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Green Suggestions to Benefit Us All on Campus

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Green Suggestions to Benefit Us All on Campus

By Chung Park
UCF Forum columnist
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Bike Lanes, More Solar Panels, Garden Plots and Other Ideas to Improve Our Lives.



UCF could perhaps even be a net positive generator of electricity and sell any excess solar power back to the grid. (Photo by Nick Russett)

Several years ago, UCF sent out a call for ideas to improve the campus, with the winning ideas to be implemented on a trial basis. I was intrigued by this and several ideas raced through my head.

Ironically, one of them was to coat all of the high-touch surfaces on campus with a copper alloy, as studies have shown that might reduce or prevent the spread of

infectious bacteria and viruses. While this is a classic example of better late than never, maybe some of these other ideas still could be implemented.

My first suggestion is to make UCF the most bike-friendly campus in the United States. Making our campus more bike friendly, thus reducing driving, will lead to increased physical and mental well-being from exercise, reduced noise pollution and reduced traffic fatalities. Reducing exhaust emissions is an obvious and worthy goal, but there are other less talked about “emissions” that come from driving, like the little bits of rubber that flake off of our tires when we drive.

The immediate benefits of reducing tire dust and keeping engine oil and other auto fluids out of our waterways will hopefully sway you in favor of bike lanes.

Even if climate change is an open question for you, the immediate benefits of reducing tire dust and keeping engine oil and other auto fluids out of our waterways will hopefully sway you in favor of bike lanes.

There are two components to this plan: The first is to have dedicated lanes on campus to keep bikers safe from cars and pedestrians safe from bikers. Perhaps skateboarders, who I’ve noticed can move pretty quickly, could share the bike lane. The second is to fix the “last mile” issue. While this term normally applies to delivering internet services, I’m using it here to talk about working with the City of Orlando and Orange and Seminole counties to figure out a way to get bikers safely from the swath of homes surrounding UCF to campus.

I regularly go to Salt Lake City and look on with envy at the large and growing network of protected bike lanes proliferating throughout the city. Hardy souls use these bike lanes even during the depths of winter. With the great weather we have during the school year, a similar network surrounding UCF would encourage students, staff and faculty who live near campus to ditch their cars and bike into campus.

Perhaps successful proof of concept near UCF would encourage our civic leaders to expand this network out into the entire community, scaling up the benefits and giving our neighbors a cheap and safe alternative for commuting.

My second suggestion is to vastly increase the amount of renewable energy we produce on our campus. Solar panels hold up well even during hurricanes and could be installed wherever feasible on campus. With the vast amount of rooftops we have at UCF we could perhaps even be a net positive generator of electricity and sell any excess power back to the grid.

I’m not sure how much gas we use on campus but if we use a good amount in our labs we could generate our own methane using a biogas digester that we’d feed with waste from campus food service. This also keeps a valuable resource out of the waste stream, reduces pressure on landfills, and lowers labor costs and emissions associated with hauling waste.

My final suggestion is to establish a community garden at UCF for participants to have individual plots. Some of my fondest memories of graduate school at the University of Illinois center around the community garden plots set on the edge of campus. Eating the insanely hot habanero peppers and canning vast amounts of food were only half of the fun. The community garden was a vibrant hub for students and faculty from a vast cross section of the university.

My friends from the music department were curious to see what kind of craziness I was up to and visited me at the plots nearly every day. I was scolded by ag majors for not doing things by the book and met people from all over the world who were growing vegetables from their homelands. Tasting these veggies exposed my palate and mind to an Epcot-like range of cultures.

I would love to relive these halcyon days on our beloved campus and put down some literal roots. There are health/wellness and environmental benefits attached to gardening but I'm most interested in the fun I'll have making new friends and learning new things.

While COVID-19 has given all of us a renewed interest in self-sufficiency, with things like gardening and home-baked sourdough bread taking off in popularity, I think the most lasting effect from the pandemic will be something much more elemental: value simply being together.

Some of us have been away from our friends and loved ones for months and Zoom just isn't cutting it anymore. I can't wait for the day when I can have a conversation and share a cucumber with a foreign student from Turkey and exchange it for some greens that I'm growing with seeds from my aunt in South Korea.

Stay healthy, everyone!

Chung Park is the director of the UCF Symphony and Chamber Orchestras, head of string music education, and an assistant professor in the Department of Music. He can be reached at Chung.Park@ucf.edu.