ERUA
European Reform University Alliance

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ERUA STUDENT MANIFESTO FOR SUSTAINABLE HIGHER EDUCATION

(DOCUMENT BY STUDENTS OF THE BLUE COMMISSION)

This ERUA Student Manifesto for Sustainable Higher Education reflects the collective vision and effort of all the students of the Blue Commission of ERUA. We call each institution, represented by its rectors, for action with a set of recommendations shaped by collaboration and purpose. We ultimately support ERUA's commitment towards a greener, just and more resilient future.

Hereby rectors acknowledge the utmost importance of improving sustainability in their institutions and commit to carefully study the introduction of the proposed recommendations. They pledge to address back to the Blue Commission in no more than six months to establish a dialogue on how to introduce them.

Mytilene, November 6th, 2025

THE BLUE COMMISSION EMBRACES SUSTAINABILITY AS ITS CORNERSTONE and as students we are aware that the future depends on us. We are committed to taking responsibility and doing everything we can to drive the change our society needs.

A sustainable higher education must be the result of a broad engagement at all levels, stronger coordination, sustained effort, resources and collaboration. The result of embedding sustainability in strategic plans, budgets and governance structures, while empowering students and staff to lead, learn and innovate. The result of a joint commitment that runs through the whole institution: from studies and curriculum, innovation and research-transfer, to campus operations. The result of recognizing that sustainability cannot be achieved without addressing the historical and structural inequalities that continue to shape our institutions and societies.

We believe a change of this magnitude at a university level will result in a domino effect, with positive impact beyond academia, on the whole community. Universities cannot only be spaces of innovation but also of inclusion and plurality. Despite the tumultuous and worrying events that are currently taking place on our planet, we firmly defend that there still is room for hope and change, and each one of us holds the power to trigger them, starting from universities.

The ERUA knowledge ecosystem plays a key role in this. The work of the Blue Commission benefited from the ongoing support of the ERUA administrative leadership, the official body on sustainability (Green and Inclusive Committee), the network established through WP7 on Student Engagement, ERUA's Student Board, and the wider ERUA community as a whole. Thus, recognizing ERUA's potential of reforming and shaping just, resilient, and future-ready societies.

Based on the considerations above, we propose 35 first steps, clustered around the different sustainability chapters, to boost the performance of ERUA institutions and engage in an ongoing dialogue about priorities and next targets in creating and maintaining positive change. These recommendations are ambitious yet grounded in reality. They build on the creativity and commitment of students, the expertise of staff and faculty, and the support of external partners.

By integrating governance, student engagement, operations, education, research and partnerships, the alliance can model an overarching approach to environmental stewardship and social and global justice, acknowledging that climate change and environmental degradation are rooted in historical and structural inequalities, including colonialism and extractive globalization.

Ultimately, universities were founded as gateways to knowledge and research, but they also bear the responsibility of transmitting its results to society. We firmly believe that higher education communities play a crucial role in shaping the future, and as part of them, we call for a more purposeful use of our shared resources to reach our common goal: creating a better tomorrow.

The success of this effort will be measured not by reduced emissions or increased recycling rates but by the culture it fosters: a culture of care for the planet and for each other, one that values diversity and inclusion, and a culture that embraces and drives innovation while respecting tradition. By embracing this vision, ERUA contributes to a more sustainable, just and resilient world.

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

CLIMATE ACTION

1. Increase investment in infrastructure and systems that enable low-carbon, resource-efficient campuses, by installing renewable energy generators such as photovoltaic plants or systems and phase out the use of fossil or nuclear power, as both cause significant environmental impacts and risks.
2. Reduce energy consumption by replacing incandescent and fluorescent bulbs with LEDs, installing motion sensors and daylight controls, and ensuring proper maintenance. LEDs use up to 75 % less energy and last ten times longer than incandescent bulbs. In addition, in the longer term, measures should be taken for the new infrastructure to ensure the maximization of daylight use. This can be achieved by installing larger and strategically placed windows, use of partitions, skylights, light tubes and choosing light-reflective colours for more effective light distribution.
3. Have conforming consumption by making sure that all lights in the campus comply with what is stated by the STARLIGHT foundation awarded to areas that certify sky quality representing protection and conservation.
4. Use low-consumption energy, save in heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems by upgrading to high efficiency boilers and chillers, insulating pipes and ducts, and implementing smart controls. Regular maintenance prevents energy loss due to leaks or malfunctioning equipment.
5. Reduce unnecessary energy use by improving insulation, sealing air leaks and installing double or triple glazed windows. Energy performance certificates (EPCs) can guide renovation priorities.
6. Mitigate climate-related risks by creating specific regulations to be implemented during heat- or cold-waves resulting from climate change. Commit to improving building insulation and seeking solutions to mitigate the effects of climate change

WATER AND MARINE RESOURCES

7. Improve sustainable water consumption opportunities on campus by installing water recharging points and thereby limiting single use bottles. Placement should consider high foot traffic areas and accessibility. Stations should be well maintained, monitored for quality and accessible to people with disabilities. Signage and awareness campaigns remind users to bring their own bottles.
8. Save water and save costs by harvesting rainwater. Collecting rainwater from rooftops can supply irrigation, toilet flushing or cooling towers. Proper filtration is required for potable uses. In drought prone regions, rainwater harvesting can buffer against water scarcity.
9. Use water efficient fixtures like low flow taps, dual flush toilets and waterless urinals to reduce consumption. Retrofitting older buildings yields large savings. Sensors can prevent taps from running unattended.

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RESOURCE USE AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY

10. Use clearly labelled bins to monitor the types and amounts of waste streams produced. Place recycling, compost, and waste bins in convenient locations in all campuses and buildings. Use consistent colour coding and signage that includes images and multiple languages. Consider accessibility for people with disabilities.
11. Promote a transition from a take-make-waste linear economy into a circular economy: all acquired products and services should be on their full life cycles, considering raw material extraction, manufacturing, transport, use and disposal. Where possible, choose reusable, recyclable or compostable materials.
12. Conduct food waste audits to identify where waste occurs. Offer smaller portion sizes or allow meal customization to reduce waste. Also, provide leftover options at reduced prices toward closing time.
13. Eliminate disposable items and phase out single use objects. Provide durable alternatives (e.g., stainless objects) that can be reused. Plus encouraging personal reusable containers by offering discounts or loyalty points to anyone who brings their own mugs, bottles and lunch boxes. Communicate this incentive clearly to the whole community.

BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEMS

14. Allocate funds to allow regular sustainability events and campaigns: such as sustainability weeks, climate festivals, creation of spaces for pollinators, environmentally friendly cafes and film screenings to raise awareness and inspire participation. Ensure that events are inclusive, multicultural and accessible to all. Use creative formats (arts, theatre) to engage people emotionally.
15. Universities must prioritize the introduction of native plants in their green spaces, endemic when possible, and prevent the arrival of invasive species. Avoiding the use of damaging pesticides and creating community shared gardening spaces where both endemic plants, pollinators and other livings beings may foster. A *nature en ville* approach fosters biodiversity, ecological resilience and environmental responsibility on campus.

POLLUTION

16. Promote the use of greener transport options such as bicycles and scooters by installing more parking slots and renewable energy-powered charging points. Plus, negotiate subsidised public transport or passes for students and staff. Coordinate timetables with lecture schedules to reduce waiting times and reduce commuters using private vehicles.
17. Use carpooling platforms. Develop digital platforms to match commuters from the same neighbourhood. Provide designated carpool parking spaces and incentives (e.g. reduced parking fees).
18. Adopt academic mobility policies. For staff and students travelling between campuses or conferences, adopt guidelines that prioritise rail and slower travel over air travel for journeys under a certain duration (e.g., 4.5 hours). Provide financial incentives (e.g. reimbursement up to the cost of the equivalent flight ticket) to encourage train use. Require carbon accounting for all travel and use the data to set reduction targets.

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OWN WORKFORCE

19. Embed sustainability positions and programmes into core budgets. Instead of relying exclusively on external grants, institutions should allocate funds for sustainability officers, student project grants and infrastructure improvements.
20. Include sustainability-related matters into existing courses. Lecturers can integrate examples of sustainability into business, engineering, arts, social science and humanities courses. For example, an architecture course might explore biomimicry, while a literature course examines eco criticism.
21. Climate activism often involves confronting distressing information, so provide mental health support and spaces for collective care, such as reflection circles. Universities shall be used as a forum for difficult discussions with other stakeholders.
22. Improve partnership relations with sustainability related associations or enterprises by building and maintaining partnerships. This might require time, funding and skilled staff. Universities should allocate resources for partnership coordination and recognise the workload involved avoiding any risk of unintended paternalistic dynamics. Clear communication, co-creation and transparent decision-making are key.

VALUE CHAIN PARTNERS AND SUPPLIERS

23. Ensure that suppliers uphold labour rights, gender equality and fair wages. Social sustainability is integral to environmental sustainability and should not be overlooked.
24. Engage the supply chain. Vendors and producers should understand how to introduce sustainability practices, encourage improvements and incorporate sustainability criteria into tenders. For example, cafeteria suppliers might be required to provide organic and fair-trade products, minimise packaging and offer plant-based options. Don´t use Paving stones produced through child labor or other products whose manufacturing processes harm nature, the climate, or human well-being.

AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

25. Support and give priority to local and regional products: Purchasing from local farmers and businesses supports regional economies, reduces transport emissions and fosters community partnerships. This must balance seasonal availability and cost considerations.

STUDENTS WELLBEING

26. Address food justice by ensuring that plant-based meal options are affordable and culturally appropriate. Avoid alienating certain communities by providing allergen information and involving student groups in menu planning to accommodate dietary restrictions (e.g., halal, kosher, gluten free).
27. Address barriers to participation. Students from low-income backgrounds may lack time or resources to volunteer; provide stipends, flexible schedules and childcare options when organising events. Students with disabilities may need accessible locations and materials in multiple formats.

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28. Create a program to train students as “sustainability ambassadors” who facilitate workshops, lead campus tours highlighting green features and act as liaisons between their peers and the sustainability office.
29. Ensure proper student training and foster research projects to prepare students to drive the green transition through training opportunities, such as:
    a) Workshops on project management, leadership and communication. These can be delivered by students, university staff, external trainers or alumni. Topics might include budgeting, event planning, conflict resolution and public speaking.
    b) Support research regarding environmental justice and climate change in partnership with affected communities by offering scholarships for non-EU students.
    c) Technical training. Provide sessions on composting, energy auditing or lifecycle assessment. Practical skills enable students to implement projects effectively.
    d) Policy literacy. Educate students about EU climate policies, institutional governance structures and funding mechanisms. Understanding the policy landscape helps students navigate bureaucracy and advocate effectively. understand the complex interplay of environmental, social and economic systems, preparing them to drive the green transition.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONDUCT/ ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE:

30. Engage in policy advocacy by participating in local policy discussions on sustainability (e.g., bike lane expansions, waste collection systems). Universities should provide scientific evidence and test innovative solutions.
31. Involve diverse stakeholders (including students) in decision making, ensuring that policies are informed by multiple perspectives and lived experiences.
32. Foster cultural dimension related education. Culture shapes how we see the world, how we relate to each other, and how we imagine our future. Through art, storytelling, and dialogue for Earth universities can nurture more empathy between people and the environment around us. We need to bring human and planetary dimensions of education closer together, and the cultural dimension is a bridge for it.
33. Promote ERUA sustainability awareness and create a joint campus through competitions and challenges: host sustainability competitions (e.g., energy saving challenges in dorms, zero waste challenges in cafeterias) with small prizes or recognition. We believe gamification encourages participation.
34. Assess environmental performance in all events and conferences hosted by our institutions. Organisers should measure emissions associated with travel, catering waste, and resource consumption, and include a self-evaluation of waste management practice
35. Ensure financing to organise the Young Forum for Action on Sustainability and Climate Change as an annual initiative allowing discussions and connections between students interested in this topic. Rotate hosting among campuses. Holding the forum on different campuses each year exposes participants to diverse contexts and encourages local communities to engage. Virtual participation should remain an option to reduce travel and increase accessibility.

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