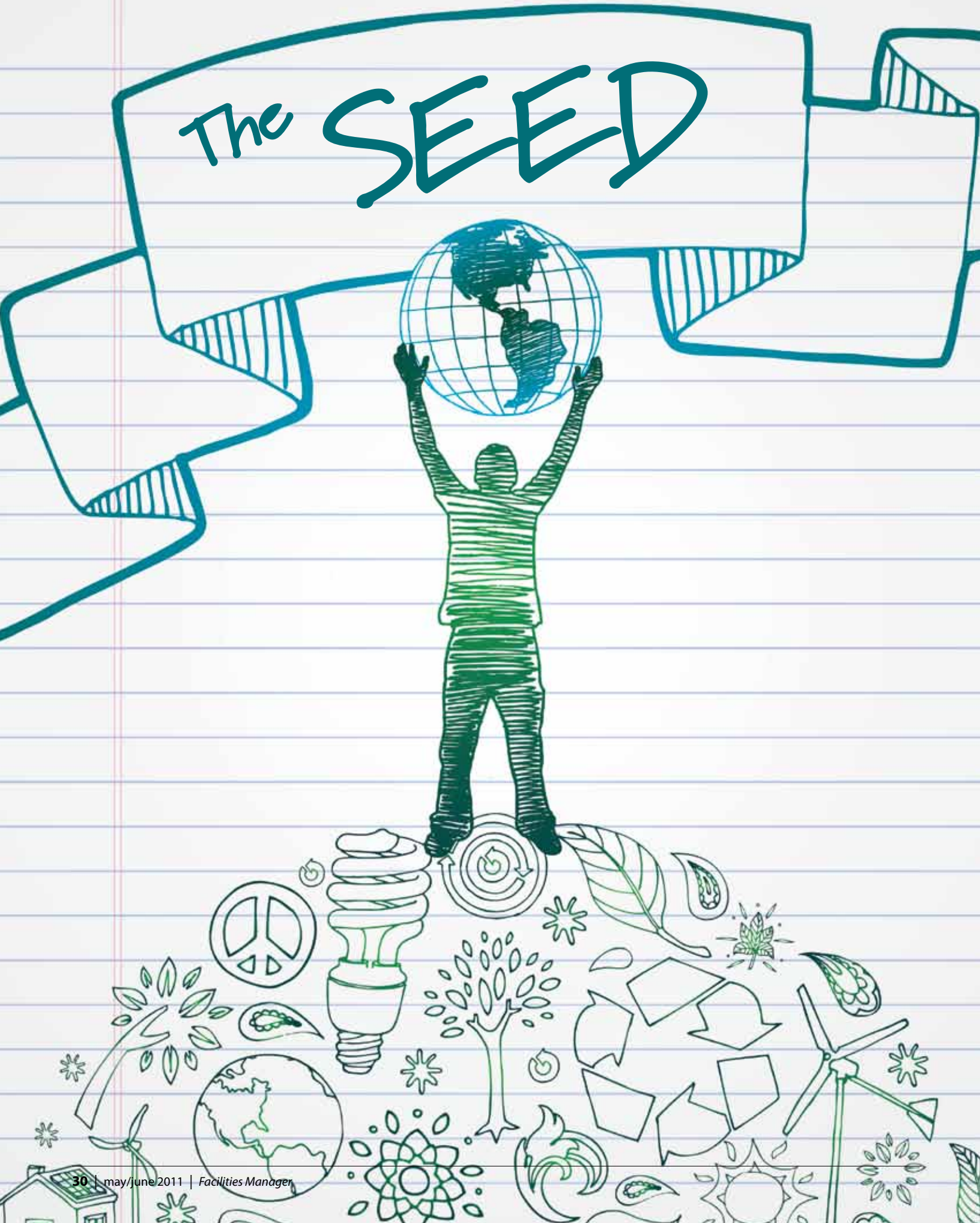
The SEED



Initiative

By Carolyn R. Teich

Committed to fulfilling the promise of the green economy, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) launched the Sustainability Education and Economic Development (SEED) initiative (*www.theseedcenter.org*) in October 2010. The project advances sustainability and clean energy workforce development practices at community colleges by sharing innovative models and resources and building the capacity of college leaders, faculty, and staff to grow the green economy. Through initial funding from The Kresge Foundation and Surda, and support from ecoAmerica, AACC is helping colleges and others navigate an increasingly green world. To date, more than 360 community college presidents have pledged to support the goals of SEED.

The SEED Center includes more than 300 curated green jobs resources, community college program and course descriptions, in-depth success stories, instructional guidance for colleges on developing and advancing green focused programs on campus, and a Wiki to incorporate curricular materials submitted by colleges. Content is updated on a regular basis. As the database grows more robust, it will help college leaders, faculty, and staff plan, implement, and improve their programs and courses. The initial database focuses on solar, wind, green building, energy efficiency, and sustainability education.

According to John Sygielski, chair of the AACC Board of Directors, "Community colleges are inherently positioned to be some of the most influential and impactful organizations to lead the national movement toward sustainability and a greener economy." With more than 1,100 colleges serving over 12.4 million students, colleges are educating and training students for new green jobs as well as the greening of existing jobs. And, they can create a demand for sustainable products, sustainable behavior, and a sustainable economy.

Over the past year, the AACC Sustainability Task Force consisting of 36 community college presidents chaired by Jerry Weber of the College of Lake County, (IL), crafted a mission and a set of three long-term priority areas for two-year colleges engaged in the green space. The task force identified:

1. workforce development (education and job training for careers in the green economy);

2. community engagement (broadening partnerships with local stakeholders to build sustainable communities; and

3. sustainable colleges (reducing the carbon footprint of college campuses.

By transforming curricula, workforce development, community collaboration, and campus operations, colleges will generate skills, values, and behaviors that will prepare students to participate in a thriving green and sustainable society. The goals are lofty, the rewards are great.

For community colleges, "green" is really about comprehensive change - making sustainability a guiding principle for all institutional educational offerings and practices. It means campuses moving toward carbon neutrality; it means integrating sustainability into campus operations; and it means developing quality green job training opportunities for students and workers.

Three examples of renewable energy programs are illustrative of the scope of community college efforts. Butte College (CA) produces more electricity from on-site solar than any other community college is moving to produce all of their electrical power on site. Mesalands Community College (NM) is home of the North American Wind Research and Training Center (NAWRTC)—the first partnership of its kind between a national energy laboratory (Sandia National Laboratories) and a two-year higher education institution in the country. The Technical College of the Lowcountry (SC) has installed an electrical generator on the Beaufort River to confirm the potential of tidal energy.

STRENGTHS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES— THEY'RE COLLABORATIVE

Community colleges are collaborative by nature and sustainability issues provide another opportunity to join other colleges to accomplish their goals. Some of the collaboration includes entire states. Central Carolina Community College (NC) is the Energy Sector lead college for the North Carolina Community College System Code Green Super Curriculum Improvement Project. The college will develop and improve existing curricula in five sectors: energy, transportation, engineering technology, environment and building. The improvements will be integrated across North Carolina's 58 community colleges. The Illinois Green Economy Network (IGEN), formerly known as the Illinois Community College Sustainability Network, is a vibrant and growing collaboration between the state's 48 community colleges. An initiative of the community college Presidents, this network brings community colleges together to expand employment opportunities, improve human and environmental health, foster community engagement and accelerate market competitiveness to drive Illinois's emerging green economy. (See p. 35 for more on the Illinois Green Economy Network.)

Other collaborations cross state lines or are national in impact. The NSF-sponsored Advanced Technology Environmental and Energy Center (ATEEC) is headquartered in Iowa, but it reaches across the map. ATEEC's instructional design team works with education, business, industry, and government clients to analyze gaps and evaluate existing training to provide professional development opportunities for technician educators and technicians. In the environmental and energy technology fields, these opportunities include: program and curriculum development, educator technical training workshops, fellows Institute, peer and technical assistance networking, conferences, forums, webinars, and resource sharing.

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Columbia Gorge Community College (OR) formed a regional collaboration with Washington. In addition to orchestrating workforce consortium arrangements between Oregon and Washington state agencies and funders, CGCC was the leader in founding the Columbia Gorge Bi-State Renewable Energy Zone (CGBREZ) to promote and coordinate economic development opportunities across five Oregon and Washington counties. Their wind energy programs are the result of strong collaboration with the wind energy business sector.

STRENGTHS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES— THEY'RE EVERYWHERE

Community colleges are ubiquitous, they are positioned to lead and model sustainability. SEED plans to showcase how to use the campus and the community as a living laboratory for sustainability to engage both students and the public in sustainable solutions. Many of the best community college programs create assignments and activities that engage in real world sustainability projects in the local government, business, and nonprofit sectors. Such activities can impact facilities, purchasing and strategic planning, as well as energy production and consumption, and drive the level of environmental and social responsibility in policies and practices. Students, staff and faculty learn how to work systemically with the broader community to support the development of a stronger, greener economy.

Gateway Technical College (WI) created the Center for Sustainable Living, a five-acre property with gardens, orchards, a greenhouse, and an older home that students are retrofitting to meet sustainable energy guidelines. The home will serve as a community showcase in green building construction, remodel-

ing, and geothermal exchange to heat the greenhouse in Wisconsin's extreme winter climate. The students in the Culinary Program will use the greenhouse, gardens, and orchards to produce sustainable and organic foods for on-campus dining.

As the market for green jobs expands, SEED is noting good programs and processes in developing sought after skills for the workforce. As the premier workforce development provider in higher education, community colleges are used to working with businesses to provide the education and training needed to work in various sectors, including which certificates and degrees are required. The new green jobs provide a prime example of multiple certificates arising in new fields. SEED works with government agencies and business groups to assist colleges in determining which certificates are business-driven and which skills are necessary for some of the new jobs. This is a fluid, dynamic process. Green energy sector competencies and recognized credentials allow students of all ages to move in a career pathway.

FUTURE PLANS

As part of this effort, AACC recently released a strategic plan for Community Colleges in the Emerging Green Economy: Charting a Course and Leadership Role (posted on the SEED website). The plan expands the workforce development phase to include more efforts to increase community engagement and create more sustainable colleges. Many community colleges have well defined sustainability goals and benchmarks, others have some programs, while others cannot imagine adding another project or program in tight economic times. SEED is designed to assist all colleges on the road to sustainability by providing a forum to understand the challenges, provide technical assistance, provide promising practices, provide resources, and promote the role that community colleges play in a green economy. Webinars, toolkits, and workshops are planned to for the next couple of years to spread the resources. Additionally, scholarship and award opportunities will encourage new endeavors and reward existing work.

AACC works with other higher education associations as well as other organizations to further the sustainability agenda. SEED links to other relevant websites which allows community colleges to benefit in many ways, from scientific research to federal regulations to aligning coursework to secondary and four-year colleges. Sustainability is an integrative endeavor, with no fixed starting and stopping point. The greater the inclusion of travelers along the path, the greater the chance for a successful journey. We welcome the addition of good practices and suggestions from APPA.

This article was adapted from the SEED Center and *Community College Journal*. Carolyn Teich is senior program associate for economic development at the American Association of Community Colleges, Washington, DC. She can be reached at *cteich@aacc.nche.edu*. This is her first article for *Facilities Manager*.