

# Have Yourself a Low Impact Holiday



- By Konrad Schlarbaum, Director of Sustainability
- On November 15, 2023
- For PASF's Sustainability in Progress and Studio 809's Peak Environment Podcast

# UCCS Overview

- 11,300+ students enrolled
- 142+ degree programs
- 1:16 faculty-to-student ratio
- 30% of undergraduate students come from low-income families
- Student borrow \$16,854, which is 1/3<sup>rd</sup> less than the national average





# UCCS Sustainability Overview

- **Academics**

- Sustainability as a General Education Requirement
- Sustainability Minor
- Bachelor's and Master's in Geographic and Environmental Studies

- **Engagement**

- Green Action Fund
- Sustainability Demonstration House (picture)
- Signature Events: Creek Week, Sustainable Solutions Challenge, and Sustainability Summit



# UCCS Sustainability Overview 2

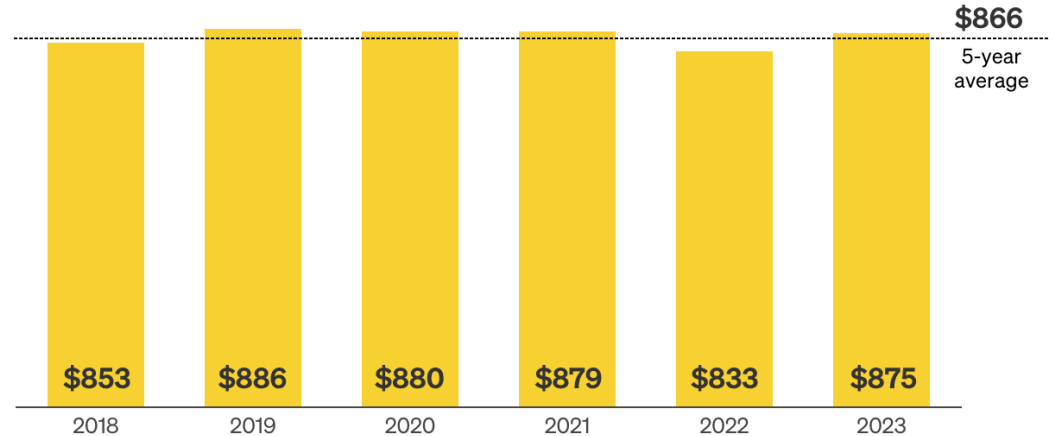
- **Operations**
  - 15 LEED Gold Buildings
  - Energy Performance Contract
  - 50% of Waste Diverted from Landfill
- **Planning and Administration**
  - Sustainability Strategic Plan 2030
  - Office of Sustainability and Sustainability Committee
  - STARS (Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System) Gold Rated



# Adopting a Sustainability Lens for Holiday Gift Giving

- **Financial**
  - Overspending
- **Social**
  - Stress of buying and receiving unwanted gifts
- **Environmental**
  - Significant increase in wastefulness

Consumer holiday spending plans



Source: NRF and Prosper Insights & Analytics October 2023 Consumer Holiday Survey

# Sustainable Gift Practices

- Before you shop
  - Organize a gift exchange
  - Set a spending limit
  - Create a budget
  - Share a wish list
  - Gather insider information
- Alternative Gifts
  - Give a special handmade gift
  - Give quality time
  - Give the gift of an experience
  - Give consumable gifts
  - Give to a charity in their name



After a camping trip, my wife, children, sister, and nephew posing for a picture on top of Wilkerson Pass.



# Sustainable Gift Practices Continued

- Buying Tips
  - Buy from local stores
  - Buy from secondhand stores
  - Buy quality and durable gifts
  - Buy recyclable and eco-friendly gifts
  - Buy fair trade and socially responsible
  - Buy products with less packaging
  - Buy gift cards from local shops
- Wrapping Gifts
  - Use gift bags or recycled or reused wrapping paper
- Unwanted Gifts
  - Regift
  - Donate
  - Return



# Adopting a Sustainability Lens for Holiday Food Eating

- **Financial**
  - Overspending
- **Social**
  - Overeating
  - Eating healthy food
- **Environmental**
  - Food miles
  - Food waste



During Thanksgiving, 200 million pounds of turkey meat goes to the landfill (National Resource Defense Council).



# Sustainable Food Practices

- Make a plan using scenarios
- Communicate food preferences
- Buy local, organic, and seasonal food
- Offer to bring a healthy dish, dessert, or beverage
- Eat regular snacks and meals throughout the day
- Sample and go back for more
  - Rank your food by deliciousness and nutrition
- Use a small plate to control portions
- Slow down
  - Savor your bites
  - Put your utensils down after each bite
  - Engage in a conversation
  - Take a deep breath
- Plan and eat leftovers
- Compost food scraps



USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

# Adopting a Sustainability Lens for Holiday Decorating

- **Financial**
  - Overspending
- **Social**
  - Getting into the holiday spirit
  - Family Traditions
- **Environmental**
  - Waste
  - High electricity Consumption



# Decorations

- Make a plan and budget
- Consider your storage space
- DIY or craft together
- Use natural materials
- Repair and restore decorations
- Swap decorations
- Less is more
- Buy used decorations
- Buy durable and repairable decorations
- Use LED holiday lights
- Turn lights off before going to bed
- 100% recycled and non-toxic PVC tree that is made in America
- Recycle fresh-cut tree
- Donate decorations
- Send digital or recyclable cards



Who Gives a Scrap (Organization's Facebook Page)



# Adopting a Sustainability Lens for Holiday Travel

- **Financial**
  - Cost
- **Social**
  - Visiting friends and family
- **Environmental**
  - Carbon emissions



Amtrak train crossing a bridge in the mountains while snow is falling.



# Transportation

- Trade-offs
  - Speed
  - Carbon
  - Duration
  - Cost
  - Flexibility
    - Cargo
    - Multiple Destinations
  - Experience



Source: Brightly Blog, [Holiday Travel Methods, Ranked from Most to Least Eco-Friendly](#), 2022

# References

- National Retail Federation. (2021). \$428 Billion in Merchandise Returned in 2020. <https://nrf.com/media-center/press-releases/428-billion-merchandise-returned-2020?ref=affiliatesection>.
- Clark, T. (2022). Average holiday spending in the U.S. is expected to jump 5 percent this year. The Current. <https://www.thecurrent.com/consumer-holiday-spending-sale-retail>.
- Brightly Blog. (2022) Holiday Travel Methods, Ranked from Most to Least Eco-Friendly. <https://brightly.eco/blog/holiday-travel-sustainability>.
- National Resource Defense Council. (2018). A Thankful Feast, Not a Wasteful One. <https://www.nrdc.org/bio/andrea-spacht-collins/thankful-feast-not-wasteful-one>.
- United States Environmental Protection Agency. (n.d.). Green Your Holiday Scene. <https://archive.epa.gov/students/web/html/holiday.html#:~:text=The%20amount%20of%20household%20garbage,to%20negatively%20impact%20our%20environment>.
- USDA. (2013). Make Small Changes for a Healthy Holiday - Makeover Your Holiday Plate with MyPlate. <https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2013/11/21/make-small-changes-healthy-holiday-makeover-your-holiday-plate-myplate>.
- Wolfson, A. (2017). Americans Spend \$16 Billion on Holiday Gifts that End Up in the Garbage. MarketWatch. <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/americans-spend-16-billion-on-holiday-gifts-that-end-up-in-the-garbage-2017-12-22>.



# Contact Information

- **Konrad Schlarbaum, Director of Sustainability**
  - Kschlarb@uccs.edu
- **Office of Sustainability**
  - <https://sustain.uccs.edu/>
  - [sustain@uccs.edu](mailto:sustain@uccs.edu)

# Questions





University of Colorado  
Colorado Springs



University of Colorado

Boulder | Colorado Springs | Denver | Anschutz Medical Campus