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FOCUS ON AU: GREEN BUILDINGS

by Chris McChesney*

Large buildings are not typically hailed as protectors of the globe and sustainable in their construction and maintenance. However, an emerging movement among architects is changing the amount of energy and resources these concrete monsters require in both their construction and use. “Green architecture” promotes energy efficiency and dramatically cuts the amount of resources needed by focusing on a building’s design, construction, and day-to-day use.¹ Currently, buildings account for a large percentage of energy consumption and waste in America, including 36 percent of total energy use and thirty percent of greenhouse gas emissions.²

The move to green buildings, the products of green architecture, can cut energy use and emissions by up to fifty percent when compared with similar, non-green buildings.³ The use of natural light and ventilation reduce the need for artificial lighting and the amount of energy required to regulate a building’s temperature.⁴ Computerized blinds can help to maximize these benefits by responding to changes in the weather. Buildings can be built with renewable power sources that supply some of the energy required and in some cases provide all the power needed during the night.⁵ Environmental impacts are further reduced by improving insulation or switching to alternative insulation materials such as recycled shredded jeans.⁶

Several U.S. organizations are dedicated to promoting green architecture, led by a coalition called the U.S. Green Building Council (“USGBC”) that consists of over four thousand members.⁷ The USGBC uses the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (“LEED”) Green Building Rating System® as a national standard to promote “high-performance, sustainable buildings.”⁸ By setting a uniform system of standards, the USGBC stimulates competition among green builders and pushes for new scientific developments in “water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection, and indoor environmental quality.”⁹ Across the

U.S., 137 buildings have been LEED certified and almost two thousand others are seeking certification. The General Service Administration, the federal agency that oversees all non-military government construction, has announced that any new governmental building or renovation of any pre-existing governmental building will meet minimum LEED standards.¹⁰

American University (“A.U.”) has been a member of USGBC since September of 2002¹¹ and is “committed to environmental responsibility.”¹² Part of the campaign *AnewAU* is the construction of a new eighty thousand square-foot building for the School of International Service (“SIS”) on the main campus.¹³ Working with the architects William McDonough and Partners, recognized for their sustainable designs,¹⁴ and architect Quinn Evans, the new SIS building will be sustainable and utilize “cradle-to-cradle” design.¹⁵ The “cradle-to-cradle” concept focuses on using recyclable materials and decreasing the amount of products that end up in garbage dumps. One of William McDonough’s philosophies is that “[p]ollution is a symbol of design failure.”¹⁶

A.U. is likely to find advantages to green building beyond good environmental stewardship. On average, green buildings use 30 percent less energy than other buildings, meaning decreased costs in running the building. Additionally, several studies have shown that green architecture makes a building’s indoor environment healthier and its people more productive.¹⁷ Several companies, including Lockheed Martin, that have green buildings report fewer sicknesses, greater job satisfaction, and an overall increase in productivity.¹⁸ Similarly, some studies show students perform up to twenty percent better in green buildings.¹⁹ Absentee rates tend to drop and students



A computer-generated image of the planned School of International Service Building at American University. See <http://american.edu/anewau/sis.cfm>.

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feel less stressed. Even legal costs can drop in a green building due to fewer lawsuits stemming from environmental working conditions, otherwise known as “sick building” lawsuits.²⁰

Constructing the SIS building will make A.U. one of the few universities nationwide to have a green building. The University of California at Davis, the University of Michigan, and the University of Vermont have also implemented green buildings on their campuses.²¹ The new SIS building will also join the ranks of green buildings around the world, such as the future Freedom Tower to be built at the site of the World Trade Center.²² With the completion of the new SIS building, which has yet to be named, A.U. hopes to provide a state of the art facility for its faculty and students in SIS, and “creat[e] a positive physical environment,” to foster “a sense of community among faculty, students, and staff.”²³



ENDNOTES:

¹ *The rise of the green building*, THE ECONOMIST, Dec. 2 2004, available at http://www.economist.com/science/tq/displaystory.cfm?story_id=3422965 (last visited Mar. 24, 2005).

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Supra* note 1.

⁶ *Supra* note 1.

⁷ About USGBC: Who We Are, United States Green Building Council website, at <http://www.usgbc.org/DisplayPage.aspx?CMSPageID=39&> (last visited Apr. 10, 2005).

⁸ LEED: Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, United States Green Building Council website, at <http://www.usgbc.org/DisplayPage.aspx?CategoryID=19> (last visited Apr. 10, 2005).

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Supra* note 1.

¹¹ About USGBC: Member List, United States Green Building Council, at <http://www.usgbc.org/AboutUs/MemberList.aspx?CMSPageID=91&CategoryID=1&> (last visited Mar. 27, 2005).

¹² Email from Daniel Yu, Office of Program Development, American University School of International Service to Chris McChesney, J.D. Candidate, American University Washington College of Law (Mar. 8, 2005, 10:30, EST) (on file with author).

¹³ AnewAU: Facilities, School of International Service, American University website, at <http://www.american.edu/campaign/sis.cfm> (last visited Mar. 27, 2005).

¹⁴ Firm Profile, William McDonough and Partners website, at <http://www.mcdonoughpartners.com/index.htm> (last visited Mar. 27, 2005).

¹⁵ Current Work, Quinn Evans Architects website, at <http://www.quinnevans.com/current.html> (last visited Mar. 27, 2005).

¹⁶ *Beyond Recycling: Manufacturers Embrace ‘C2C’ Design*, WALL STREET JOURNAL, Mar. 3, 2005, available at <http://webreprints.djreprints.com/1186091444562.html> (last visited Mar. 24, 2005).

¹⁷ *Supra* note 1.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Supra* note 12.

²² *Supra* note 1.

²³ *Supra* note 1.