, "the evidence is overwhelming -- and very troubling. We at our university feel a certain ethical mission to be operative on this issue."

Hundreds of university presidents have signed the [American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment](#), pledging to take leadership on eliminating greenhouse gases. In 2006, the group now called the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education had about 35 members. Now it has more than 500.

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