



ILLINOIS CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

2026



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Executive Summary



The Illinois Climate Action Plan (iCAP) 2026 is the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign’s strategic vision for meeting our Climate Leadership Commitments and integrating sustainability into campus operations, academics, and daily life.

Since becoming one of the first signatories of the Second Nature Climate Leadership Commitments in 2008, the university has taken bold steps to reduce emissions and strengthen climate resilience. Our achievements reflect the dedication of students, staff, and faculty who advocate for sustainable policies, participate in iCAP teams, and adopt sustainable practices. The iCAP 2026 builds on these efforts and advances progress toward our climate action goals.

Now in its fourth iteration, the iCAP 2026 presents seven core sustainability goals linked to the Climate Leadership Commitments that reflect the university’s dedication to creating a sustainable campus and cultivating the next generation of sustainability leaders. These goals overlap and reinforce one another, and together they reflect the university’s broad commitment to sustainability.

Illinois Sustainability Goals:

To achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and promote climate resilience, we are working to:

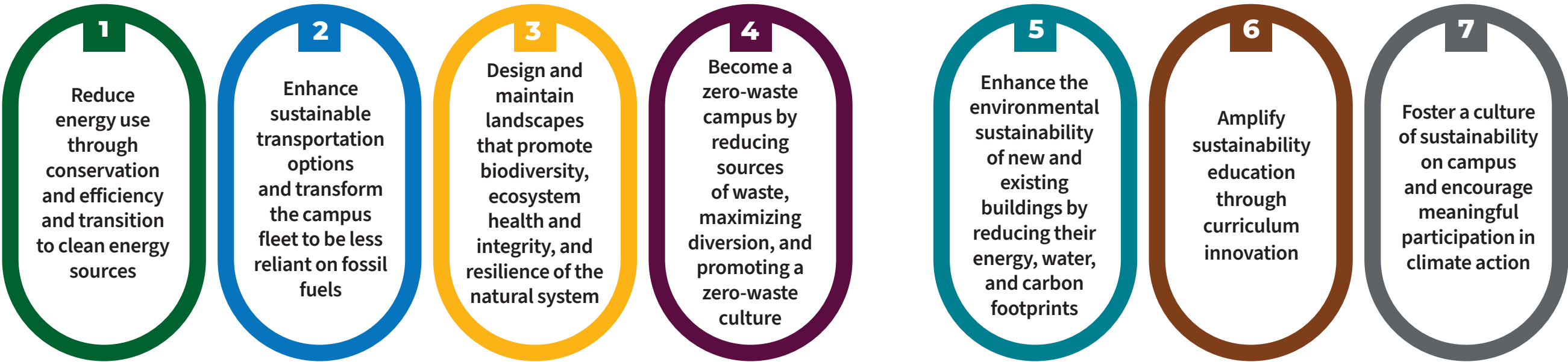


Figure 1. Illinois Sustainability Goals.

This plan presents 40 objectives organized around seven themes: Energy, Transportation, Land & Water, Zero Waste, Sustainable Buildings, Education, and Engagement. In recognition of the important leadership role of the Division of Intercollegiate Athletics (DIA), DIA-specific objectives are outlined in these chapters to reflect its commitment to sustainable actions. An accompanying document outlines strategies, pathways, and metrics for measuring and reporting progress to the campus community.

Reaching these goals requires university-wide collaboration. The Sustainability Council, chaired by the Chancellor, provides leadership and affirms our commitment to this plan, and each academic and operational unit on our campus has a role in taking action to reach our objectives. As stewards of the iCAP, the Institute for Sustainability, Energy, and Environment (ISEE) and Facilities & Services (F&S) coordinate with stakeholders across campus to support units in taking viable and impactful steps. With the support and participation of our campus community, together we can reach our shared vision for a sustainable campus.

I hereby declare that these are the goals and objectives of the 2026 Illinois Climate Action Plan.

Chancellor Charles L. Isbell, Jr.

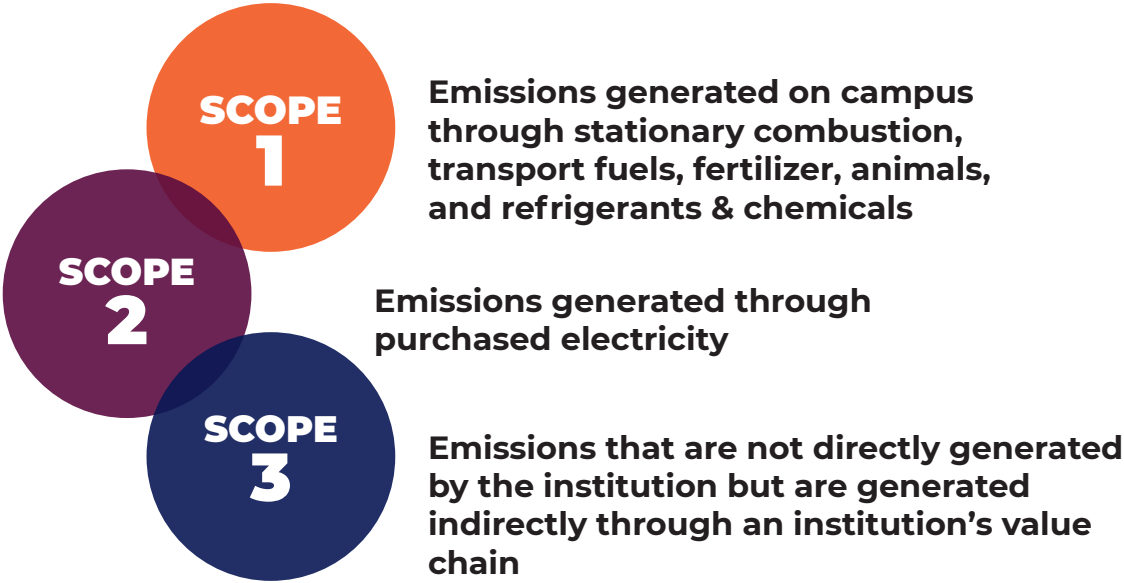
Introduction

Overview of Climate Commitments

On Feb. 22, 2008, Chancellor Richard Herman joined a cohort of hundreds of higher education colleagues in signing the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment (later renamed the Second Nature Carbon Commitment), pledging to achieve carbon neutrality as soon as possible and no later than 2050. On Feb. 9, 2016, Interim Chancellor Barbara Wilson expanded the university's climate commitment by signing Second Nature's Climate Resilience Commitment, committing to integrate climate adaptation into sustainability planning and support community capacity-building to address the impacts of a changing climate. Together, these two commitments form Second Nature's Climate Leadership Commitments, of which Illinois is a charter signatory.

Carbon neutrality is defined as releasing a net-zero sum of greenhouse gases (GHG) into the atmosphere through a combination of reducing emissions and offsetting remaining emissions. Illinois tracks and reports its emissions as required by the Climate Leadership Commitments, which call for signatories to report all Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions, as well as emissions generated by commuting and air travel paid by the institution. Full Scope 3 emissions accounting is not required due to data-collection challenges. See Figure 2 below for a definition of the three scopes.

Figure 2. Scope 1, 2, and 3 Emissions.



Since the first emissions inventory in fiscal year (FY) 2008, Illinois has reduced campus GHG emissions by nearly 40 percent from 683k metric tons of CO₂ equivalent to 423k in FY24 (shown in Figure 4). This progress has been achieved through extensive and ongoing work to increase energy efficiency through building system, equipment, and control system upgrades, construction of on-campus solar farms and smaller-scale solar installations, the purchase of clean electricity generated by wind power, thermal energy storage, and a collection of other efforts to reduce emissions through sustainable practices.

FY24 Campus Emissions (By Source & Scope)

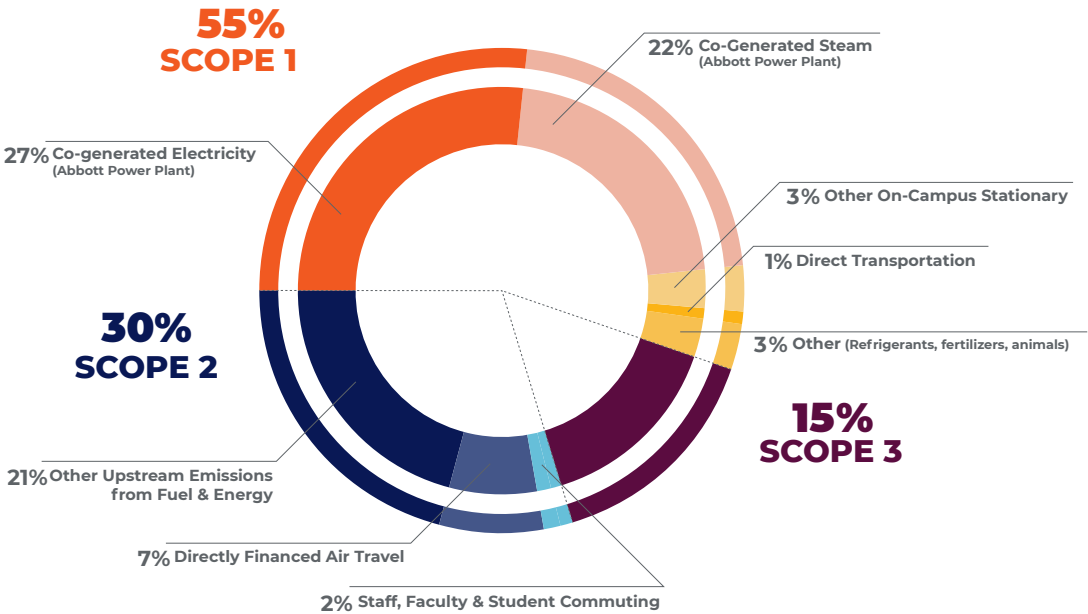


Figure 3. Campus emissions in FY24 by source and scope. Note that not all sources of Scope 3 emissions are currently tracked by the university.

Illinois is also committed to strengthening climate resilience through mitigation and adaptation. In the following chapters, we highlight how our climate action objectives are linked to climate resilience. In pursuit of a just and inclusive process to build a resilient campus, we have engaged broadly with the campus community in developing our sustainability goals to ensure the objectives outlined in this plan reflect the needs and priorities of all community members. We are also committed to working in partnership with the local community on shared sustainability priorities, and we actively coordinate with community partners on issues including transportation systems, biodiversity, waste management, and more.

GHG Emissions by Fiscal Year

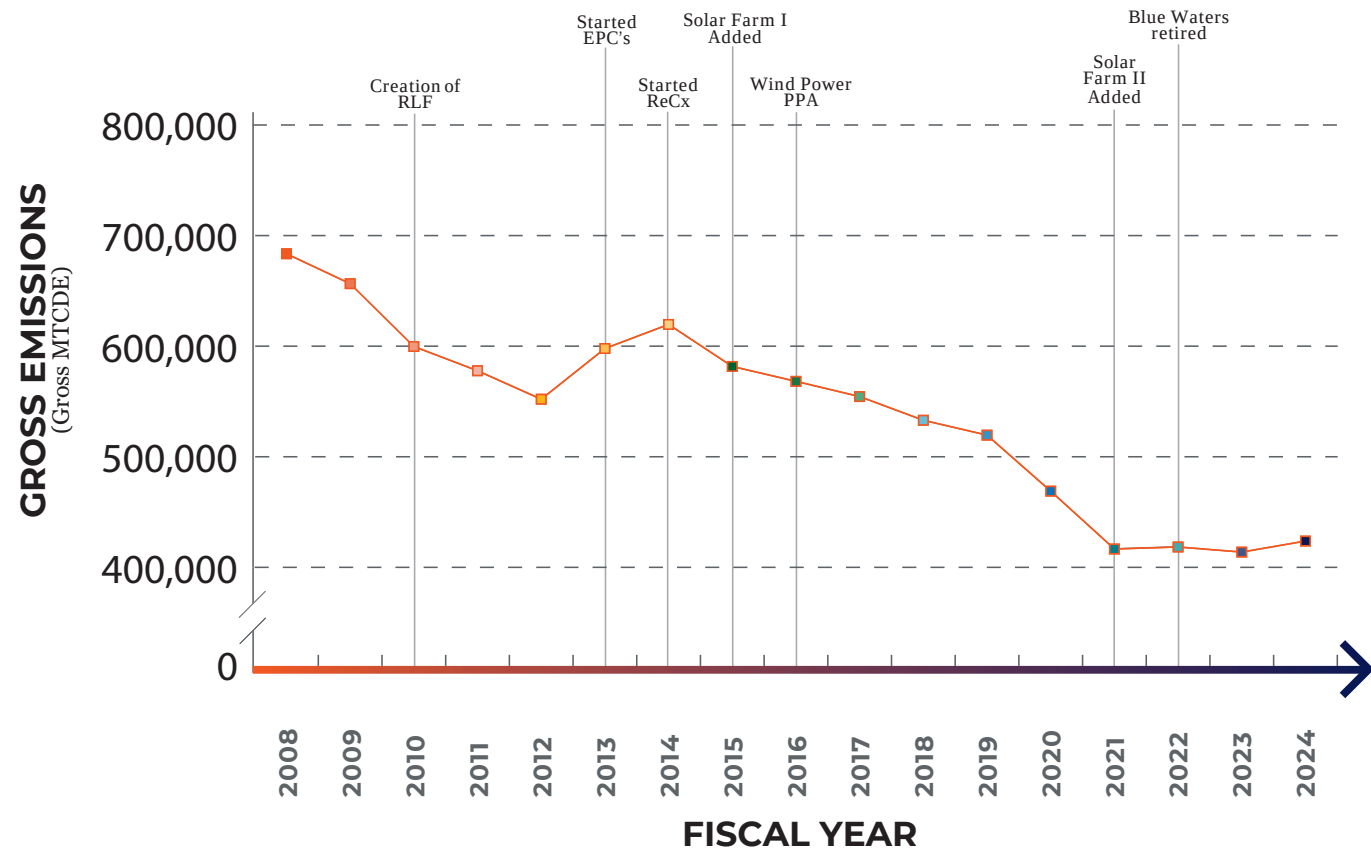


Figure 4. Annual greenhouse gas emissions measured in metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MTCDE), as reported in the Sustainability Indicator Management & Analysis Platform (SIMAP). Key developments that have impacted emissions reductions are also noted, including:

- Creation of the Revolving Loan Fund (RLF), which provides a financing source for utility conservation projects within a ten-year payback period
- Start of energy performance contracts (EPCs), through which energy service companies implement energy conservation measures
- Start of recommissioning (ReCx), or coordinated efforts to conduct preventive maintenance in upgraded buildings to ensure energy savings
- Addition of Solar Farm 1, the first on-campus solar farm
- Start of a ten-year wind power purchase agreement (PPA), which supplies electricity sourced through clean wind power to campus
- Addition of Solar Farm 2, the second on-campus solar farm
- Closure of Blue Waters, a petascale supercomputer that contributed to electricity demand.

The emissions for each year have been calculated using the most updated emission factors used on SIMAP. The results do not account for carbon credit sales that occurred in 2018, 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023. Carbon credit sales equivalent to 258.975k MTCDE occurred across these years.

iCAP Update Process

The iCAP is updated approximately every five years to measure progress, identify challenges, and realign strategies based on evolving campus priorities. The 2026 update began in Spring 2024, with iCAP teams assessing progress toward iCAP 2020 objectives and developing updated objectives based on achievements and challenges since 2020. Sustainability staff at iSEE and F&S provided feedback on the updated objectives and facilitated conversations with relevant campus stakeholders. The objectives were then vetted and approved by campus leadership represented on the iCAP Working Group (iWG) before being incorporated into the final iCAP 2026. The plan was reviewed by the Sustainability Council and approved by Chancellor Charles L. Isbell, Jr.

Throughout the process, participation from campus community members was sought to gather input and feedback on the objectives. The process was launched during the Spring 2024 Green Globes + iCAP Kickoff event, where iCAP teams created posters and interacted with students to learn about their priorities for the iCAP 2026. In Fall 2024, students in the NRES 285: iCAP Ambassadors course organized three student input sessions to inform students about the iCAP 2025 development process and collect their feedback on priorities for climate action. In addition, opportunities were provided for campus community members to share input through online forms at events such as the 2024 Campus Sustainability Celebration. During the 2025 Green Globes + iCAP Reception event, iCAP teams presented the draft iCAP 2025 objectives and gathered feedback on students' top priorities.



Top: Campus stakeholders provided feedback into the iCAP 2026 objectives during three input sessions in October and November 2024.

Bottom: Illinois students connected with iCAP teams and provided input into iCAP 2026 objectives and priorities during Green Globes + iCAP Input events held in Spring 2024 and Spring 2025.

Planning Context

The iCAP aligns with other campus-level plans, including the university’s Strategic Plan¹, the Campus Master Plan², the Energy Master Plan³, the Campus Landscape Master Plan⁴, the Campus Bike Plan⁵, and many others. iSEE and F&S work closely with campus leadership to encourage synergy and alignment of these plans with our sustainability goals.

Contents of the Plan

The University of Illinois System, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and the University of Illinois Foundation value and demonstrate sustainable practices and innovation across our multiple missions to help achieve the goal of a carbon-neutral economy. The iCAP is not involved in financial investment decisions made by the University of Illinois System and Foundation; hence, an iCAP objective related to divestment is not included in this document.

The iCAP presents a comprehensive strategy to discover, develop, and implement solutions to reduce our energy, water, carbon, and waste footprints.

The following chapters provide an overview of seven thematic areas (Energy, Transportation, Land & Water, Zero Waste, Sustainable Buildings, Education, and Engagement) in which we are advancing our sustainability goals. Each chapter includes background on previous efforts, challenges, resilience co-benefits, focus areas, and a list of objectives for each theme. Some objectives are highlighted as specific to the Division of Intercollegiate Athletics (DIA), an active partner in our campus sustainability efforts and one of the most visible campus units. These objectives are highlighted to recognize DIA’s sustainability efforts and the important role it plays. By committing to work toward visible sustainability objectives, DIA is setting a model that other campus units and institutions can follow.

A companion document outlines the major strategies, metrics, and next steps to measure progress and meet the iCAP 2025 objectives.

Implementation and Reporting

This document is published under the authority of Chancellor Isbell. The Chancellor is also the chair of the Sustainability Council, which is composed of campus decision-makers at the highest level. The Sustainability Council leads campus sustainability efforts and provides strategic direction and oversight of the iCAP.

Progress toward iCAP objectives is driven by various campus stakeholders, many of whom participate in iCAP topical teams convened by iSEE and F&S. These teams consist of staff, faculty, and students who commit to advancing objectives related to different iCAP themes. The teams collect information to build the case for sustainability initiatives, explore solutions, meet with stakeholders across campus to build support, educate the campus community about sustainability, and develop recommendations to campus units to request policy changes. These recommendations are sent to the iCAP Working Group (iWG) for evaluation, after which they are transmitted as formal recommendations to units.

1 Strategic Plan: <https://boldly.illinois.edu/> Strategic Plan: <https://boldly.illinois.edu/>
2 Campus Master Plan: <https://www.uocpres.uillinois.edu/resources/uiucplan>
3 Energy Master Plan: https://www.uocpres.uillinois.edu/UserFiles/Servers/Server_7758/file/UIUC/reports/UtilitiesMP-redacted.pdf
4 Campus Landscape Master Plan: https://www.uocpres.uillinois.edu/UserFiles/Servers/Server_7758/file/UIUC/mastrpln/UIUC-landscape-mp-2022.pdf
5 Campus Bike Plan: https://www.uocpres.uillinois.edu/UserFiles/Servers/Server_7758/file/UIUC/mastrpln/CampusBicyclePlan-2024.pdf

Large-scale recommendations with major policy or financial implications are forwarded to the Sustainability Council for evaluation and approval.

Bi-annual progress reports will be developed through collaboration with iSEE, F&S, and the iCAP topical teams and presented to the Sustainability Council. Regular reporting on sustainability efforts toward iCAP goals is intended to increase transparency and communication with the campus community and improve overall sustainability awareness. Project-level updates will be shared continuously on the iCAP portal.⁶ Comprehensive updates to the plan will occur every five years.

6 iCAP portal: <https://icap.sustainability.illinois.edu>

Energy

Reduce energy use through conservation and efficiency, and transition to clean energy sources

Energy is central to the university's progress toward carbon neutrality. Our strategy to achieve this goal is twofold: (1) reduce total energy use as much as possible and (2) transition to clean, renewable energy sources to meet the remaining energy demand. Many of our research laboratories require energy-intensive infrastructure, such as freezers and clean rooms. Efforts to upgrade aging infrastructure and improve energy efficiency through various projects have been crucial to reducing our carbon footprint. We are increasing the use of solar, wind, geothermal exchange, and other forms of clean energy for campus operations. To meet our commitment to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, the university is actively developing the roadmap to guide future energy planning efforts.

Illinois Energy Enterprise

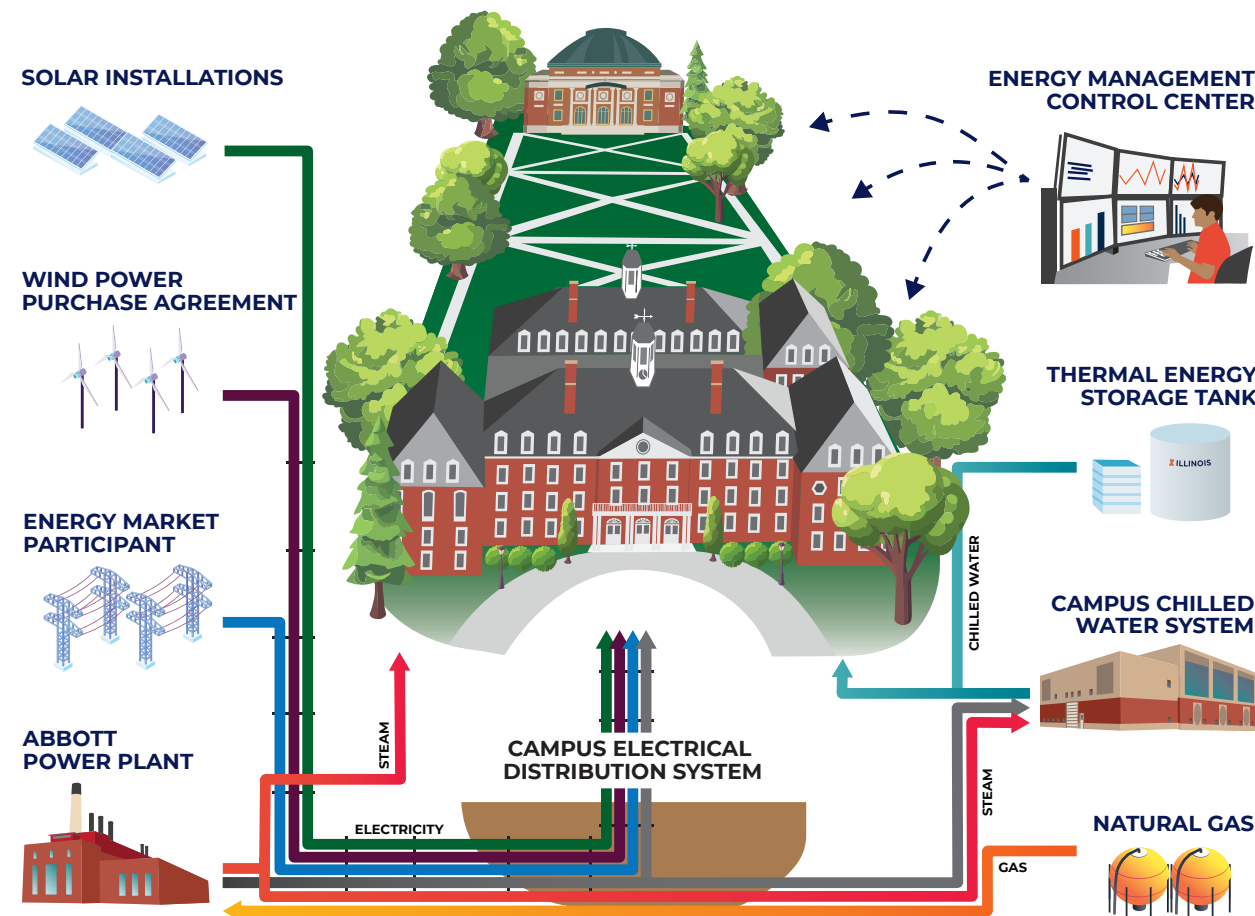


Figure 5. The Illinois Energy Enterprise, depicting the sources of energy used on campus.

Recent accomplishments:

- Through high-impact investments in energy reductions⁷, including energy performance contracts, retrocommissioning projects, and recommissioning projects, among others, the energy use per square foot of campus space was reduced by 36% from FY08 to FY24, with cumulative savings of \$120M.
- Solar Farm 2.0, the second on-campus utility-scale solar farm, went online in January 2021, bringing solar energy generation on campus to over 27,000 MWh in FY24.
- Through solar energy generation and a wind power purchase agreement, clean energy sources contributed over 13% of the campus's annual electricity in FY24.
- Seven geothermal exchange projects have been installed on campus since FY10, which will provide an estimated 44,800 MMBTU of geothermal energy per year.

FY24 Energy Sources in MegaWatt (Hours/Year)

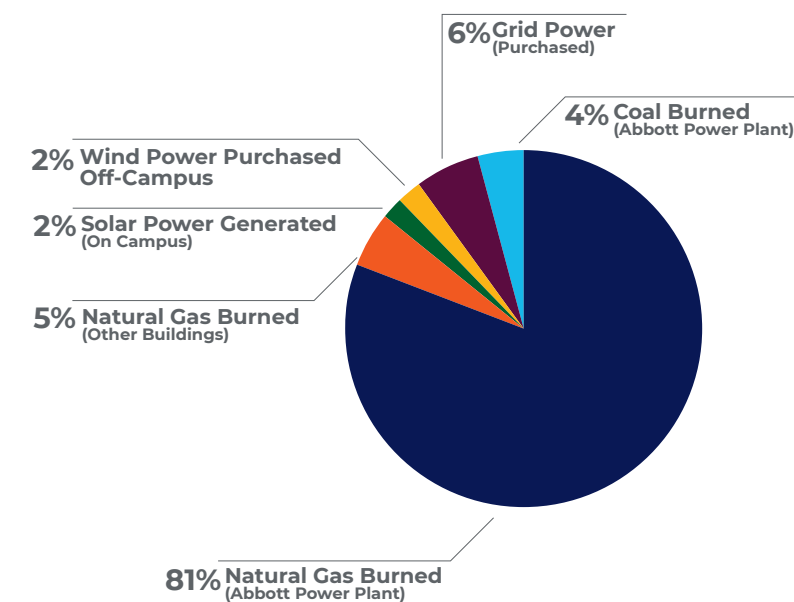


Figure 6: Energy sources used on our campus and the percentage of energy they supply.

⁷ For more information on energy conservation and efficiency efforts, see: <https://fs.illinois.edu/Providers/utilities-energy-services/>

Challenges:

- The campus faces a deferred maintenance backlog of \$4.9 billion, making it harder and costlier to maintain high-quality, energy-efficient facilities.
- Reductions in energy use per square foot of campus space have plateaued since FY22, demonstrating the need to address deferred maintenance, incorporate sustainability features into new capital projects, and intensify energy efficiency measures.
- Achieving carbon neutrality will require significant investments in additional clean energy technologies for our central utility systems. Energy efficiency efforts, while important, will contribute only modestly to our carbon neutrality goal. Computing facilities and data centers are essential for research, education, and technological innovation at the university, but they are also major energy consumers.
- As the campus footprint and population grow, reducing overall energy use becomes more challenging.
- The local electricity grid is becoming increasingly strained and less reliable, posing a growing risk to our campus. As a result, we are facing an uncertain and potentially serious energy reliability challenge in the near future.

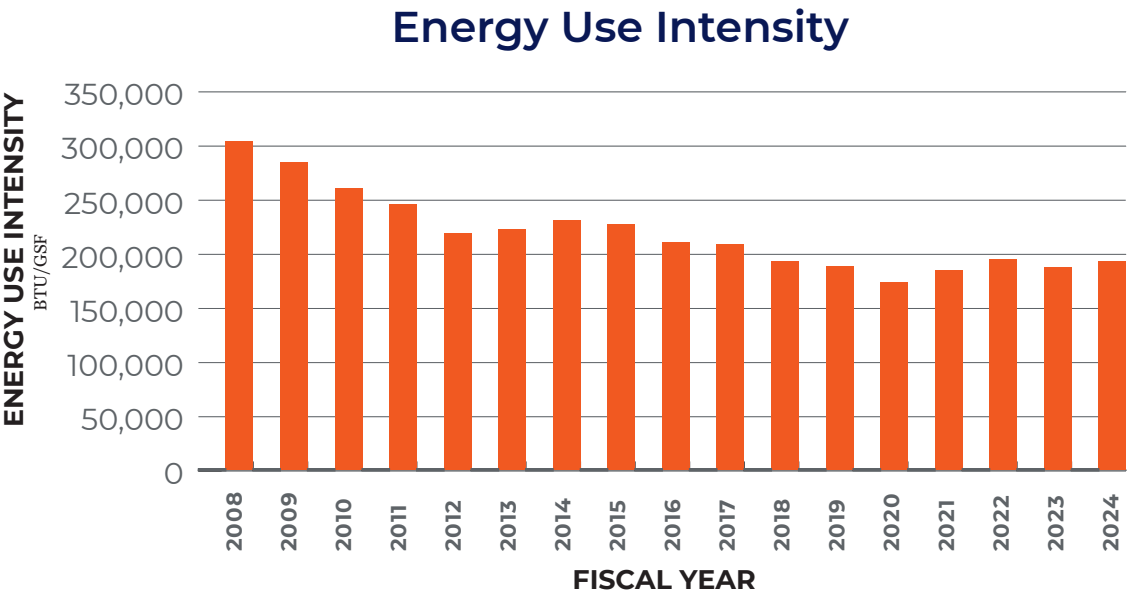


Figure 7: Energy use per square foot of campus space, measured in British thermal units (BTU) per gross square foot (GSF).

Resilience co-benefits:

- Reducing the burning of fossil fuels improves air quality, benefiting the campus community’s respiratory health.
- Adding more renewable energy sources diversifies our energy portfolio and reduces our dependence on volatile fossil fuel markets.
- Preparing for possible brownouts or blackouts from the regional grid will ensure that our vital research and learning operations will continue to be powered at all times.
- Developing and operating a micro-grid can reduce carbon emissions by isolating from the regional power grid and incorporating renewable and lower-carbon energy technologies.



Solar Farm 2.0, a 12.32 megawatt (MWdc) utility-scale array located on campus.

Energy

ICAP 2026 OBJECTIVES:

- 1 By FY30, develop a comprehensive energy planning document that includes a detailed strategy for meeting the FY50 net-zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions goal.
- 2 Intensify efforts to address deferred maintenance and reduce energy use per square foot through energy conservation and efficiency initiatives.
- 3 Work with campus units to improve space utilization and minimize square footage per person.
- 4 By FY30, analyze the potential of a micro-grid demonstration project by FY30 to increase resiliency.
- 5 Expand the use of clean energy sources, add more energy storage, and implement clean energy technologies with new capital construction projects.
- 6 Prioritize sustainable design features for new construction and renovations.
- 7 Assess energy use intensity (EUI) for each athletic facility and develop tailored plans for decreasing EUI by investing in energy-efficient measures.

Transportation

Enhance sustainable transportation options and transform the campus fleet to be less reliant on fossil fuels

The university prioritizes and promotes sustainable commuting options like walking, biking, and mass transit to reduce carbon emissions. We are working to reduce driving on campus, promote carpooling, and make the campus fleet more sustainable by reducing the total number of vehicles and transitioning to zero-emission vehicles. Every member of our campus community can play a role in reducing emissions by choosing to make sustainable commuting options part of our daily routines.



Electric vehicles in the campus fleet and the staff that care for them.

Recent accomplishments:

- Additions and improvements to bicycle facilities have continued, with bicycle parking, storage, and repair facilities, as well as bike path and street infrastructure improvements.
- The 2024 Campus Bike Plan¹ was released, containing updated objectives to promote bike safety, raise the university’s standing in bicycle-friendliness, and advance campus bike infrastructure.
- In FY24 and FY25, nearly 68 miles of campus sidewalks were scanned and analyzed for ADA compliance.
- An inventory of all campus vehicle fleets was conducted to begin assigning fleet managers to develop sustainable fleet plans.
- An Electric Vehicle (EV) Task Force was established to develop recommendations for installing charging infrastructure for EV users. This task force supported an initiative between the Grainger College of Engineering, iSEE, F&S, and the Parking Department to test a tracking system for Level 1 charging, developed by Engineering to learn about Level 1 usage and charging patterns.
- In FY25, the number of Level 2 charging stations on campus increased to 26 from 12 in FY24. More are being added in FY26.

¹ <https://bike.illinois.edu/resources/campus-bike-plan/>

Challenges:

- Despite recent increases in funding related to bicycle programs and infrastructure, there is still insufficient funding to fully implement the 2024 Campus Bike Plan.
- There is no consistent funding to improve and maintain the sidewalk infrastructure, which is vital for universal accessibility and multi-modal transportation.
- University vehicles are owned and operated by many departments and units, so coordination across many different stakeholders is required to develop sustainable fleet plans for all campus fleets.
- Influencing individual commuter choices is difficult due to a lack of incentives, existing habits and attitudes around transportation options, and external factors like available bus routes, off-campus bike conditions, etc.
- Air travel, while essential for academic collaboration, professional advancement, and athletics, remains a significant and difficult-to-offset emissions source. The expansion of the Big Ten Conference increases travel distances, emphasizing the need for equitable offset solutions.

Resilience co-benefits:

- Increased access to sustainable transportation options helps to reduce air pollution and associated health impacts.
- Providing infrastructure and promoting the use of active modes of transportation reduces strain on roads and parking infrastructure and promotes healthy lifestyles.
- Maintaining high-quality conditions on bikeways, sidewalks, and roads improves safety and prevents the need for more costly and emission-intensive structural repairs.



Electric vehicle in the campus fleet

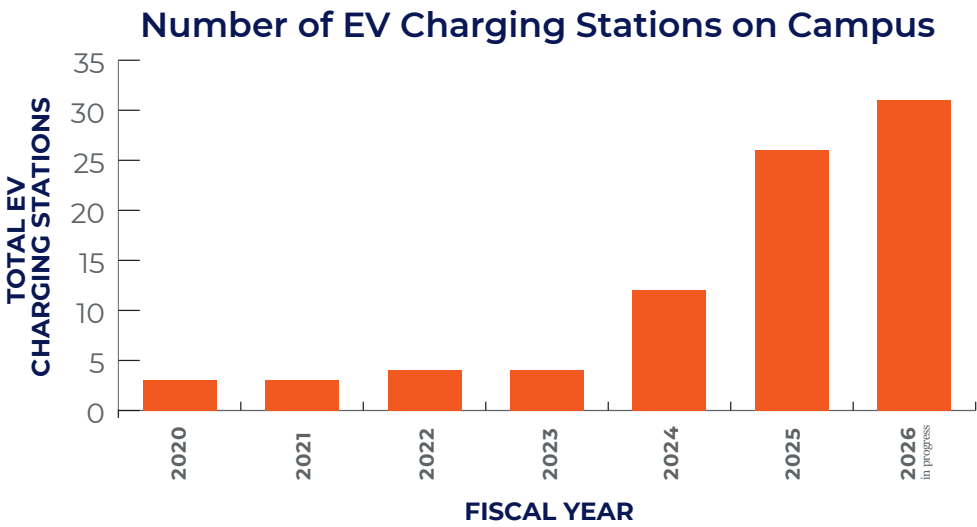


Figure 8: Number of EV charging stations available for public use on campus.



Top: Number of EV charging stations available for public use on campus.

Bottom: A bicyclist commutes on campus.

Transportation ICAP 2026 OBJECTIVES:

1

Continue to improve bike infrastructure, including charging infrastructure for electric bikes/scooters/skateboards.

2

Promote active transportation to reduce driving on campus.

3

Regularly assess the demand for EV charging to guide future investments in charging infrastructure.

4

Maintain high-quality pavement conditions for university road surfaces and accessible sidewalk conditions that comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

5

Optimize fuel efficiency in the university-owned fleet and implement zero-emission vehicles.

6

Explore options to reduce air travel emissions, while maintaining support for academic collaboration, professional networking, and global engagement.

7

Develop a plan to transition the DIA fleet (including utility vehicles) to lower-emission, higher-efficiency vehicles.



Land & Water

Design and maintain landscapes that promote biodiversity, ecosystem health and integrity, and resilience of the natural system

Promoting water-efficient landscapes, indigenous plants, and biodiversity is important to the university's strategy to reduce emissions and promote climate resilience. Because the university obtains water from the Mahomet Aquifer, and treating and pumping water require significant energy, reducing our water consumption contributes to conservation and a reduction in the associated emissions. Supporting the integrity and biodiversity of our ecosystems helps to increase resilience to extreme weather events. Furthermore, protecting and promoting natural areas ensures that all members of our campus community can enjoy them and benefit from the ecosystem services, research, and learning opportunities they provide.



Left: Bees at flowers in the prairie restoration at the corner of Florida & Orchard in Urbana (near the President's House).



Right: Boneyard Creek overlooking Engineering Quad.

Recent accomplishments:

- The first Campus Landscape Master Plan¹ was completed in FY22, outlining a vision to protect natural heritage, strengthen ecosystems, and provide learning opportunities in the natural environment.
- The Rainwater Management Program² was finalized in Spring 2025, offering recommendations for the development of green infrastructure and enhanced rainwater policies.
- F&S Grounds planted more than 2,500 trees on campus from FY19 to FY24.
- Fifty-five pollinator-friendly landscape areas are being maintained on campus as of FY24, an increase from 26 pollinator-friendly areas in FY19.
- Over 50 green infrastructure projects, such as green roofs, rain barrels, rain gardens, and others, were active on campus in FY24.

¹ https://docs.fs.illinois.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2022_campus_landscape_master_plan.pdf

² <https://fs.illinois.edu/Projects/rainwater-management-program/>



The Red Oak Rain Garden supports sustainable rainwater management, showcases historic trees, and provides educational opportunities to the community.

Left: A locally culled wood pedestrian bridge added the RORG in June 2021.

Right: The second annual Illuminating Art in Nature event, organized by the Red Oak Rain Garden Extension team in October 2025, invited the community to an autumnal celebration highlighting sustainability.



Challenges:

- Funding sources must be identified for additional landscape improvements.
- Maintaining natural areas, including native and pollinator-friendly trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants, requires specialized skills and dedicated staffing. Expansion of these areas requires additional training and resources for F&S Grounds.
- Prolonged drought, as well as pests and pathogens, threaten the growth and survival of campus trees. Continuing to increase species diversity will be vital to ensuring the resilience of the university's urban forest.
- Projected increases in heat and drought may increase irrigation needs and the costs of establishing and maintaining a diverse landscape.

Resilience co-benefits:

- Pollinator-friendly plantings provide habitats for the full life cycle of pollinators, which support overall ecosystem health.
- Sustainable landscapes promote flood control, improve air quality, filter and purify water, and provide cooling microclimates, resulting in greater preparedness for severe rainfall, heatwaves, and drought.
- A well-maintained and inviting natural environment contributes to community members' mental health and overall well-being.



Land & Water
ICAP 2026 OBJECTIVES:

- 1** Explore advocacy opportunities for state-level policy changes that support sustainability, such as allowing the use of greywater in campus facilities.
- 2** Increase the abundance, diversity, and health of indigenous and pollinator-friendly plants, including trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants.
- 3** Improve rainwater management practices and expand green infrastructure.
- 4** Enhance sustainable land management on South Farms by using cover crops and prairie strips.
- 5** Identify tracking methods and begin measuring irrigation water use on the main campus and South Farms.
- 6** Reduce water demand by installing native, drought-tolerant plantings on athletic grounds.
- 7** Improve rainwater management by increasing water recapture infrastructure (e.g., permeable pavers, raingardens) at athletic facilities.

Zero Waste

Become a zero-waste campus by reducing sources of waste, maximizing diversion, and promoting a zero-waste culture

The core mission of zero waste is to eliminate avoidable waste and divert recyclable or reusable materials from the landfill. These efforts reduce GHG emissions generated at landfills, reduce air and water pollution from landfill sites, and prevent unnecessary resource extraction. The U. of I. is committed to implementing zero-waste strategies across campus, starting by reducing sources of waste through sustainable procurement practices and working to prevent recyclable and organic waste from going to landfills. Reaching our goals will require commitment from all campus units, offices, and individuals to adopt sustainable waste-reduction practices, so zero-waste messaging and behavior-change campaigns are central to our efforts.



Standardized waste bin.

Recent accomplishments:

- The Grind2Energy system installed in FY20 allows food scraps from university dining halls to be collected and sent to the Urbana-Champaign Sanitary District, where they are converted into energy.
- Since FY23, campus-wide collection events each May have captured and diverted over 70,000 pounds of household goods and dry food to local nonprofits and food banks through the Dump & Run program, in collaboration with the University YMCA.
- Recycling infrastructure increased with the installation of a new baler for recyclables at the Waste Transfer Station and new three-stream waste collection bins in 70 campus buildings.
- A campus-wide waste audit conducted in FY24 by F&S and the Illinois Sustainable Technology Center provides data on major waste sources, which will inform future zero-waste efforts.
- Over 700 hydration stations have been installed on campus to encourage the use of reusable water bottles.
- Since FY23, zero-waste athletic events have engaged volunteers to promote recycling at major sporting events that generate significant amounts of waste.



Above: The Grind2Energy system collects food waste from university dining halls so that it can be transported to the Urbana-Champaign Sanitary District and converted into energy. **Below:** A new, state-of-the-art baler machine was installed at the Waste Transfer Station in 2024 to enhance campus-wide recycling efficiency.



Landfilled Campus Waste

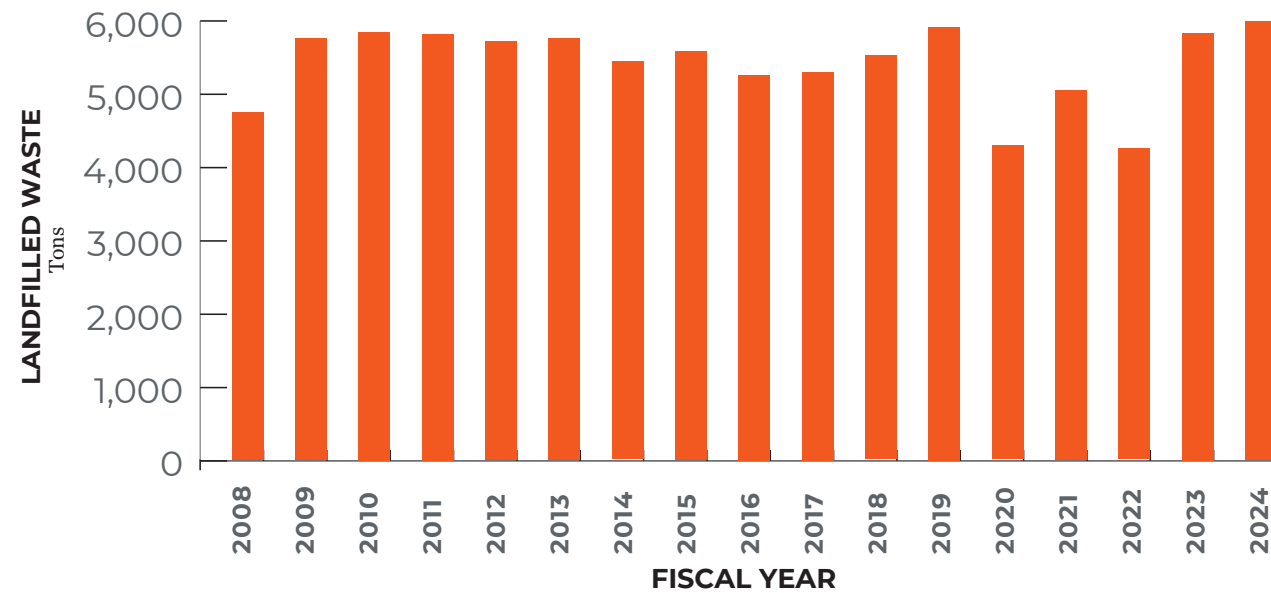


Figure 9: Tons of landfilled waste produced on campus each year from FY08-FY24.

Challenges:

- Total landfilled waste increased slightly in FY24 and dropped significantly only during the years affected by the COVID pandemic. This illustrates the challenge of reducing waste with a growing campus population, a need for increased recycling infrastructure, and a need to find solutions to address organic waste.
- Procurement processes and tools are designed to serve the entire University of Illinois System. It is difficult to create and implement sustainable procurement guidelines that meet the diverse procurement needs of different campus units.
- Organic waste comprises a large portion of landfilled waste, but diversion options are limited in this region. Currently, no compost hauler or compost facility operates locally, and other organic waste solutions like an on-campus anaerobic digester come with high infrastructure and operational costs.
- Standardized waste bins that meet campus requirements are costly.

Total Campus Waste Going to Landfills

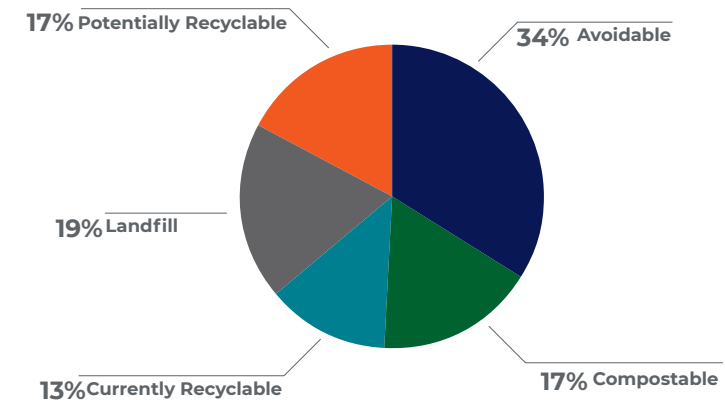


Figure 10: Results of the FY24 Campus Waste Audit, showing the composition of landfill-bound waste from eight audited buildings, including residence halls, academic buildings with and without laboratories, and multi-use buildings. Waste was classified as avoidable, compostable, currently recyclable, potentially recyclable, and landfill.

Resilience co-benefits:

- Reducing total waste avoids stressing the capacity of our waste management infrastructure and reduces disposal fees.
- Reducing the amount of waste sent to landfills decreases our campus's contribution to air and water pollution in nearby communities.

Landfilled Waste from 2024 Football Games

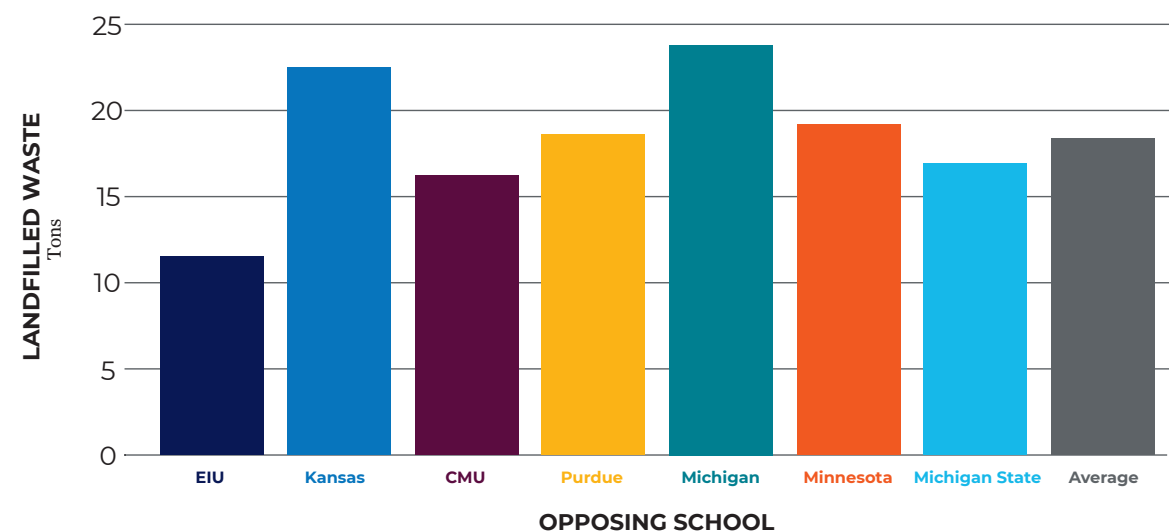


Figure 11: Tons of waste generated from home football games during the 2024 football season, including waste collected in the stadium and the tailgate area.

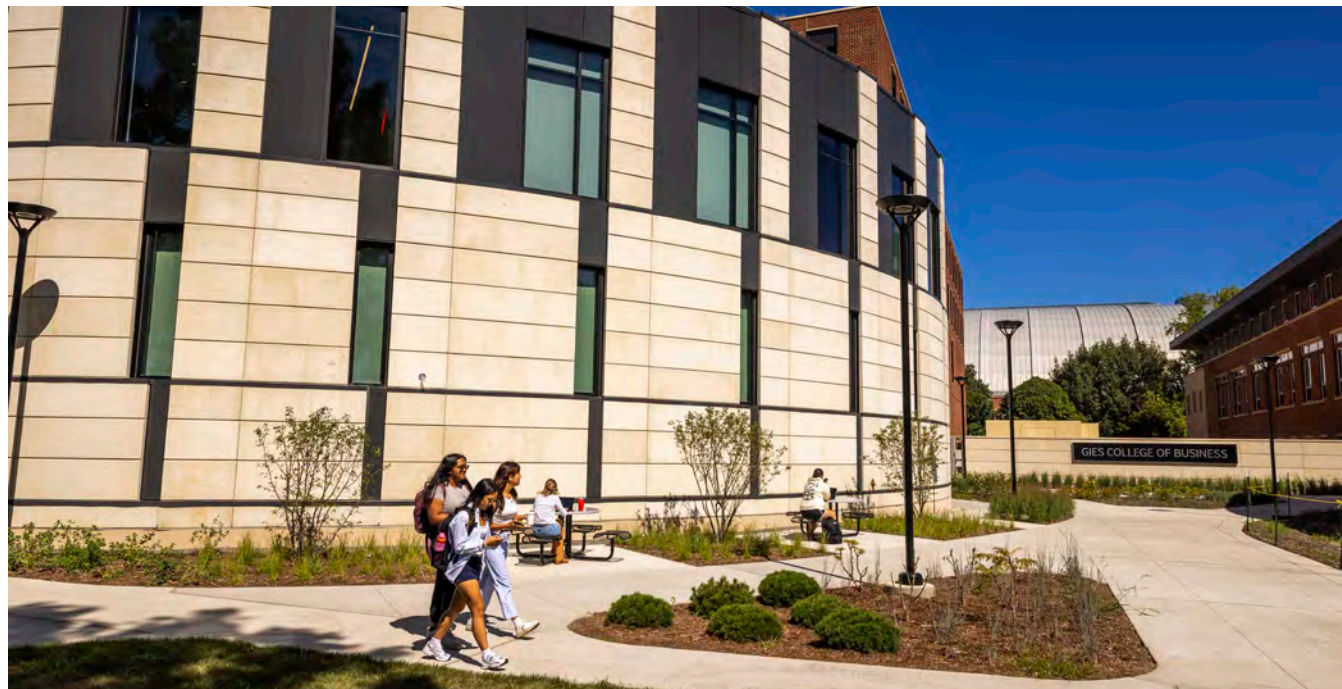
ICAP *Zero Waste* 2026 OBJECTIVES:

- 1 Revise Campus Administrative Manual policy BF-11 to increase the use of recycled-content paper.
- 2 Reduce the total campus waste going to landfills.
- 3 Install standardized waste collection infrastructure across campus to encourage proper recycling practices.
- 4 Develop a plan for organic waste handling options.
- 5 Develop a comprehensive zero-waste messaging campaign.
- 6 Implement green cleaning practices to reduce the use of hazardous chemicals.
- 7 Reduce plastic waste.
- 8 Reduce landfilled waste at athletic events by increasing the number of recycling bins and water bottle refill stations, and support their use through marketing, outreach, and education.
- 9 Develop sustainable procurement guidelines at DIA for equipment, tools, and contracted services.

Sustainable Buildings

Enhance the environmental sustainability of new and existing buildings by reducing their energy, water, and carbon footprints

This new thematic area has been introduced into the iCAP 2026 to address cross-cutting aspects of sustainability that relate to campus buildings. Buildings are responsible for a significant portion of our energy use, greenhouse gas emissions, and resource consumption, typically accounted for as embodied carbon (from the building materials and construction) and operating carbon (from the building's use). Through sustainable design, construction, demolition, and operation of campus buildings, the university will advance toward our goals in energy, water, and a reduced carbon footprint.



Wymer Hall, which was built with sustainable features including a geothermal system.

Challenges:

- Sustainability priorities must be balanced with other university priorities, such as growth.
- Coordination with existing iCAP teams is needed to provide meaningful added value.

Resilience co-benefits:

- Buildings are a hub and platform for human activity. Using a buildings perspective can provide insight into behavioral activities and usage patterns within the space to help create targeted programs to encourage greater energy efficiency and water conservation.

- Use of sustainable building materials in new development, construction, and renovation will reduce our carbon footprint and contribute to a resilient built environment.
- Sustainable building design is important to minimize and manage the future impacts of climate change.

Focus Areas:

Because this is a new topical area, the objectives will be developed surrounding these focus areas during FY26:

- Collect and analyze building-level data on energy consumption, waste, and water use to support college-level reporting and target-setting.
- Review and recommend changes to university sustainability standards, specifically Green Infrastructure, Energy Efficiency, LEED Requirements, and standards related to Clean Energy, Waste Reduction, Transportation, and Grounds.
- Quantify the sustainability benefits of addressing deferred maintenance and systems efficiency.
- Explore sustainable operating certifications (e.g., TRUE, ASHRAE net zero operations, IREM sustainable property, and WELL), including benchmarking the Urbana campus against other universities.
- Evaluate opportunities to enact green leases and sustainable vending contracts in university buildings.
- Review environmental product declarations (EPDs), embodied carbon intensities (ECIs), and life-cycle assessments (LCAs) for recent construction and renovation projects, and provide Facilities & Services with recommendations about methods to include these assessments in design decisions.
- Investigate opportunities to integrate sustainable building materials into the construction of campus infrastructure to reduce embodied carbon, such as recycled or sustainably produced bricks and pavers, fly ash in concrete, and recycled glass.
- Evaluate the embodied carbon implications of potential building demolitions.



Building demolitions on campus. Building demolitions have a significant environmental impact because they result in the discarding of carbon-intensive building materials and drive demand for new, high-impact building materials.

Education

Amplify sustainability education through curriculum innovation

The university aims to equip all graduates with the knowledge and skills needed to address the global challenge of creating an environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable world for future generations. However, opportunities to engage with sustainability are uneven across academic units. While some colleges offer many courses with sustainability content, others offer few or none. Instead of creating new courses, a more practical approach is to integrate sustainability into existing curricula. This requires time, incentives, and collaboration, which can be difficult to coordinate. Broader integration, beyond general education or self-selected minors, will ensure all students graduate with the knowledge and skills to contribute to a more sustainable future.



Students participate in a sustainability-focused course.

Recent accomplishments:

- More than 550 sustainability-related courses were offered by over 60 departments on campus during the 2024-25 academic year. iSEE publishes an inventory of sustainability-related courses so that students can easily find them.
- A sustainability literacy assessment is distributed to all incoming students as part of their orientation. A follow-up survey will be delivered to a sample of graduating seniors to evaluate how their

sustainability knowledge and attitudes changed during their time on campus.

- The Environmental Leadership Program (ELP) was launched by iSEE in 2021 and has provided over 60 students with opportunities for observing and participating in environmental policymaking and learning about corporate sustainability efforts.
- iSEE partners with the Career Center to organize green career forums so that students can engage with employers and learn more about potential careers in sustainability.
- A new online graduate certificate in Weather and Climate Risk and Data Analytics was launched in 2024.
- A Gen Ed Theme in Sustainability is now available for students interested in enhancing their learning about sustainability and is highlighted on the Provost Office's general education website¹.

Challenges:

- While there is strong potential for collaboration across departments to address gaps in sustainability education, structural obstacles such as administrative silos and a lack of coordination limit cross-departmental collaboration to develop new course offerings that increase students' exposure to sustainability.
- Limited availability of teaching resources, such as faculty time, teaching materials, classroom space, and revenue-sharing structures, makes it difficult to take a strategic, campus-wide approach to sustainability education.
- The university lacks a mechanism to ensure that all students engage with sustainability-related content during their studies. While there are high-quality programs that expose students to sustainability's multiple dimensions, these opportunities are limited in capacity and currently reach only a small portion of the student body.

Resilience co-benefits:

- Sustainability literacy prepares graduates to understand the positive and negative impacts of human actions on the environment and the resulting climate crisis.
- Sustainability education engages students in team science and develops soft skills of networking, project management, and conflict resolution that enhance their job market skills.
- Students work with community partners on real-world projects to increase local sustainability.

¹ <https://gened.illinois.edu/choosing/themes/#Theme-Sustainability>.

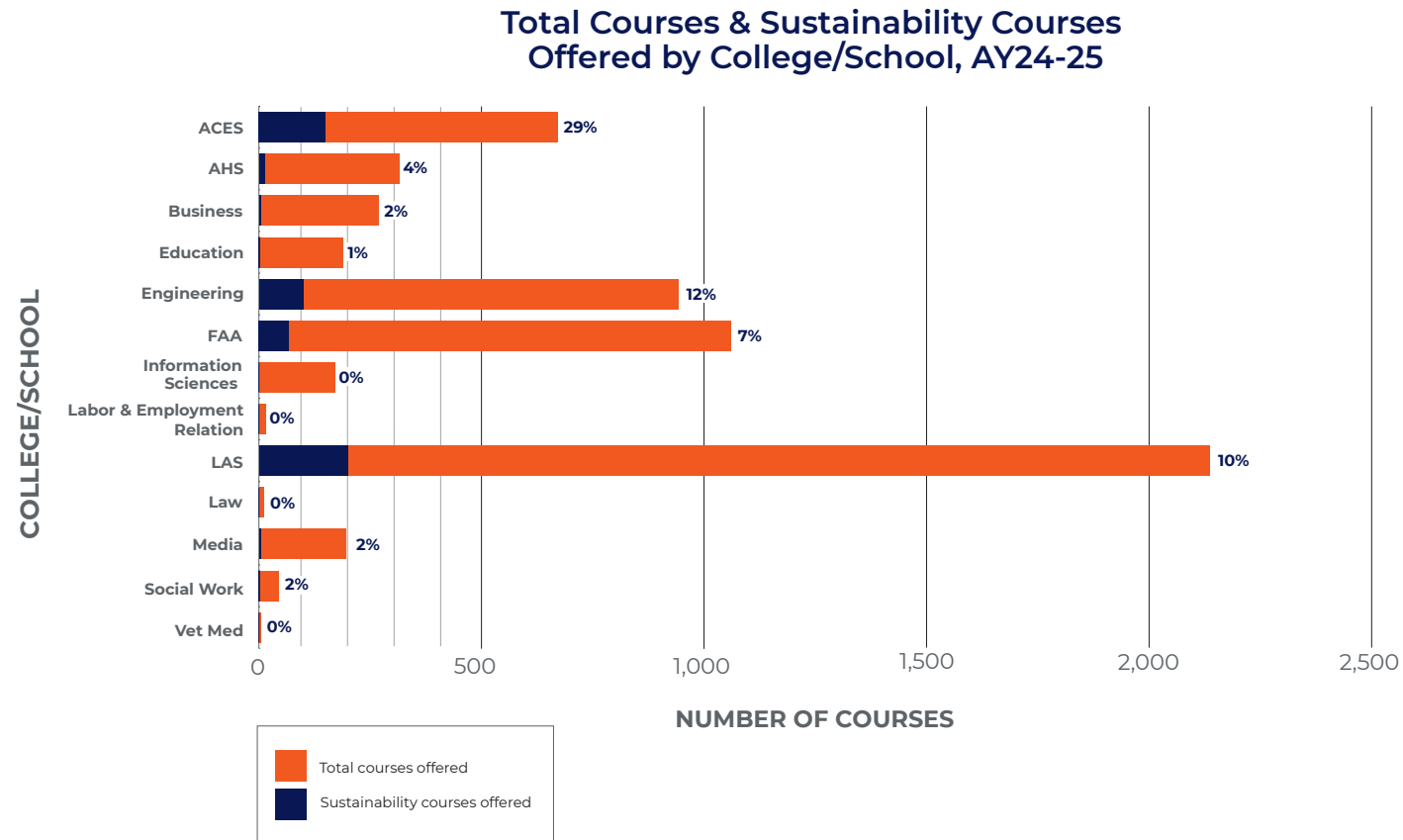


Figure 12. Total number of courses offered by each college/school in academic year 2024-2025, and the number and percentage of those courses that are sustainability-focused.



Education

ICAP 2026 OBJECTIVES:

1

Incorporate sustainability content into existing courses to make sustainability education more accessible and meaningful.

2

Regularly assess student sustainability literacy at the campus level to evaluate sustainability learning outcomes.

3

Create a community of practice around sustainability education to disseminate best practices and provide resources to future instructors across academic departments.

4

Create experiential learning opportunities about sustainability by utilizing campus infrastructure and the campus environment to cultivate students' professional skills.

Engagement

Foster a culture of sustainability on campus and encourage meaningful participation in climate action

We are dedicated to empowering our entire campus community—including students, faculty, staff, and our surrounding neighbors—to take part in creating a more sustainable future. Through greater visibility of sustainability issues and accessible opportunities for involvement, we aim to inspire positive change. By making our iCAP goals and progress transparent and easy to find, and by sharing ways to engage through campus-wide communications, we strive to connect more people with meaningful action. Our work is guided by the belief that, together, we will be leaders in engaging humanity in the paradigm shift towards sustainability for the future.



The campus community celebrates sustainability at the 2025 Earth Day festival, Sustainapalooza.

Recent accomplishments:

- The Greener Campus Certifications¹ program was updated and relaunched in 2024. This program recognizes campus community members’ commitment to sustainability and provides actionable steps to conserve energy, reduce waste, and promote sustainability in offices, student chapters, and campus events. The Greener Campus Portal provides small, actionable steps to become certified and promote sustainability.

¹ <https://isee.illinois.edu/campus-sustainability/get-involved/greener-campus/>

- The Division of Intercollegiate Athletics (DIA) joined the Green Sports Alliance as part of broader efforts to increase the visibility of sustainability in athletics. As part of this collaboration, two hydration stations were installed at Memorial Stadium to encourage the use of reusable water bottles during Illini games, and several zero-waste athletic events have diverted materials from local landfills.
- The Green Guide² was launched in 2025 as a user-friendly guide highlighting campus sustainability efforts and best practices. The Green Guide aims to break down institutional barriers and engage communities across units, disciplines, and cultures.
- A new sustainability literacy assessment was developed for incoming students to raise awareness about sustainability goals, resources, and opportunities on campus and encourage them to become involved.
- Sustainability outreach was expanded in residence halls through training for resident advisors to promote sustainable living, and digital signage promoting plastic waste reduction.

Challenges:

- Sustainability programs are managed by multiple campus units, making it difficult to centralize information about opportunities for involvement.
- The university operates multiple communication platforms, and it is important to maintain consistent sustainability messaging across platforms.
- Large-scale initiatives, such as zero-waste events and bike programs, depend on volunteer support, which must be sustained through ongoing recruitment and recognition.



The Department of Psychology achieved Monarch-level Green Office certification in 2024.

² <https://studentengagement.illinois.edu/studentsustainability/greenguide>

Resilience co-benefits:

- Fostering climate awareness and encouraging behavior change is essential to building resilience and developing the next generation of climate leaders.
- Climate change impacts the mental health of our local and global communities. By engaging with the campus community on sustainability topics, we can share progress and encouragement to cultivate mental well-being, while also building momentum toward the overall iCAP goals.



Student volunteers promote recycling at a zero-waste athletic events.

Engagement iCAP 2026 OBJECTIVES:

1

Engage the student body in iCAP efforts by communicating iCAP progress and opportunities for involvement.

2

Create a sustainability volunteer program for staff and faculty and continue to offer volunteer opportunities to students.

3

Develop and deliver standardized green training for university employees.

4

Implement a sustainability literacy survey for staff and faculty.

5

Increase Greener Campus Certifications (Green Certified Events, Offices, and Chapters).

6

Raise the visibility of the university's and DIA's commitment to sustainability by developing and implementing a comprehensive communications strategy for sustainability initiatives.



Conclusion

The Illinois Climate Action Plan 2026 reflects the collective dedication and commitment of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign community to advancing sustainability and climate leadership.

Our progress would not be possible without the collaboration of many campus stakeholders who help integrate sustainability into operations, academics, and daily campus life. Growing interest among campus stakeholders, particularly within the Division of Intercollegiate Athletics, Student Affairs, University Housing, and across other colleges and units, has fostered ongoing innovation and shared responsibility. Above all, student enthusiasm, advocacy, and leadership continue to drive meaningful change and ensure that Illinois remains at the forefront of climate action.



