

OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY

2025-2026 Annual Impact Report





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About the Office



About Us

The UCR Office of Sustainability advances sustainability across campus through operations, academics, and community engagement. Our work supports efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, conserve resources, promote environmental and social responsibility, and integrate sustainable practices throughout the university. By collaborating with students, faculty, staff, and community partners, we help strengthen a culture of sustainability at UCR and beyond.

Mission

Our mission is to advance a culture of sustainability at UCR by connecting environmental, economic, and social well-being through climate action, education, engagement, and sustainable campus operations.

Leadership



Leadership



Codie Sterner, Program Director

In 2025-2026, the Office of Sustainability (OS) welcomed its new Chief Sustainability Officer in September, and soon after achieved a major milestone by completing the first Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) and receiving the Chancellor's approval. The CAAP serves as the university's sustainability roadmap for the next ten years. Guidelines for transitioning to all-electric buildings, expanding energy analysis systems, conducting a campus micromobility study, improving composting programs, and strengthening the R'Garden program were identified as the priority areas to be achieved in the next 3 years. To learn more about the CAAP, see the Appendix on page 42. The office also completed its annual 2025 Sustainability Report, which tracks campus progress in reducing campus resource consumption and greenhouse gas emissions across the 13 policy areas outlined in the University of California Policy on Sustainable Practices. To explore the 2025 Sustainability Report, see the Appendix on page 42.

With regard to engagement, in April, Earth Month remained the OS's largest annual outreach effort that brought together students, faculty, staff, and community partners through a series of events, workshops and programs. Throughout the month of April 2026, the office hosted 11 events focused on topics related to planetary health, climate careers, sustainability in the classroom & research, healthy food systems & food justice and health & well-being. Participation and collaboration reached record levels with more than 1,000 attendees, 27 campus partners, 52 community organizations and featured 19 professional and student panelists. Beyond leading its own initiatives, the office was also invited to be part of other sustainability related campus programs, including ResLife Education Programs, Highlander Orientation, Sustainability Literacy Assessment, Grad Slam, the Disaster Resilience Network and UCR's Health and Well-Being Summit.



Francis Mitalo, Program Specialist

Leadership

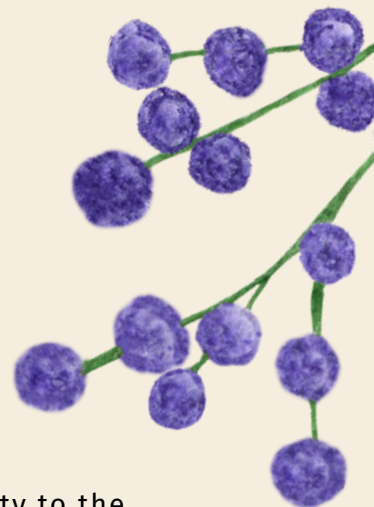


The OS co-chaired the Sustainability Committee composed of faculty, staff and students. The committee met throughout the year and focused on new and upcoming initiatives and challenges in campus sustainability. The end results boosted campus environmental stewardship and overall sustainability in academics. The OS, with collaboration from GCAP, was also able to achieve development of a pilot program in select student housing for compost bin placement and increased land diversion rates for food waste. The program will begin the upcoming fall semester.

Student success and engagement was also a central focus of the Office of Sustainability. In 2025-2026, the OS supervised nine students who gained hands-on experience through programs like EcoHighlander, Bonnie Reiss Leading on Climate Fellowship, Green Labs and Office Communications. With some achieving recognition from the UC Office of the President's Global Climate Leadership Council. Beyond student success the OS was fortunate to have four California Climate Action Corps (CCAC) fellows join the team, bringing program expertise from EcoHighlander, the R'Garden and Campus Zero Waste. If you are curious about the amazing work they achieved, all nine students and four fellows reports will be featured in this annual report.



Leadership



Throughout the year the OS represented UCR's campus sustainability to the University of California Office of the President. This was accomplished by attending the sustainability working groups, participating in policy adaptations, implementing new initiatives and attending the annual Sustainability Officers meeting in January. Additionally the OS kept up with current and emerging sustainability practices, and professional staff participation by attending several regional and national conferences throughout the year. These included the Riverside Extreme Heat Summit in September 2025, the AASHE Conference & Expo in October 2025 and the Inland Empire Sustainability Summit in April 2026.



A stylized landscape illustration featuring a large white cloud in the top right corner, a yellow sun in the center, and green mountains and trees in the foreground. The background is a light beige color.

Communications & Engagement

Communications & Engagement



During the 2025–2026 academic year, Sathya significantly expanded and improved the Office of Sustainability's digital presence by managing website development, accessibility improvements, event promotion, and email communications. His work focused on making sustainability information easier to access while ensuring the website remained organized, current, and user-friendly.



One of his largest contributions involved redesigning and maintaining several of the office's most heavily visited webpages. He rebuilt the Reports and Plans page to better organize institutional sustainability documents and updated the Sustainability Resources page to improve navigation for campus and local community members. Additional improvements were made to the Building Operations page, the Office of Sustainability homepage, and multiple department pages, preserving existing designs while improving usability and accessibility.

Communications & Engagement



Sathya also managed the website presence for Earth Month 2026. He built and maintained the event calendar, updated event listings as programming evolved, uploaded promotional graphics, maintained homepage calendar integration, and ensured visitors could easily navigate between event information and registration materials. He additionally improved presentation of the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan by redesigning its homepage section, simplifying document previews, and improving access to downloadable materials.

Accessibility improvements were another major focus. Using SiteImprove, Sathya corrected accessibility issues including empty headings, duplicate links, page hierarchy concerns, and iframe errors. These targeted improvements contributed to a measurable increase in the website's accessibility score while maintaining the site's visual consistency.

Beyond website development, Sathya maintained staff directory information, updated departmental pages, and added educational resources such as the Sustainability Walking Tour to expand the website's usefulness for visitors. He also supported the Office of Sustainability's communication strategy through Mailchimp by designing and formatting newsletters, event promotions, and monthly campaigns throughout the academic year. These communications supported major initiatives including Earth Month, seasonal newsletters, the Dean's Panel on Sustainability, and other campus events.



Communications & Engagement



Overall, Sathya's work strengthened the Office of Sustainability's online communications by improving website organization, accessibility, and event promotion while providing students, faculty, staff, and community members with a more effective digital resource for sustainability information.

Communications & Engagement



Melina Shafie, Marketing Coordinator

During the 2025–2026 academic year, Melina Shafie served on the Office of Sustainability Communications Team, supporting the office's marketing, communications, and outreach efforts through graphic design, social media management, video production, and campaign planning. Her work focused on increasing student engagement with sustainability initiatives by creating accessible, student-centered content while strengthening the Office's visual identity and promotional strategies.

Throughout the year, Melina contributed to a wide range of communications projects that supported campus programming and sustainability outreach. She designed promotional graphics, postcards, stickers, posters, presentations, templates, and other print and digital materials while producing TikToks, Instagram Reels, recap videos, and promotional content for Office of Sustainability initiatives. She also collaborated with staff members and student organizations, promoted events through tabling and outreach efforts, and assisted with end-of-year planning and reporting.



Communications & Engagement



One of Melina's largest contributions was supporting the Earth Month Campaign, where she played a key role in planning, promotion, and content creation. She designed promotional materials for major events including the Earth Day Festival, Denim Day, Threads of Change, the Climate Careers Panel, Maternal Health events, and collaborations with the Career Center. She also created the Earth Month event calendar, filmed and edited event recap videos, produced a "How to Get to the R'Garden" informational video, coordinated social media coverage throughout the month, and participated in Green Campus Action Plan (GCAP) grant proposal meetings and campaign planning efforts.

Beyond Earth Month, Melina created a wide variety of promotional content highlighting Office of Sustainability programming throughout the academic year. Her work included graphics and videos for Desert Blooms, Refill Your Routine, Sustainable Studio, No Scraps Left Behind, Green Labs Coffee Cart, Petals with Purpose, Air & Aura, Threads of Resistance, SustainUSburg, Waves of Change, and numerous other sustainability initiatives. She also designed outreach materials such as Green Labs promotional graphics, office branding assets, educational brochures, water bottle designs, office stickers, printer signage, presentation templates, and promotional materials used for campus events and outreach activities.

In addition to content creation, Melina supported communications and engagement efforts by promoting sustainability programming through social media, coordinating with student organizations to share event information, advertising Green Labs initiatives, tabling at campus events such as the Student Life Fair and Career Fair, and assisting with newsletter promotion. She also collaborated with Office of Sustainability staff on end-of-year celebration planning, campaign coordination, internal presentations, and long-term communications planning to improve consistency across outreach efforts.



Communications & Engagement



Melina's communications strategy contributed to significant growth in the Office of Sustainability's digital presence during the 2025–2026 academic year. Following the implementation of more structured content planning and increased short-form video production, Office of Sustainability social media reached more than 46,000 accounts, representing approximately 968% growth in reach, while generating 349,100+ content views and 10,500+ content interactions, doubling overall engagement from the previous year. Several of her videos became top-performing pieces of content, including "How to Get to the R'Garden From the Bell Tower" (6,568 views), "Item From Free Fit Market vs. How I'd Style It" (6,043 views, 632 likes, 87 shares, and 67 saves), and "Trying Foods From SustainUSburg ASMR," which helped promote sustainability initiatives through engaging, student-focused storytelling. Additional campaign content surpassed 112,000, 62,000, 33,000, and 32,000 views, significantly increasing awareness of sustainability programming across campus.

Overall, Melina's work strengthened the Office of Sustainability's communications, branding, and digital outreach by combining strategic marketing, graphic design, video production, and campaign planning. Her contributions helped improve the visibility of sustainability initiatives, increase student engagement, and create a more consistent and recognizable communications presence for the Office of Sustainability throughout the academic year.



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California Climate Action Corps

California Climate Action Corps



Emily Macias, EcoHighlanders

Throughout the 2025–2026 academic year, Emily focused on expanding sustainability education and student engagement through workshops, outreach events, presentations, volunteer programming, and campus collaborations. Her work emphasized creating accessible opportunities for students to learn practical sustainability skills while increasing awareness of the Office of Sustainability's resources and initiatives.



Emily organized and facilitated nine sustainability workshops covering topics such as sustainable living, refill programs, environmental art, clothing reuse, and creative upcycling. These workshops reached a total of 209 student participants throughout the year. Sustainusburg was the largest event, drawing nearly ninety attendees during Earth Month. Other programs such as Desert Blooms, Air & Aura, Threads of Resistance, Refill Your Routine, and Sustainable Studio introduced students to sustainable practices through interactive learning experiences, engaging with ten to twenty-five students each program. Success was due in part to collaboration.

California Climate Action Corps



In order to expand the audience and reach, she collaborated with numerous campus and community partners, including the Women's Resource Center, Luna's Thrift Store, Plant Power Fast Food, UCR Dining, and Health, Well-Being, and Safety. These partnerships strengthened the Office of Sustainability's relationships across campus while expanding sustainability education to new audiences.

Campus outreach was another area of focus. Emily regularly tabled throughout the residence halls and campus at campus marketplaces, Highlander Day, and other outreach events. She engaged with over one hundred current and prospective students in conversations about sustainability resources, EcoHighlander programming, and campus involvement opportunities. In addition, she presented for Resident and Peer Advisors about sustainable program planning tips and techniques to incorporate into their own programs.

Volunteer engagement represented another major component of her work. Emily organized volunteer days at the R'Garden in collaboration with organizations including UER and Sigma Pi Alpha, where volunteers helped establish composting infrastructure and support garden maintenance. She also created volunteer programming during Sustainusburg that tied in both an educational opportunity and volunteerism during the event.



California Climate Action Corps



Angelique Lawrence, Zero Waste

During the 2025–2026 academic year, Angelique focused on advancing sustainability and food justice initiatives that reduced food waste, increased food access, and educated students about environmental justice. Throughout the year, she helped lead programs that combined hands-on service with community engagement, strengthening partnerships across campus while expanding opportunities for students to participate in sustainable food systems.

A significant portion of Angelique's work centered on campus food recovery and composting efforts. She co-led Scotty Eats on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings by coordinating volunteers, managing inventory, organizing food distribution, maintaining equipment, and creating an inclusive environment for students accessing recovered food. She supported campus composting operations by collecting and processing food waste from dining halls, maintaining compost systems, and operating the food dehydrator at The Barn. Additionally, she completed Food Recovery Network pickups by recovering surplus food, weighing and documenting donations, and delivering them to the R'Pantry, while also participating in Overflow Farm produce pickups to recover fresh fruits and vegetables from local farms. Beyond these operational responsibilities, she supported Food Insecurity and Climate Action Fellows with event planning, outreach, educational programming, and food waste audits that helped measure waste and identify opportunities for improvement.



California Climate Action Corps



Angelique also played a leading role in organizing educational events that connected sustainability with food justice and community engagement. During the Earth Month Festival, she helped organize one of the Office of Sustainability's largest annual events, welcoming more than 700 students, coordinating with over 50 campus and community vendors, and recovering approximately 200 pounds of food through a free thrift store and food swap. She partnered with African Student Programs to host *Beyond the Desert: The Black Community and Food Apartheid*, where she shared her personal experiences growing up in South Central Los Angeles while facilitating discussions about food deserts through an interactive MasterChef-style activity. She also collaborated with the Middle Eastern Student Center for *Cultural Cuisine Done Green*, exploring how food deserts affect access to cultural foods while teaching students to create compost jars. Additional collaborations included *Denim, Dignity, and Food Justice* with the Women's Resource Center, where students learned about the intersection of food justice, gender equity, and Denim Day while decorating reusable denim tote bags. Throughout the year, she also helped facilitate Food Recovery Network workshops covering food propagation, sustainable shopping, reducing food waste, and preparing simple recipes using recovered food.



California Climate Action Corps



Angelique concluded the year by co-hosting an End-of-Year Donation Drive with Residential Education and Green Campus Action Plan during residence hall move-out, recovering 334 pounds of food that was donated to the R'Pantry. Collectively, the year's initiatives diverted 7,373 pounds of food waste through composting efforts across dining halls, Inland Harvest, and Food Recovery Network programs, while 1,904.2 pounds of food were recovered and redistributed through Scotty Eats and the Scotty Eats Expansion program.

Looking ahead, Angelique plans to continue expanding sustainability initiatives by mentoring a new fellow and launching several new programs. These include Taste It Before You Waste It, which introduces students to plant-based foods and their environmental benefits; Scotty's Number One Rule, an initiative promoting balanced dining hall portions to reduce food waste; the creation of a Community Garden at Glasgow for students and dining staff; and expanded Campus Compost Drop-Offs in partnership with Eco Highlander to make composting more accessible across campus.



California Climate Action Corps



Ashley Avila, R'Garden

During the 2025–2026 academic year, Ashley served as a California Climate Action Corps (CCAC) Fellow supporting both the R'Garden and later the Office of Sustainability's Zero Waste initiatives. Her work centered on strengthening community resilience through sustainable agriculture, food security, volunteer engagement, and environmental education while helping maintain the R'Garden as a valuable campus resource.

Ashley played an essential role in the daily operation of the three-acre R'Garden. Her responsibilities included monitoring plant health, maintaining crops and walking areas, repairing irrigation systems, coordinating with Agricultural Operations staff, preparing seed trays, transplanting seasonal crops, and maintaining garden equipment. Throughout the year she helped cultivate a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, flowers, and native plants while also arranging soil testing and implementing improvements to irrigation and growing conditions. She contributed to major infrastructure projects including creating new community garden plots, restoring unused land, expanding drought-tolerant landscaping, and acquiring 20,000 pounds of compost from Burrtec. This compost was available for plot owners at the R'Garden to use at no cost.



California Climate Action Corps



Volunteer engagement is another major focus of Ashley's fellowship. She established weekly R'Hours volunteer sessions, created volunteer procedures and safety materials, established communication systems for garden staff, and collaborated with student organizations including College Corps, The Garden Project, and Green Campus Action Plan to organize service events. These efforts resulted in more than 100 volunteers participating in R'Garden activities throughout the academic year while strengthening long-term volunteer programming for future students.

Ashley also expanded the garden's impact on campus food security and climate action. She helped grow, harvest, glean, and distribute over 2,215 pounds of fresh produce to students, community members, and the R'Pantry while reducing food waste through partnerships with Agricultural Operations and the Botanical Gardens. Composting initiatives diverted food scraps and coffee grounds from campus dining facilities, while additional efforts included planting trees and native vegetation, maintaining compost systems, distributing heat-tolerant plants, and donating seedlings to local environmental organizations.



California Climate Action Corps



In addition to fieldwork, Ashley actively supported outreach and education efforts. She tabled weekly at campus events, interacting with more than 1,300 students and visitors while promoting sustainable agriculture, volunteer opportunities, climate action, and food security. She also presented workshops and classroom presentations on gardening and sustainability, collaborated with campus partners on educational events, created promotional content for social media, and assisted with planning Office of Sustainability events including the End-of-Year Celebration. Toward the end of her fellowship, Ashley transitioned into the Zero Waste program, where she learned food recovery operations and supported campus food redistribution efforts. Additionally, she mentored Living Lab Fellows, and spread awareness of the Reusables Container Program expansion coming up in Fall 2026. Her fellowship combined hands-on environmental stewardship with community engagement and mentoring, leaving a lasting impact on both the R'Garden and the Office of Sustainability.

California Climate Action Corps



Grecia Ortega, R'Garden

Beginning as a CCAC fellow in February 2026, Grecia supported the R'Garden through volunteer coordination, community outreach, and communications. Her work focused on increasing student engagement with sustainable agriculture while helping expand the visibility of the R'Garden through both in-person outreach and social media.



One of Grecia's primary responsibilities was organizing and facilitating weekly R'Hours volunteer sessions. These volunteer opportunities supported ongoing maintenance of the R'Garden while providing students with hands-on experience. Grecia also contributed to the R'Garden by converting approximately 600 square feet of unused land into 3 new gardening plots, planting 6 additional fruit trees, and installing drought-resistant turf.

California Climate Action Corps



Throughout her time at the R'Garden, Grecia helped harvest and distribute approximately 2,000 pounds of fresh produce to students and community members through campus tabling events and the R'Pantry. She also partnered with a local coffee shop to divert used coffee grounds which were added to compost and plots at the garden.

Community outreach was another significant aspect of Grecia's fellowship. She regularly tabled at the Bell Tower and major campus events, including Highlander Day and the Earth Day Festival, engaging nearly 1,200 students and visitors in conversations about sustainability, gardening, and volunteer opportunities.

Grecia also strengthened R'Garden's communications through creative content development. She recorded and edited Instagram Reels that collectively received hundreds of engagements, designed promotional flyers for volunteer events and programming, and created 3 new sticker designs. In addition, she planned and facilitated an educational workshop focused on the climate action initiatives at the R'Garden. By combining volunteer leadership, outreach, and communications, Grecia helped strengthen the R'Garden's presence on campus while supporting the Office of Sustainability's broader mission of increasing student participation in sustainability initiatives.



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College Corps

College Corps



Matisse Rios, Green Labs

During the 2025–2026 academic year, Jose Linares and Matisse Rios led the Green Labs Program at UC Riverside, working to promote sustainable laboratory practices through certification, waste reduction initiatives, and campus engagement. Their efforts focused on helping research laboratories reduce their environmental impact while fostering a culture of sustainability within UCR's research community.



Jose Linares, Green Labs

One of the program's primary accomplishments was the expansion of the Green Labs Certification Program. Throughout the academic year, eight laboratories earned Green Lab certification after demonstrating a commitment to sustainable practices, including waste reduction, energy conservation, water efficiency, and responsible resource management. The newly certified laboratories included the Ostevik Lab, Kou Lab, Reynaga Lab, The Gray Lab, Wheeldon Lab, Wu Lab, Stajich Lab, and M.E.N. Lab.

Combined with five laboratories that had previously earned certification, the program reached a total of 13 certified Green Labs, reflecting continued growth in sustainability efforts across campus research spaces.

College Corps



In addition to certification efforts, Jose and Matisse implemented programs designed to reduce laboratory waste and improve resource efficiency. Through a partnership with TerraCycle, the Green Labs Program distributed personal protective equipment (PPE) recycling boxes to laboratories, allowing researchers to divert laboratory waste from landfills. By the end of the academic year, seven laboratories had received dedicated recycling boxes, and more than 100 pounds of laboratory gloves had been collected for recycling. The team also expanded the Lab Sharing Initiative, encouraging laboratories to redistribute unused equipment and supplies rather than purchasing new materials. This collaborative effort helped reduce unnecessary waste while strengthening communication between research groups, resulting in the redistribution of more than 5,000 pipette tips that otherwise may have been discarded.

Community engagement was another major focus of the Green Labs Program. In collaboration with the Graduate Student Resource Center, Jose and Matisse hosted two Green Labs Coffee Socials during the Winter and Spring quarters. The Winter Quarter event welcomed 121 attendees, while the Spring Quarter event attracted 138 attendees, making it the largest Coffee Social hosted by the Graduate Student Resource Center to date. These events provided graduate students with opportunities to network, learn about sustainable laboratory practices, and become familiar with the Green Labs Program, significantly increasing the program's visibility and encouraging greater participation across campus.



College Corps



Overall, the 2025–2026 Green Labs Program successfully expanded sustainable research practices through laboratory certifications, waste reduction initiatives, and community outreach. By increasing the number of certified laboratories, implementing innovative recycling and resource-sharing programs, and engaging graduate students through educational events, Jose and Matisse strengthened UC Riverside's commitment to creating more sustainable research environments while laying the foundation for continued growth in future years.



College Corps



Mitchel Nacion, EcoHighlanders

During the 2025–2026 academic year, Mitchel Nacion served as a College Corps Fellow with the UC Riverside Office of Sustainability, developing educational workshops and sustainability resources that empowered students to adopt environmentally responsible habits. His work focused on climate action, waste reduction, sustainable food systems, environmental justice, and community engagement through educational programming, outreach, and campus collaborations.

One of Mitchel's largest accomplishments was developing the 2026 Green Living Guide, a comprehensive resource introducing students to sustainable living both on and off campus. The guide covered a broad range of topics, including climate change, food systems, sustainable transportation, water conservation, environmental justice, waste reduction, composting, sustainable fashion, climate resilience, and campus sustainability resources. Designed as an accessible reference for students, the guide encouraged practical, everyday actions while connecting readers with resources such as the R'Garden, R'Pantry, Cooking Well programs, UCR Transportation Services, and local farmers markets.



College Corps



Throughout the academic year, Mitchel also designed and facilitated interactive sustainability workshops for Residential Education students. His Refill Your Routine workshop, attended by 24 students, combined a presentation on zero-waste living with a hands-on refill station where participants received free household detergents and cleaning products while learning practical strategies for reducing waste through reusable products, refill systems, and sustainable household swaps. The workshop emphasized that sustainability can be affordable, accessible, and incorporated into everyday routines without requiring major lifestyle changes.

Mitchel also developed and facilitated Petals with Purpose, a workshop attended by 20 students that explored the importance of native plants, invasive species, biodiversity, pollinators, and ecosystem conservation through an interactive pipe-cleaner flower bouquet activity. Students learned about California's native ecosystems, water conservation, wildfire resilience, and environmental stewardship while being introduced to tools such as iNaturalist and campus resources including the UCR Botanical Gardens and R'Garden. In addition, he created a Sustainable Food Workshop that focused on affordable, nutritious, and low-waste eating practices by teaching meal planning, food waste reduction, sustainable grocery shopping, environmental justice, and practical recipes designed specifically for college students. Although attendance for this workshop was limited, the curriculum serves as a valuable educational resource for future sustainability programming.

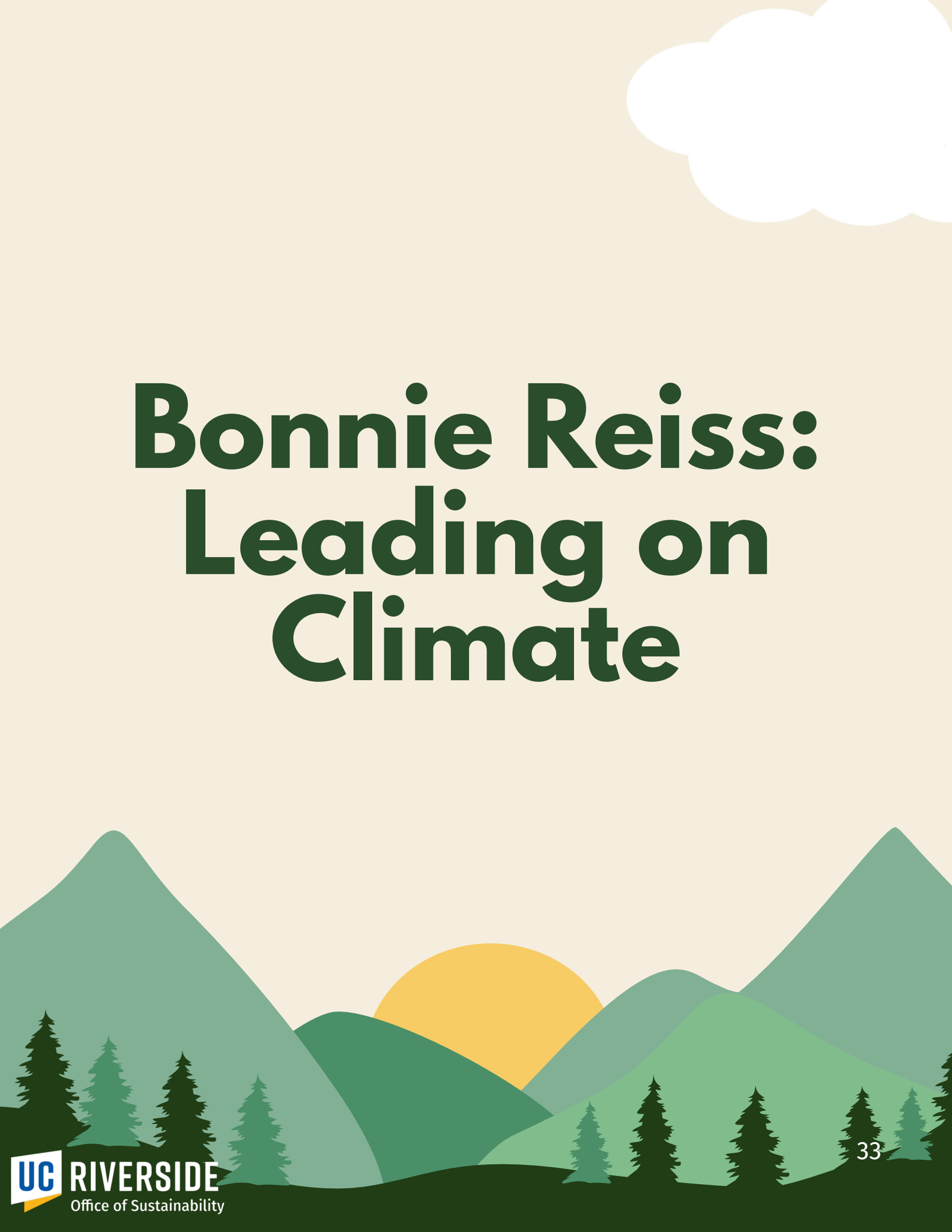


College Corps



Beyond workshop facilitation, Mitchel supported campus sustainability outreach through tabling events, SustainUsBurg, and collaborations with Residential Education and Residential Life. He developed educational presentations, sustainability guides, and interactive activities while connecting students with campus resources that promote environmental stewardship, food security, composting, recycling, and sustainable transportation. His programming consistently emphasized that sustainability is not only an environmental issue but also one closely connected to public health, affordability, accessibility, and community well-being.

Overall, Mitchel's work strengthened sustainability education at UC Riverside by creating engaging, student-centered programming that combined practical skills with environmental awareness. Through the development of educational resources, interactive workshops, and campus outreach initiatives, he helped provide students with the knowledge and tools needed to make more sustainable choices while fostering greater engagement with the Office of Sustainability and its campus partners.

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Bonnie Reiss: Leading on Climate

Bonnie Reiss: Leading on Climate



Rohan Vig, Action Planning

During the 2025–2026 academic year, Rohan Vig served as a Bonnie Reiss: Leading on Climate (LOC) Fellow, conducting a comparative analysis of Climate Action and Adaptation Plans (CAAPs) across the Inland Empire. His project examined the climate strategies of UC Riverside, Riverside Community College District (RCCD), the City of Riverside, and Riverside County, evaluating how each institution addresses greenhouse gas reduction, climate resilience, environmental justice, implementation strategies, and public health considerations.

To complete this research, Rohan conducted an extensive review of climate action and adaptation plans, greenhouse gas inventories, sustainability reports, UC sustainability frameworks, and supporting climate resilience literature. He developed a comparative framework to evaluate each institution's emissions sources, reduction targets, implementation strategies, environmental justice initiatives, public health considerations, and accountability measures. In addition to document analysis, Rohan met with climate planning professionals from local government, higher education, and the private sector to better understand the planning process, implementation challenges, and stakeholder engagement behind each plan. Throughout the fellowship, he also participated in UC-wide fellowship workshops and attended regional conferences focused on sustainability, extreme heat, and public health.



Bonnie Reiss: Leading on Climate



The fellowship also provided significant professional development opportunities. Through meetings with climate planners, public officials, consultants, and sustainability professionals, Rohan expanded his professional network and gained firsthand experience with climate planning at different administrative levels. He strengthened his skills in policy analysis, comparative research, and climate planning while representing his research through the Riverside County RUHS Healthy Cities Network. Building on this experience, he secured a Summer 2026 internship in Environmental Planning at Kimley-Horn in Riverside.

Rohan's analysis found that although all four institutions share the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, each organization approaches climate action differently based on its unique priorities. UC Riverside emphasizes institutional decarbonization through energy efficiency, electrification, renewable energy, and climate adaptation while incorporating environmental justice through the UC Environmental and Climate Justice Framework. RCCD takes a community-centered approach, framing sustainability as a cultural transformation by integrating climate justice, wellness, education, and community resilience. The City of Riverside prioritizes transportation, land use, electric vehicle infrastructure, and green infrastructure to improve urban resilience, while Riverside County adopts a broader regional strategy centered on emissions inventories, transportation, land use, and infrastructure improvements.



Bonnie Reiss: Leading on Climate



A major focus of the project was the relationship between climate planning, public health, and environmental justice. Rohan found that while environmental justice has become increasingly integrated into climate planning across California, its implementation varies considerably among the four institutions. UC Riverside and RCCD explicitly prioritize climate justice and vulnerable communities, while the City of Riverside incorporates environmental justice through community engagement and equitable planning efforts. In contrast, Riverside County's 2025 Climate Action Plan Update does not include a dedicated environmental justice section despite the region's significant freight-related pollution and warehouse development. Community organizations have since advocated for stronger environmental justice policies, expanded outreach, and full implementation of California Senate Bill 1000 to better protect disadvantaged communities.

Overall, Rohan's fellowship demonstrated the importance of integrating public health data, environmental justice, and community vulnerability assessments into future climate planning efforts. His research recommends that future Climate Action and Adaptation Plans move beyond emissions reduction by strengthening community engagement, incorporating public health organizations into the planning process, and prioritizing equitable strategies that improve both climate resilience and community well-being throughout the Inland Empire.



Bonnie Reiss: Leading on Climate



Kashish Rai, Engagement

During the 2025–2026 academic year, Kashish Rai served as a Bonnie Reiss: Leading on Climate (LOC) Fellow, focusing on student engagement and sustainability education at UC Riverside. Her fellowship centered on increasing student involvement in sustainability initiatives through outreach, educational programming, and a campus-wide survey designed to better understand students' sustainability knowledge, habits, and interests.



A major component of Kashish's fellowship was the development and administration of a sustainability survey, which examined students' awareness of the Office of Sustainability, UC sustainability policies, campus sustainability organizations, and environmental initiatives. Over a 15-week period, 410 students completed the survey, with 370 valid UCR student responses included in the final analysis. The survey represented both undergraduate and graduate students and provided valuable insight into student awareness, engagement, and opportunities for future programming.

Bonnie Reiss: Leading on Climate



Beyond survey collection, Kashish engaged students through tabling events, sustainability programming, and collaborations with campus partners. She connected with students at outreach events hosted by the Office of Sustainability and in partnership with the R'Garden, helping educate the campus community about sustainability initiatives and encouraging participation in environmental programs. She also organized two collaborative workshops—Learn How to Sew and Learn How to Embroider—with the Creat'R Lab, providing students with practical skills that promote sustainable living while increasing participation in her research efforts.

The survey findings revealed several important trends. Undergraduate juniors were generally the most aware of the Office of Sustainability among undergraduate students, while graduate students demonstrated the highest overall awareness. Students were most familiar with UC sustainability initiatives related to Zero Waste, Health and Well-Being, and Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, while awareness of Green Building Design, Sustainable Building and Laboratory Operations, and Sustainable Procurement remained comparatively low. The survey also found that many students were unfamiliar with the R'Garden referendum and its bridge funding, highlighting opportunities for increased education about campus sustainability resources.



Bonnie Reiss: Leading on Climate



Students expressed strong interest in additional hands-on sustainability programming. The most frequently requested activities included workshops on sewing, knitting, embroidery, scrapbooking, clothing upcycling, zero-waste living, gardening, and creating crafts from recycled materials. Additional recommendations included cooking classes, farmers markets, vegan food events, climate anxiety discussions, microplastics education, tech recycling, thrift pop-ups, and other community-focused sustainability initiatives.

Overall, Kashish's Bonnie Reiss: Leading on Climate Fellowship demonstrated the value of combining student outreach with data-driven assessment to strengthen sustainability engagement at UC Riverside. Her findings provide actionable recommendations for expanding awareness through increased tabling, a stronger social media presence, and educational programming that addresses gaps in students' knowledge of UC sustainability policies, helping guide future engagement efforts across campus.



Bonnie Reiss: Leading on Climate



Kevin Leung, Decarbonization

During the 2025–2026 academic year, Kevin contributed to UC Riverside's campus decarbonization efforts by supporting the transition away from natural gas-powered steam systems. While the majority of campus steam is used for heating purposes, his work focused on the unsolved issue of electrifying process steam, which powers research and operational equipment such as autoclaves and soil sterilization systems. As the campus phases out its natural gas steam boilers in favor of electric heat pumps as part of its broader decarbonization strategy, Kevin helped evaluate and identify electrified alternatives that would allow these essential process steam systems to continue operating without relying on natural gas.

Working alongside Facilities Services during building energy audits, Kevin visited laboratories, greenhouses, and research facilities to document autoclaves and other steam sterilization equipment reliant on natural gas powered steam for operation. Following these visits, he researched and proposed electrified solutions for long-term decarbonization planning. His work complemented the University's broader decarbonization initiatives by ensuring that critical campus operations can continue reliably in a decarbonized campus setting.



Bonnie Reiss: Leading on Climate



Overall, Kevin's work helped advance UC Riverside's long-term sustainability goals by planning accommodations for an important component of campus operations to enable a seamless transition to electrified steam processes amid the campus decarbonization efforts. His research and planning support the University's transition toward a lower-carbon future while helping ensure the continued reliability of campus research and operational facilities.

Appendix



Scan the QR codes below to explore additional resources.

Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP)

Learn more about UCR's Climate Action and Adaptation Plan and the university's sustainability priorities for the next decade.



2025 Sustainability Report

Explore UCR's progress across the University of California's sustainable practices and policy areas.

