

Solar Project at Mercer County Community College Will Offer Educational Benefits

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WEST WINDSOR, N.J. – An innovative solar project of the Mercer County Improvement Authority (MCIA) to be installed on the West Windsor, N.J., campus of Mercer County Community College (MCCC) will foster academic opportunities for students interested in pursuing careers in solar/energy technology, engineering, sustainability, and other programs.

The energy output of the 8-megawatt solar project will provide real-time data that will enable students to conduct cross-disciplinary studies of the benefits of alternative energy and sustainability.

“We are excited about the multiple ways in which this solar project will foster academic opportunities for MCCC students,” said Dr. Guy Generals, vice president for academic affairs. “Such learning opportunities will break new ground in community college education, preparing students for a world that is moving further away from expensive, dirty fossil fuels and closer to clean, renewable sources of energy.”

In addition, the system will benefit students by allowing the college to rechannel savings on energy costs, among the college’s highest operating expenses, back into college programs and services that were cut because of budget constraints.

The ground-mounted solar array will offset approximately 70 percent of the college’s West Windsor Campus annual electricity usage, saving about \$750,000 annually on electricity costs. The project will be built on 45 acres within a 67-acre parcel of currently undeveloped land owned by the college on the east side of the campus.

The ownership of the project has been structured as a lease-purchase agreement. The title owner is the MCIA; the MCIA and MCCC have entered into a 15-year lease with SunLight General Mercer Solar, which will offer energy from the project to MCCC at a discounted rate of 3 cents per kilowatt-hour, compared to the 14 cents per kilowatt-hour the college currently pays to its local utility. The lease transfers all burdens and benefits of ownership to SunLight General Mercer Solar, including the right to sell energy to the College.

The educational benefits offered by the project are especially important in New Jersey, which is the second largest solar market in the nation after California and one of the 10 largest in the world, according to the N.J. Board of Public Utilities. New Jersey’s thriving solar industry is one of the brightest sectors in the New Jersey economy, having created more than 3,500 new “green collar” jobs. (N.J. Board of Public Utilities)

“Part of our mission is to meet the needs of business and industry by training our students for careers that are in demand,” said Dr. Generals. “The solar industry is creating jobs for engineers, electricians, installers, computer scientists and landscape designers. The MCCC solar project will help meet this demand by providing hands-on training for students enrolled in our sustainability-related degree programs.”

The project, which has been carefully planned for more than a year, also brings significant environmental benefits. Each year, the project will offset the emission of 7,500 tons of carbon dioxide, a major source of greenhouse gas. In addition, it will offset the emission of 20 tons of sulfur dioxide and 8.5 tons of nitrogen oxides, which cause smog and acid rain and trigger asthma and other respiratory ailments.

Detailed information on the MCIA/MCCC solar project, including a fact sheet, is available at www.mcianj.org.