

ASU leads the US for impact with UN Sustainable Development Goals

At No. 6, ASU is the only American institution to make global top 50 in latest Times Higher Education ranking

By Marshall Terrill , ASU News
June 17, 2025

For the sixth year in a row — and bucking a downward trend among American universities — Arizona State University is the No. 1 institution in the U.S. and in the top 10 globally for work toward the United Nations' [Sustainable Development Goals](#), Times Higher Education announced today in its [2025 University Impact Ranking](#).

According to the official release, universities in the United States are “waning” and lagging behind their foreign counterparts — except for ASU.

ASU “is the only institute in the nation to feature in the global top 50 or to top an individual SDG ranking,” the release said.

The yearly release of university rankings examines the contributions made toward fulfilling 17 specific objectives designed to create a better world by 2030 — goals that serve as a collective framework for promoting peace and prosperity for individuals and the planet.

“By design, ASU is made to tackle complex challenges, and our consecutive selection as a leader in advancing the SDGs reflects our all-in approach to creating positive outcomes for all,” said ASU President Michael M. Crow, who was named in October to the 2024 [TIME100 Climate list](#) of leaders and innovators driving real climate action.

“Now more than ever, the world needs faster, effective and efficient answers to a growing spectrum of issues, and our university of action is here to serve.”

In the latest ranking, ASU's score of 97.1 out of 100 points put it at No. 1 in the U.S., ahead of Michigan State University, Penn State and MIT. ASU also placed No. 6 in the world out of approximately 2,500 institutions, ahead of the University of Manchester in England, the University

of New South Wales Sydney in Australia and McMaster University in Canada.

ASU also made big strides on water issues, ranging from water security to marine biodiversity. The university's highest scores are: [Life Below Water](#) (No. 1 in the U.S. and globally); [Sustainable Cities and Communities](#) (No. 1 in the U.S., No. 5 globally) and [Life on Land](#) (No. 1 in the U.S., No. 19 globally).

"Higher education institutions have a significant role in defining pathways towards reaching the 17 SDGs," said [Peter Schlosser](#), vice president and vice provost of global futures at ASU and director of the [Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory](#). "The Global Futures Laboratory at ASU is a central entity dedicated to understanding the world we live in, imagining futures that allow all life to thrive on a healthy planet, and developing options for real-world sustainability challenges."

Some might be surprised a desert university leads the world in the **Life Below Water** category. In recent years, ASU has made major strides in water work, from efforts to [restore coral reefs in Hawai'i](#) to a project aimed at improving [a local river preserve's health](#) to expanded research and learning opportunities through the [ASU Bermuda Institute of Ocean Sciences](#) and the [School of Ocean Futures](#).

The **Sustainable Cities and Communities** category pertains to how a university helps stimulate the economy, environment and social aspects of society. ASU hosted the inaugural [NSF Futures Engine in the Southwest](#) unity event in October. The multi-institutional effort, [led by ASU](#), is tasked with addressing, through economic development, the sustainability issues facing the Southwest — driving innovation and workforce development in clean energy, water security and carbon capture.

This April, ASU also welcomed experts and journalists who focus on environmental and climate issues for the Society of Environmental Journalists' 34th [annual conference](#). More than 870 attendees gathered to discuss Arizona challenges — from water scarcity to wildfire management — that also have implications across the nation and globe.

The **Life on Land** category covers a wide spectrum of environmental issues, including combating biodiversity loss and restoring degraded lands. ASU is collaborating on a new algae system that's [helping Arizona farmers grow better crops with less water](#), sounding the alarm on [the urgency of biodiversity loss in an increasingly thawing Arctic](#), making summers more livable in Arizona through research ranging from [road coatings to a sweating manikin](#), and jump-starting decarbonization projects [to reduce manufacturing CO2 emissions](#).

Alongside these successes, ASU is No. 1 in the U.S. for 11 of the 17 SDGs:

SDG 1: No Poverty

SDG 4: Quality Education

SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

SDG 13: Climate Action

SDG 14: Life Below Water

SDG 15: Life on Land

SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

“ASU’s top placement in these global rankings highlights the university’s ability to turn knowledge into action at scale,” said [Nancy Gonzales](#), executive vice president and university provost. “From pioneering research in climate adaptation and water conservation to advancing sustainable urban development and clean energy solutions, our faculty and students are actively shaping solutions to the world’s most pressing challenges.”

The university’s ranking underscores the importance of partnerships within ASU and beyond.

[Project Cities](#) is a prime example of ASU’s collaborative spirit. This initiative connects ASU students and faculty with sustainability needs faced by local communities while providing students opportunities to gain real-world experience and develop potential career pathways. Projects include collaborating with the [city of Tempe on water treatment](#) and sustainable landscape management across the [city of Chandler parks system](#).

[Amanda Ellis](#), co-chair of the SDGs task force at ASU and a former U.N. ambassador who helped negotiate the SDGs, said she’s inspired by the transdisciplinary collaboration across the university and the community partnerships that help address the complex challenges our planet is increasingly facing.

“While there is still much to achieve, collectively, we are making an incredibly valuable impact and we are focused on moving forward,” she said.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



ASU researchers Leo Blanco-Bercial and Amy Maas work aboard the RV Atlantic Explorer at the Bermuda Institute of Ocean Sciences. The university was ranked No. 1 in the world for the U.N.'s "Life Below Water" Sustainable Development Goal in this year's Times Higher Education list.
Photo by ASU