Sustainability – a defining challenge of our time – is one of Northeastern’s primary academic thrusts. Beyond the focus on sustainability that we bring to our teaching and research, it’s also a reality that we live each and every day.

In this spirit, I’m pleased to let you know that Northeastern has been recognized once again for our commitment to sustainability on campus. Last week, we were named the 4th “greenest” university among 215 institutions in 49 countries rated in the new Greenmetric World University Ranking compiled by the University of Indonesia.

This marks the third year in a row that Northeastern has ranked among the top four universities in the world in this survey, which assesses institutions’ practices in the areas of energy use, waste treatment and recycling, water use and transportation, among others. This also marks the fourth year in a row that Northeastern has received the highest score on the Princeton Review’s “Green Honor Roll,” which highlights excellence in campus sustainability.

While this external recognition is welcome, the actions that each of you – students, faculty and staff – take on a daily basis to make Northeastern an environmentally responsible university are much more significant. Together, you have:

- Reduced the university’s carbon footprint by 26% compared to 2005 levels, on a square foot basis;
- Reduced campus water consumption by 17% since 2005, on a square foot basis;
- Composted approximately 600 tons of pre- and post-consumer food waste in 2012, up from 200 tons in 2007;
- In the past year, recycled 66 tons of kitchen grease, which is processed into biofuel and composting solids at a nearby treatment plant;
- Achieved a 42% “diversion rate” for our campus – which means that of all the material disposed of on campus, more than two-fifths is recycled, composted or re-used.

Through the efforts of our dedicated colleagues in the Facilities Division, we continue to lead the way in replacing inefficient building systems with sustainable, green technologies such as efficient chillers, heat transfer systems, and automatic dimming systems that turn down interior lights when the daylight is sufficient. This year, we will extend these efforts with a major retrofitting of the Egan Center’s building systems. We’re also continuing the campus-wide program to upgrade lighting on campus with more efficient technologies, including LED lighting. In addition, I’m pleased to let you know that we’ll be installing 70 hydration stations across campus this year to provide an alternative to bottled water consumption.

As always, our students are in the vanguard of our campus sustainability efforts. Thanks to the leadership of our Student Government Association, we’ve installed a new self-service bicycle repair station on campus, which is located underneath the archway near the north tower of West Village A. Once again this year, the SGA and the Husky Environmental Action Team are coordinating Northeastern’s participation in RecycleMania, a competition among North American colleges and universities to highlight the benefits of recycling and carefully track recycled material over a 10-week period. This year’s competition extends from February to April, and I encourage all members of our community to take part.

Combined with the more than 130 courses on campus that integrate sustainability into the curriculum – as well as the innovative research of our faculty in this area – these actions make it clear that sustainability is much more than a bromide at Northeastern. To the contrary, it is part of our ethic – a deeply ingrained part of who we are.

I’m grateful to each and every member of our community for the steps you take, big and small, to make Northeastern more sustainable. You’re not only making changes for the better at our university – you’re making a lasting impact on our world.

Sincerely,

Joseph E. Aoun
President