Including foliage in your next improvement project for your college or university lecture halls, dorms, cafeterias, and outdoor spaces could increase productivity by removing pollutants from inside buildings, creating aesthetically pleasing study areas, and increasing your environmental handprint.
Creating a Healthy Body and Mind

We maintain a predominantly indoor existence that includes a progression from our bedrooms to the kitchen, followed by a commute to work; then, we reverse the order each night. This type of routine equates to more than half of our time spent indoors which can increase our chances of being exposed to indoor air-quality issues that affect our overall health. The quality of air indoors can be compromised by the pollutants that furnishings and equipment give off, the uncontrolled humidity levels, and how well the ventilation system is functioning.

Fortunately, architects and builders are designing new and remodeled buildings that are healthier to work in because of the use of low-emission products, and increased ventilation, as well as successful maintenance schedules. Unfortunately, we don’t all work in these well thought-out environments, and changing them can be costly. If you are working in a building that is causing you to have building-associated illness or could increase the chances of such an illness, one quick and easy way to combat this problem is by increasing the use of greenery.

Greenery is found to clean air particulate matter such as molds, bacteria, and toxic agents. Greenery also reduces excess CO2 and increases humidity. The data collected by NASA, PCAC, Wolverton Environmental Services, and multiple professors—Dr. Ronald Wood, Dr. Tove Fjeld, Dr. Virginia I. Lohr, and Dr. Margaret Burchett—confirms that plants are, in fact, an essential part of creating an indoor working space that is healthier, which has been shown to increase productivity and decrease the number of sick days that employees use.

Using Plants to Improve Air Quality

Using plants to improve indoor air quality all started in 1980 when NASA performed a clean air study, not for us earth dwellers but moon dwellers. NASA needed a way to get rid of waste and clean the recycled air. Using sealed test chambers, they concluded that plants could remove formaldehyde. Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) were encouraged by NASA’s findings and helped fund a study to test 12 houseplants and their performance. The ALCA found that adding more greenery can increase not only the humidity in our spaces but also remove toxins.

A few of the toxic culprits are benzene, formaldehyde, ammonia, and bio-effluents, which are found in electronics, flooring, cleaning products, office furniture, décor and the people inhabiting the space. Even after completing the NASA Clean Air study, Plants for Clean Air Council (PCAC) and Wolverton Environmental Services have continued to study the effects of plants in our indoor environments.

Their findings have been summarized in Dr. B.C. Wolverton’s book How to Grow Fresh Air. Wolverton indicated the top indoor plant performers based on a rating composed of how well the plant removes volatile organic compounds (VOCs), how easy they are to grow and maintain, how resistant they are to pests, and how fast they turn the water into vapor. Based on all the results of the research, the Areca Palm, Lady Palm, Bamboo Palm, Rubber Plant, and Dracaena “Janet Craig” were the top performers.

Professor Dr. Tove Fjeld has further recommended that buildings should have at least one large plant for every two employees, and Dr. B.C. Wolverton recommends keeping a plant on
every desk. Adding greenery is an important choice with any new build or remodel, and the benefits are encouraging enough to be supported by the administration.

**Satisfying Functional Space Needs**

Large open spaces such as cafeterias and ballrooms can make students feel lost, but permanent dividers or accordion walls can be costly and just create another drastically uninteresting wall. Instead, use foliage to create immediate spaces that feel cozy and not like a vast open vista that quite frankly will make even the most confident individual shy away.

Long wide hallways between classrooms can also be potential spaces to create small private meeting spots for groups to congregate before class. These spaces can be used for students to catch up on notes, to study for an exam or for private conversations between faculty members and students. Creating private areas is especially important in smaller colleges where space is limited and creating more private spaces is crucial for a satisfied student body.

It is also important to segment areas that are otherwise just large, open, outdoor spaces—especially for universities with larger student bodies. Dividing outdoor spaces can increase the likelihood of people utilizing those areas. Do you have benches that are rarely—if ever—used? They are usually in the vast open space.

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However, a grouping of trees or plants around a lonely bench can make the space more appealing and therefore make the area a sought-after spot for lunch or the perfect place for a last-minute cram-session before a midterm.

Providing Eco-Friendly Living

We love our Earth; however, it can seem daunting to think about everything we are doing that potentially harms our planet. Instead of thinking about your carbon footprint, focus on your environmental “handprint,” an idea formalized by Dr. Gregory A. Norris from Harvard. In other words, a great way to start living an eco-friendly life is by making decisions and focusing on how you can help, instead of focusing on the mess we are creating.

One way you can increase your environmental “handprint” is to use plant sippers. These plant-watering systems use capillary action to feed plants at the roots and reduce water waste. This will especially help plants in containers without drain holes. Keeping the water away from the soil and plant will prevent its demise. Adding greenery to a space at first can seem dauntingly work-intensive, due to the time that will be spent watering and maintaining plants, but with Ollie plant sippers your watering regime will be significantly reduced. Fertilizing is also easy because the fertilizer can be added directly to the container and then goes directly to the roots where it is most needed.

Greenery will also increase your handprint if it is used to transform areas such as infrequently used patios and rooftops to reduce runoff by absorbing rain, and the greenery could be used to create garden spaces.
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Adding Aesthetically Pleasing Components

The draw to your school for prospective students will be the healthy, aesthetically pleasing environment that they will experience in the cafeteria, entryways, libraries, and outside walkways as they move across the campus toward lecture halls, as well as the attachment they make with the areas. We all understand the importance of the attachment that is created between a caregiver and a child, but this attachment to a physical space can play a part in the retention of current students, staff, and faculty.

Entomologist E.O. Wilson says, “Nature holds the key to our aesthetic, intellectual cognitive and even spiritual satisfaction.” Just a few years ago, Gallup conducted a three-year survey of 26 communities with an active Knight Foundation, a non-profit foundation that empowers communities. The surveyors of the study found that the top three aspects of a community that retains its residents are the area’s physical beauty, opportunities for socializing, and the community’s openness to people.

These three aspects of a community are important for individuals to create what is called a community attachment. Your college or university is a community; for the benefit of your current students, staff, and faculty members, the aesthetics of your campus—in both external and internal spaces—can be improved with added greenery, ultimately creating spaces that are both more healthy and beautiful.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Amy Gustafson is the Marketing Manager at Pure-Modern; she can be reached at amy@puremodern.com. Please contact 1-800-563-0593 if you have any questions.
Verde is the industry’s first treadmill that is capable of harnessing human power and converting it to utility grade electricity. The sleek, non-motorized design combines supremely low friction and flat-slat belt to create an approachable unit that feels remarkably natural and comfortable. Utilizing both mechanical and electrical braking systems the Verde allows walking, jogging, running, sprinting or sied pushing features that cater to a broad spectrum of users, from deconditioned to elite athletes and is capable of capturing up to 200 Watts/hour of energy.

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