INSIDER’S GUIDE TO GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP
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Contents

Getting In Gear  1
Attitude  2
No Impact Man’s Top Ten
    Eco-Lifestyle Changes  2
The Big Question: Can Students Really
    Make a Difference?  4
Easy Ways for Students to Make an Impact  4
Inspire Others to Live the Eco Way  7
Tips for Commuters  7
Food for Thought  8
Get Involved on Campus  9
Insider Tactics || How Top Students
    Help Save the Planet  9
Bibliography  11
Research Sources  12
First things first: Why should you bother to live your life in service of your community instead of simply living for yourself? Good question, but think of it in a different way: Don’t you want to feel as happy and fulfilled as possible? Studies have shown that our baseline happiness is tied to the community we live in. In other words, it’s hard to experience total joy if everyone around you doesn’t second that emotion. Right now, an estimated 26 percent of Americans are depressed or suffering from anxiety disorders, so obviously something in our “all about me” culture isn’t working.

Given the current environmental and economic crises, things look iffy out there. Some researchers think that global warming may cause sea levels to rise three feet over the next century, drowning major cities like London, New Orleans, and Miami. “Living just for yourself is like fighting for deck chairs on the Titanic,” says Colin Beavan, author of No Impact Man. “We really just need to figure out how to keep the Titanic afloat.” For that to work, everyone on the planet needs to grab a bucket and start bailing. Here are a few easy ways to do your part—and enhance your life in the process.

Getting In Gear

The first thing to remember: Living responsibly—as boring as that sounds—is actually a thrilling prospect, because you’re coming of age at a time when the old stereotypes are falling away. “It used to be that you were a monk or a merchant,” Beavan says. “You either renounced materialism and helped people, or you were a consumer—with nothing in between. If you weren’t poor, people wouldn’t believe that you were serious about helping others. If you were a successful businessperson, it meant you weren’t really interested in making the world a better place. But who gets to decide for us that we can’t be both?”

Living in a conscious way is really about becoming yourself—who you want to be, what you care about, and how you can use your talents to help the world. And a lot is at stake.
Attitude

Why bother? We know: Not everyone can be like *No Impact Man*. To minimize their dependence on fossil fuels, Colin Beavan and his family famously gave up many modern amenities, from electricity to toilet paper, for a full year. The important thing is the direction you’re pointing toward.

To psych yourself up, think of what you’ll gain by living in an environmentally conscious way. The problems we now face—locally, regionally, and globally—are complex and diverse. That means there’s plenty of opportunity to follow your passion and make a difference. It might mean volunteering, finding a career in sustainable energy sources, teaching, or simply living with more eco-awareness.

Take Beavan, for example. “I was really worried about the state of the world when I came up with the idea for *No Impact Man,*” he says. “There was a real question of whether or not I could survive [financially]. But it was what I cared about so I just pushed forward and, slowly but surely, things started to happen: The press became interested, and speaking engagements and a documentary followed. What you do in your career isn’t just about earning a living—it’s about creating the life that you want.”

No Impact Man’s Top Ten Eco-Lifestyle Changes

1. **Stop eating beef.** Worldwide, beef production contributes more substantially to climate change than the entire transportation sector.

2. **Give up bottled water.** The production of plastic water bottles together with the privatization of our drinking water is an environmental and social catastrophe.

3. **Observe an eco-sabbath.** For one day or afternoon or even hour a week, don’t buy anything, don’t use any machines, don’t switch on anything electric, don’t cook, don’t answer your phone, and in general, don’t use any resources. In other words, for this regular period, give yourself and the planet a break. Keep your regular eco-sabbath for a month. You’ll find that the enforced downtime can make a marked improvement to your life.

4. **Tithe a fixed percentage of your income.** Currently, many of our health and welfare services at home and abroad are
tied to consumer spending, which, in turn, depends upon planetary resources. But the idea of tithing (giving up one-tenth of your income) or buying stuff to help people isn’t crazy, especially when you consider that our consumption is harming the habitat that we depend on for our health, happiness, and security. If you want to help, don’t go shopping. Just help. Commit to tithing part of your income to the nonprofit(s) of your choice.

5. **Get there under your own steam.** Commit to getting around by bike or by foot a certain number of days a month. Not only does this mean using fewer fossil fuels and creating less greenhouse gases, it means you’ll get good, healthy exercise and we’ll all breathe fewer fumes. A city with a pedestrian bike path is a lot more pleasant to live in than a city filled with vehicles.

6. **Commit to not wasting.** Wasting resources costs the planet and your wallet. Don’t overheat or overcool your home—a few degrees make a huge difference. Let your clothes hang dry instead of using the dryer. Take half the trips but stay twice as long. If your old cell phone works, consider not getting another. Repair instead of replace.

7. **Build a community.** Play charades. Have dinner with friends. Sing together. Enjoying each other’s company costs the planet much less than enjoying its resources. Let’s relearn to joke around and play in ways that cost nothing to our pocketbooks or our planet.

8. **Take your principles to work.** The old adage about “the cost of doing business” can no longer hold true. We must act as though we care about the world at work as much as we do at home. A company CEO or a product designer has the power to make a gigantic difference through their business, and so do the rest of us.

9. **Dedicate a day’s worth of TV viewing to eco-service each week.** The average American watches four and a half hours of TV a day. Take one day off from the tube each week and join with others to improve our planet. Voluntary eco-service is a great way to find a community of people who support your values and also a great way to learn about environmental issues and the quality of life issues that go along with them.
Believe with all your heart that how you live your life makes a difference to all of us. We are all interconnected. We make a difference to each other on so many levels. Every step toward living a conscious life where we consider the consequences of our actions provides support to everyone else—whether you know it or not—who is trying to do the same thing.

For more ideas and ways to join a community of people who are searching for happier, more eco-friendly lives, go to NoImpactProject.com.

The Big Question: Can Students Really Make a Difference?

Absolutely. Think about it: Who better to lead the ecological charge than the very people who are training to be tomorrow’s leaders? After all, it’s your future we’re talking about. The good news is that while protecting the planet is an obligation, it needn’t seem like a chore.

Start with a few small changes. Or dedicate your life to the cause. Either way, you’ll be gratified to know that minimizing your ecological footprint in college won’t simply help save endangered species and end climate change, but will also save you a significant amount of money. Plus, it sets up good habits, putting you on your way to a richer, healthier, and more guilt-free life.

Easy Ways for Students to Make an Impact

Becoming an eco-friendly scholar takes a little strategy and planning. Here’s how to make it a pleasure:

At school:

• **Study in the library**, where the lights and computers are already turned on. Special bonus: Quiet is guaranteed.

• **Go paperless** (or as close to it as you can get). Take notes on your laptop. Seek out free scrap paper—lots of businesses trash paper that’s been used only on one side. If you can’t go paperless, use refillable binders instead of notebooks.

• **We repeat: Don’t rely on bottled water.** Carry your own reusable bottle and refill it throughout the day.

• **Brush up on the latest news in the green movement.** Take a class in environmental studies or sustainable living.
Easy Ways for Students to Make an Impact

Go on an eco field trip. When you can’t see the evidence, it’s easy to feel apathetic about the risks of overpopulation and the fact that we’re using up resources at an extremely fast rate. To bring it all home, pay a visit to your local landfill. It’s a stark reminder that when you throw something out, it doesn’t actually disappear. Trust us: Just seeing how much trash is out there—and considering its real-world consequences—will be a life-changing experience.

or check out an eco-friendly campus club. Learn the basics of fair trade and an environmentally friendly lifestyle. You’ll be all the richer for it.

At home:
Whether you live in a dorm, off-campus apartment, or commute from home, consider a few tweaks to your routine. It all adds up.

• **Start with the basics.** Swap out regular, energy-gobbling light bulbs for compact fluorescents, and investigate the recycling options in your building or community. You can tell if a bottle or carton is recyclable simply by looking at the bottom of it: If you spot the triangular recycling symbol, you’ll know that package is a resource worth preserving.

• **Set your printer** on fast draft to save ink. Print on both sides of the page whenever possible.

• **Avoid phantom drain.** Make sure to turn off the lights and unplug electronics (i.e., your phone charger, TV, or stereo) when they’re not in use.

Recycling is an art. If any trash ends up in your recycling bin, the person collecting it might consider the whole bin contaminated. So don’t toss in anything perishable. No half-full cans of soda, no cheese-encrusted pizza boxes, no egg cartons with the eggs still inside.

Batteries, ink cartridges, and old cell phones must be recycled separately, so ask at your local electronics store or campus community center: There may be a drop-off spot or a service that picks them up.
• **Wait until you have a full load of laundry before you do your wash.** Wash your clothes on the cold cycle and ideally, dry them on a drying rack. (This goes for dishes as well.)

• **Stock up on one set of dishes, cups, and utensils.** It’s nicer than relying on Styrofoam or plastic, and it’s better for the planet, too.

• **Watch the thermostat.** Instead of cranking up the heat this winter, invest in an extra blanket or two. Conversely, when it’s hot out, resist the urge to blast the air conditioner and use a fan instead.

• **Take showers, not baths.** You’ll use far less water that way. (Ladies, please turn off the tap while you’re shaving your legs. Gentlemen, please turn off the tap while you’re shaving as well.)

• **Coordinate what you buy with your roommates.** It’s worth spending 30 seconds making a plan regarding household essentials. Otherwise, you could end up with four loaves of bread and no soap.

• **Stop smoking.** If you don’t want to give up cigarettes for the sake of your own health, do it for people you care about most. A recent study shows that secondhand smoke is a global killer, causing more than 600,000 deaths worldwide each year.

• **Institute a TV night so you can watch your favorite shows with friends on a single screen.** Bonus: If everyone in your dorm suite is bonding over *Mad Men* or *Glee*, it will probably be easier to keep the peace.

**At the store:**

• **Buy in bulk.** If you have the storage space, it’s a great way to feel virtuous. You’ll get more for your money and there’s less packaging involved.

• **Embrace vintage clothes.** It’s fun to hunt for cool, one-of-a-kind pieces. It’s also a great way to recycle and save money.

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**TIP** Buy liquid laundry detergent—not powder. Powder detergents don’t dissolve well in cold water, but liquid detergents are formulated to clean beautifully in all water temperatures, cold included.
Tips for Commuters

**TIP** Remember this fact. Should you ever feel tempted to use a plastic shopping bag or water bottle, remember this disgusting fact: There’s currently an expanse of plastic garbage floating in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, and scientists estimate that it’s almost twice the size of the continental United States. Enough said.

- **Buy recycled everything from toilet tissue to printer paper to T-shirts.** Reusing and recycling goes a long way toward conserving our resources.
- **Carry a reusable shopping bag in your backpack.** While you’re at it, just say no to plastic bags altogether.

**Inspire Others To Live The Eco Way**

If you want to be the kind of eco-warrior who inspires followers, the trick is to not come across as a moralizing goody-goody. Acting superior sets you up for failure because it’s a turn off. Take the Tom Sawyer approach instead: Make living green look so fun and rewarding that people will want to join you. Organize a group bike ride. Throw a dinner party and serve some delicious food from the local farmer’s market. Above all, don’t appeal to your own concerns. Instead, figure out what the unsuspecting friends you want to convert are worried about. Do they want to save money? Casually point out that bottled water is 1,000 times more expensive than tap water. Do they want to get in better shape? Go ahead and bring the health benefits of walking and skateboarding to their attention. In short, be a good listener and find something that resonates.

**Tips For Commuters**

Walk, bike, carpool, or use public transportation whenever possible. You can save tons of money by not using a car—and far more if you decide not to own one. Our nation is suffering from an over-dependence on fossil fuels AND an obesity epidemic. Getting out of the car and lacing up your walking shoes makes sense on both counts. And there are other benefits, too: You can discover nature! No more worrying about getting speeding tickets or having to hunt for a parking space!
Food For Thought

The way we eat has a much bigger impact on the environment than you’d imagine. Back in the old days, people ate fresh, locally grown food in season. Today, food has become a global commodity and we expect to be able to eat fresh raspberries in January. It sounds like progress, but as with many modern conveniences, there’s a hidden price to be paid. Being conscious about your food choices is a key part of living the eco-friendly way.

Start cooking. It’s hard to find time to prepare your own food as a college student, but it can be a nice way to eat healthier and to escape the Freshman 15 at the same time.

- Try to avoid processed foods. Support local farmers instead and do most of your shopping in the produce department.
- Say goodbye to Ramen noodles, canned soup, and frozen dinners. Say hello to fresh fruit smoothies and vegetarian lasagna.
- Cook dinner with friends and use cloth napkins.
- When at the grocery store, look for products with minimal or recyclable packaging.
- Don’t forget to bring your own reusable shopping bags. Mother Nature will thank you.

TIP Even if you have a long commute, try to limit your driving once you’re back home. Fact: 40 percent of car trips in the US are less than two miles long. If bike paths and walking trails aren’t available in your area, become civically involved and push for them. Some colleges even offer car-sharing programs, and virtually every campus is dotted with bike racks.

TIP Want To Do More? If you’re passionate about the climate and want to be a leader, there are countless ways to branch out in the green movement. Carve out your niche. Get involved in environmental issues, plant a tree, or lobby for sustainable architecture on campus. Join the Nature Conservancy. Start a club. Give everyone in your family an aluminum water bottle for the holidays. Revel in the sense that you’re doing something.
Insider Tactics || How Top Students Help Save the Planet

TIP Find out about recycling efforts in the dining hall and lobby to improve them. Some college cafeterias even have their own compost bins these days and it’s a major win-win: Since the gardening staff puts the compost to use as fertilizer, those campuses look prettier, too.

If you eat in the cafeteria, you can still help. First, don’t use a tray unless you absolutely need one: Washing them uses energy. Second, don’t put more on your plate than you actually will eat. Third, take one paper napkin instead of a whole stack.

Get Involved On Campus

Let’s face it: It’s hard to be eco-friendly if you don’t have a community that supports your values. So find one or create your own.

• Most campuses have environmentally conscious clubs; an increasing number also offer dorms and eco-housing specifically dedicated to sustainable living.
• A few colleges, like Furman University, even have their own farms and encourage volunteers to pitch in.
• Think about participating in student government to promote ways to live green.
• Encourage whatever groups you’re already involved in on campus—Greek societies, sports teams, or clubs—to go green and show them the way!

Insider Tactics || How Top Students Help Save the Planet

The Activist  Michelle Camp

Environmental science major at the University of Texas, Austin

“I’m the assistant director of recycling at the university’s environmental center. A big problem on campus is students either don’t recycle or don’t know how to recycle the right way. We hold events to enlighten people: If you mix trash in the bins or put things in the wrong bin, it contaminates what’s in there, so we can’t recycle any of it.”

Key tips:

• Establish environmental house rules sooner rather than later. “We manage the thermostat and make sure it’s not on
full blast. That doesn’t work if you have only one environmentally aware roommate—everyone has to be on board.”

- **Lead by example.** “It’s cool to see how my roommates went from not knowing a lot about environmental issues to knowing a lot. They didn’t know to look for the recycling symbol on the bottom of a carton until I showed them, for instance. Now we even compost in our apartment.”

- **Go two-wheeling.** “I usually ride my bike to campus. It’s kind of a hassle when it’s cold outside, but I don’t have to find parking, so it’s actually really convenient. My friends and I walk to campus a lot, too.”

**The Baby-Stepper Ana Curta**  
Neurology major at the University of Florida

“I’m addicted to my metal water bottle—I carry it everywhere. I know it’s not sanitary to reuse plastic water bottles. Plus, the metal keeps my water nice and cold.”

**Key tips:**

- **If it’s an option, try to live close to campus.** “I live at home and can walk to school—it’s a great perk.”

- **Even if they don’t offer recycling in your building, find a way.** “There are tons of receptacles on campus. I recycle everything from Arizona Tea bottles to old chemistry exams.”

- **Shop smarter.** “At the grocery store, I always look for organic food that’s grown locally. I cook my own food, too. It tastes better and I know it’s healthier because I know what’s in it!”

**The Nature Lover Reece Lyerly**  
Environmental science major at Furman University

“I took a class in environmental studies my first semester of freshman year, just because I found out that it involved camping trips. Yet the subject really captured my attention. I’ve been hiking and camping for years, and it made sense to take care of something that matters to me. It was captivating to learn about how we interact with our environment as a society—it really reframed my role as a student and as a citizen. Now I plan to work in public health.”
Key tips:

- **Become a vegetarian.** “I took a class on sustainable food practices and the professor had us write out our values regarding food. I decided that I couldn’t, in good conscience, continue eating meat with the industrial system that we have. It was a big sacrifice—my family freaked out—but I’ve learned that individual decisions count on a larger scale. Now, I don’t even miss eating meat. I actually feel healthier having less fat in my diet. It wasn’t nearly as hard as I thought.”

- **Head outdoors.** The biggest way I’m involved on campus is with our outdoor club—the club that organizes hiking, camping, and white-water rafting trips. I’ve tried to refocus it a bit to appeal to people like me—students who enjoy outdoor activities but aren’t part of more traditional environmental-action clubs. We build a little sustainability education into our trips and it’s been well received so far. We even do trail cleanups along the way.”

- **Nudge, don’t nag.** “We’re lucky to have recycling in our apartment building. When I notice something in the garbage can that should have been recycled, I’ll usually say something. My roommates will roll their eyes and laugh, and I’ll laugh back, but the next time, they’ll put the paper in the recycling bin. They might not recycle for their own sake, but they’ll do it because it matters to me and that’s a good start.”

Bibliography


Research Sources


