Announcer: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: October is Campus Sustainability Month, a celebration that engages and inspires students and other campus stakeholders to become sustainability change agents. I'm Emily Yeap.

Doug Neidigh, Missouri State University sustainability coordinator, joins me today to discuss the importance of creating a sustainable campus, as well as highlight the university's sustainability efforts.

Doug Neidigh: Universities obviously are large institutions well ingrained within the communities that they're in. Being such a large institution, they're kind of like a little city to a degree. So when you think about environmental and sustainability impacts within the institution itself, there's a lot of opportunities to conserve energy, reduce waste from an environmental side, but then also things on the social side as well.

Because they are so ingrained within the local communities, it's also a great opportunity for them to participate in the communities and provide students to work on projects in the local communities to help with sustainable development community projects. It's a great opportunity to really challenge students who are interested in sustainability, give them opportunities to pursue their interests and essentially try to develop the next future leaders in sustainability.

Emily Yeap: One way Missouri State shows its commitment to advance sustainability on campus is by participating in the STARS program. STARS stands for Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System. The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, AASHE, created STARS to measure the sustainability performance of colleges and universities.

Doug Neidigh: Every three years we reapply for a certification level. And the university since starting several years ago, has continually improved its score over the years and is now at a silver rating. So we continually strive to improve that every time. With that, there's also so many programs that the university has put in place over the years. Everything from energy reduction on campus to waste reduction and recycling that obviously all of our students, faculty, staff get to participate in and help us minimize our waste on campus.

Emily Yeap: The university offers students opportunities to learn about sustainability and put it into practice.

Doug Neidigh: There's a sustainability minor that was developed not too many years ago to give students more opportunities. Our academics program has done a great job integrating a lot of different sustainability-related and focused coursework, as well as research that students can participate in either on campus, in the communities and sometimes international opportunities.

There's also the Student Sustainability Fund that the students contribute to. It's matched by the university as well. Which I think is an excellent opportunity for students to identify a project for the university that would have a sustainability impact. And that fund has driven a lot of different sustainability projects over the years.

Emily Yeap: Looking ahead, Missouri State aims to achieve a platinum rating, the highest level in STARS.

Doug Neidigh: We actually work on a lot of different projects every single year. It's a matter of maintaining the programs that you currently have, but always looking to continually improve. And within AASHE, we have different categories. It's kind of broken down into academics, engagement, operations and planning and administration.

And here at MSU, we have subcommittees for each of those made up of faculty, staff and students. Each of those four subcommittees continually work all year long to identify more innovative opportunities or more ongoing improvement opportunities that they can pursue.

So we have strategic goals that are established for each of those committees to work on projects. Biggest focus we're really trying to go after this year is engaging the students. So our engagement committee and our academics are working to develop surveys that will not only measure what students are learning about sustainability here at MSU, but what's the culture and how can they become more engaged.

One big tool that we're looking to use in that is actually the United Nations Sustainable Development goals that MSU had signed onto just last spring.

Emily Yeap: Another area of focus is increasing community partnerships.

Doug Neidigh: We've actually started developing some partnerships in regards to community projects that are sustainability related. Recently, we've partnered with Community Partnership of the Ozarks and identified several projects that students can work on. And one student is currently working with the Transportation Collaborative to look at how can we market alternative transportation opportunities to college students

Emily Yeap: To celebrate Campus Sustainability Month, students can sign up for Project Green Challenge. Each day in October they will receive an email to complete a specific green challenge. There will also be activities to support World Food Day on October 16th.

To discover more about sustainability at MSU, visit missouristate.edu/sustainability.

I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at (417) 836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.