

FY 2021-
2022

Environmental Sustainability at University of New Orleans



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Office of Research / Keep UNO Beautiful

FY 2021-2022

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Introduction

The University of New Orleans is a 195-acre campus adjacent to Lake Pontchartrain. It houses environmentally focused research centers and world class professors who teach students about green infrastructure and other environmentally sustainable practices. Unfortunately, there has been a disconnect between what we are teaching our students and the university's operating and maintenance practices.

The Green Infrastructure Center describes green infrastructure as the “interconnected natural systems and ecological processes that provide clean water, air quality, and wildlife habitat” (Green Infrastructure Center, 2018). As a university, we need to interconnect our education, research, and operations.

Using the campus as a living lab for teaching and research will provide experiential learning opportunities for our students—research shows that a practical application of knowledge improves retention efforts. Making the campus more environmentally sustainable also makes good business sense if projects focus reducing the costs of operation and maintenance, beautifying the campus, and improving campus health. Even community engagement will be enhanced if the campus has a more vibrant outdoor habitat with native flora and fauna that is inviting to visitors.

A large number of organizations, certifications, and groups across the country reinforce the importance of sustainability in higher education. This report contains programs that are less resource intensive and benchmarks that are obtainable within a relatively short period of time. It is meant to start a conversation and engage the community. Even with our limited resources, UNO needs to create a culture that supports environmental sustainability. Ideally, the projects in phase one will focus on campus infrastructure and create visible success stories that encourage participants to stay engaged. When possible, projects should also reduce operating and maintenance costs.

In the first one to three years, it will be imperative to gather baseline data for items such as water runoff, waste production, and energy use by building. This baseline data will allow the university to set realistic goals in the short- and long-term. Projects should include cost benefit analyses when possible. Interdisciplinary teams of students, faculty, and staff who are engaged and encouraged to contribute to environmental sustainability at UNO will be imperative for our community to move forward on this initiative.

UNO Master Plan

UNO updated the [Campus Master Plan](#) in 2021. This planning document and map will guide all future sustainability efforts, ensuring university cohesion.



2021-2022 Projects

The following programs were implemented or revived in FY 2021-2022. All programs were low cost ways to build upon and celebrate successful projects, such as those from UNO's Internal Grant Program and existing sustainability groups on campus.

UNO Sustainability Circle

In 2021, the UNO Sustainability Circle started meeting again.

Co-Chairs of the UNO Sustainability Circle include Carolyn Golz, Steve Johnson, and Carol Lunn. Julie Landry served as web developer and built a new sustainability website for the university.

The following subcommittees were created for FY 2021-2022:

- Earth Day
- Transportation Trails Grant
- Waste Audit (required for KLB)
- Website
- Keep Louisiana Beautiful support

Solar Charging Station

A solar charging station was installed near Pontchartrain Hall residential housing. The charging station offers AC plugins for charging cell-phones and powering other electronics.

Just days after the station was installed, UNO students used the solar charging station as an impromptu stage for an [outdoor music concert](#).

Earth Day

UNO hosted its first campus-wide [Earth Day event](#) in FY 2021-2022.

The UNO Sustainability Circle organized a community partner tabling event including some of the following activities and participants:

- Birding at UNO
 - Hosted a birding walk
- Keep UNO Beautiful
 - Hosted [Love the Boot litter pickup](#)
- UNO Sustainability Circle
 - Hosted Sustainability Scavenger Hunt
- Bike Easy
 - Hosted Bike Workshop
- Native Plant Initiative of Greater New Orleans
 - Hosted Native Plant Seed Giveaway
- Chartwells
 - Provided seed packs and refreshments
- Green Light New Orleans
 - Rain barrel display and literature

- UNO Garden Club
 - Plant give away and sale
- Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana
- Master Naturalist of Greater New Orleans
- Mosquito Termite and Rodent Control Board
- Orleans Audubon Society
- The Water Institute

Environmental Sustainability Mural & Native Plant Garden

In Spring 2022, Keep UNO Beautiful and the UNO Office of Research funded a student art project that transformed an otherwise nondescript set of utility doors into a vibrant and poignant art installation drawing attention to local birds affected by climate change.

Kathy Rodriguez, assistant professor of fine arts at UNO, offered to incorporate the mural as a class project in her Painting II course.

[Jamie Risbourg](#), a junior majoring in studio arts, submitted the [winning design](#).

The collaboration was inspired by the National Audubon Society's [Audubon Mural Project](#).

A native plant garden was installed next to the mural, tying the art together with a complete ecosystem. Carol Lunn obtained plant donations from the Spring 2022 Louisiana Native Plant Sale and worked with Tammany Baumgarten, a licensed horticulturist, owner of Baumgardens, Inc., and president of the [Native Plant Initiative of Greater New Orleans](#) to install the garden.

Audubon Delta interviewed the project members and produced a [video](#).

Urban Bird Habitat Grant

The grant proposal "Urban Bird Habitat and Environmental Education at the University of New Orleans" was submitted by a group of faculty and staff with broad support from local environmental groups. The project was funded. Dan Shahar served as the principal investigator and the co-principal investigators included Liz Sigler and John Bishop.

A number of community volunteer events were hosted in connection with the grant:

- November 6, 2021: Woodlot Restoration
- December 18, 2021: Woodlot Restoration
- January 29, 2022: Woodlot Planting

Privateer Pocket Parks

The first Privateer Pocket Park was installed in the Administration Courtyard between the Administration Building and the Administration Annex. The park includes a rain garden of native plants installed by Tammany Baumgarten and a rain barrel from Green Light NOLA. Julie Landry was the lead on the demonstration project.

Keep UNO Beautiful plans to add more parks in FY 2022-2023. The program is listed on the Sustainability at UNO website along with an application to oversee the installation of a Privateer Pocket Park.

The goal is to revitalize unkempt gardens with native plants, increasing the biodiversity of wildlife on campus while educating the UNO community about our native plants and their importance to our environment.

Louisiana's University Sustainability Coalition

To open lines of communication and initiate a network focused on increasing higher education sustainability efforts in Louisiana, the [University Sustainability Coalition](#) was established in 2021, with Dr. Jerrod Penn, Assistant Professor with the Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness at Louisiana State University, as chair and KLB as the lead facilitator.

The University of New Orleans joined the University Sustainability Coalition in October 2021 by joining the Keep Louisiana Beautiful University Affiliate program.

Carol Lunn and Samantha West represented UNO in the larger coalition. They attended monthly meetings to discuss opportunities and partnerships for sustainability in Louisiana.

The group of 15 colleges and universities meets for eight months throughout the academic school year with one goal—to increase higher education sustainability efforts in Louisiana. Networking and sharing have led to members replicating successful programs focused on implementing more sustainable campus dining practices and reducing waste during the student move-out process.

Innovation Challenge: Office of Research Internal Grant

In 2022, the Office of Research announced a new internal grant program: the [Innovation Challenge](#) for sustainability.

The Innovation Challenge requires participation from a faculty mentor and a team of students from two or more colleges. The aim of the program is to fund environmental sustainability projects on UNO's campus. Applicants are encouraged to seek additional matching funds from off-campus constituents. Sample projects were included in the [RFP](#).

One proposal was funded. Chris Belser was the principal investigator. The title of the proposal was "Project SEED (Supporting EcoLeadership & EcoWellness Development)." The project is an applied eco-leadership development initiative centered on environmental sustainability and eco-wellness.

Keep UNO Beautiful (A Keep Louisiana Beautiful University Affiliate)

The University of New Orleans joined the Keep Louisiana Beautiful University Affiliate program in October 2021, creating Keep UNO Beautiful.

By June 2022, Keep UNO Beautiful had [graduated](#) within the [first class](#) of KLB university affiliates.

Contacts for Keep UNO Beautiful include Carol Lunn, Irene Ziegler, and Julie Landry.

Communications are conducted via the Sustainability at UNO website and Instagram. UNO supported Keep UNO Beautiful by providing the email address keepunobeautiful@uno.edu and a donation account through the UNO Foundation.

Marketing efforts included the design of a Keep UNO Beautiful logo, which was used on a table cloth, tote bag, and t-shirt.

Several initiatives were required in order to qualify for University Affiliate membership.

Waste Audit

The university affiliate process required each school to conduct a waste audit to determine baseline data. This activity assisted each school in determining the type, quantity and origins of waste. Samantha West was the Keep UNO Beautiful team lead and coordinator.

Litter Audit

A new litter app was created by KLB to assist university affiliates with conducting a litter audit. The litter audit was conducted in the same areas as the waste audit. Samantha West was the Keep UNO Beautiful team lead and coordinator.

Love the Boot Earth Day Litter Pickup

Three representatives from Keep Louisiana Beautiful attended Keep UNO Beautiful's litter pickup on Earth Day. Litter was picked up around the library, quad, and surrounding areas as part of the Love the Boot Earth Day campaign.

Green Move Out Days

Amanda Robbins, Director of Residential Life, partnered with Keep UNO Beautiful and the University of New Orleans introduced sustainable practices to residential halls' [move-out day](#) with its first-ever [Green Move-Out Day](#).

Partners from Residential Life, Keep UNO Beautiful and the UNO Sustainability Circle worked with Goodwill and the UNO Privateer Pantry to reduce the environmental impact of students moving out of on-campus housing. Students were able to donate items in good condition to Goodwill and unopened, shelf-stable food and personal care items to the UNO Privateer Pantry. Instead of being sent to a landfill, these items were provided for re-use by those in need.

Website: Sustainability at UNO

The UNO Sustainability Circle and Keep UNO Beautiful worked with Julie Landry to create and maintain a [sustainability website](#) for the University of New Orleans, which now houses baseline data, promotes events, and communicates sustainability success stories.

UNO Garden Club

The UNO Garden Club, an on-campus student group, began meeting in FY 2021-2022 for the first time since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the landfall of Hurricane Ida. Carol Lunn signed on to the the club's new advisor.

The Garden Club's first initiatives were to clean out its greenhouses and yard; re-start student planting; host a table with a plant sale and giveaway for Earth Day; and replace missing panels in the greenhouse damaged by Hurricane Ida.