

ABSTRACT

In helping students form a sense of place, a connection with the community and environment where they live, colleges can help encourage a sense of stewardship. This sense of responsibility can lead to a reduction in the ecological footprint of a college both through student resource use and through increased efforts by students to make the college a more sustainable institution. I attempted to add to and rework programs on the Smith campus to help foster a sense of place in the first year class. By meeting with faculty and staff who organize the programs, I assessed the programs Smith has in place and offered recommendations for the future. I suggested additions to the pre-orientation and orientation programs for incoming students, suggested a book for the incoming students to read that has a local environmental theme, and designed a first year seminar that investigates the reciprocal relationship between Smith and its surrounding environment. I hope that these programs will help Smith students become more aware of their social and ecological impacts on the surrounding areas, and subsequently act to reduce their resource use and become positive members of the Northampton community. In addition, I hope this sense of place will provide the impetus for students to become involved with environmental movements on campus and beyond.

INTRODUCTION

In a country where there appears to be an increasing emphasis placed on the importance of economic growth at the expense of all else, environmental sustainability is often seen as an unrealistic or undesirable goal. For economic growth to continue in the long run, however, limited resources must be used in a sustainable manner. With lives that are increasingly mobile, (the average American moves 10 times in their lifetime), and indoors, individuals often lose sight of the importance of the environment and their impacts thereon (Orr 1992).

A sense of place includes ties to both the environment and the community of an area. This sense of rootedness may lead to a sense of responsibility and a desire to limit one's negative impact on this place (Orr 2002). Meyrowitz (1985) suggests that there has been a radical change in the sense of place of Americans within the last several decades

and this has led to a number of social changes. He argues that this transformation in sense of place has been orchestrated by electronic media, especially television, which has fragmented the idea of place and changed our perception of physical isolation. Thus, American's sense of place is no longer rooted strongly in an area where they live.

In a time when a strong sense of place is hard to develop, college is an especially difficult place in which to cultivate these sentiments. Students often see themselves as residents of the areas from which they came and usually only remain in the area where they attend school for parts of four years before moving. However, by fostering a sense of place in its students, colleges can help reduce their ecological footprint by reducing direct student resource use and by interesting students in making the campus more ecologically sustainable.

A successful movement towards sustainability on the Smith campus will require a strong commitment on the parts of the administration, faculty, physical plant, and the students. A culture of stewardship can be an important component in the institution and support of green policies (Creighton 1998). To create such a culture, students must feel invested in reducing their ecological impact in this place, in addition to in the world as a whole. If students feel more connected to the area they will have a stronger motivation to reduce their resource use. Smith College is located in an area ideal for establishing a sense of place. Housed within an active community and surrounded by an area of natural beauty, there are many ways in which students can form attachments to the area. While Smith College has some programs that help to instill a sense of place in its students, I believe that there is ample room for additional programs that will enrich the college, the community, and the students.

Objectives:

The goal of my project is to institute and revise programs that help to foster a sense of place in the first year class. In focusing on the first year class I hope help students form a connection with the local community and with the environment of the area that will make them more conscientious citizens during their subsequent four years at Smith. I aimed to accomplish this goal by making additions to pre-orientation and orientation programming, including providing activities and information that help students understand their impact on and their potential roles in the community in the area. In addition, I hoped to be able to locate and propose a book for the first year class to read that had a local, environmental focus. Finally, I attempted to create a first year seminar that focused on the interrelationship between Smith College and its environment.

METHODOLOGY

For each program, I researched how decisions were made about the program content. I then met with those who make decisions about the program and offered my oral and written suggestions for additions to the programs.

Pre-Orientation and Orientation:

I met with Rae-Anne Butera, the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs. She is responsible to creating and organizing all pre-orientation and orientation programming. She gave me information about existing programs that are aimed at tying students to the community or natural area around Smith. In turn, I talked about the overall goal of my project and what specific changes I would like to see occur. I gave her a written copy of all my ideas (Appendix 1). In addition, I talked to a number of students about what programs they had taken during pre-orientation and orientation that related to sense of

place and what programs they would like to see added. These ideas were incorporated into the suggestions I gave Rae-Anne Butera.

Required Reading for Incoming Students:

I met with Tom Riddell, Dean of the First Year class and head of the committee which selects the book the incoming students read. He provided me information about how the selection process works and the criteria by which book is chosen, in addition to the history of consideration of books regarding the environment. I then researched books about local environmental or social issues and recommended two books to him.

Creation of a First Year Seminar:

I met with professors from several departments in an effort to gather ideas for a course, assess interest in such a course being taught, and attempt to locate someone interested in teaching such a course. I met with Ann Leone from the Landscape Studies Department, C. John Burk from the Biological Sciences Department, and Michael Marcotrigiano, Director of the Botanic Gardens. I was in contact with Helen Horowitz from the American Studies Department and Nina James, a Mellon Fellow and lecturer in the Landscape Studies Department. After meeting with the professors I researched books relating to a topic and compiled all the ideas into a potential course syllabus (Appendix 2). I then sent a copy of the syllabus to all the professors I was in contact with.

RESULTS

Pre-Orientation and Orientation:

The purpose of Smith's orientation programs is to acclimate students to the college and, as importantly, to acclimate students to the area where they live. From its

beginning Smith College attempted to integrate its students into the community; Smith housing is strategically designed to promote students living in houses within the community and at its beginning Smith College had no chapel or library in an effort to encourage students to use those resources within Northampton (Butera, personal communication).

Currently, participation in pre-orientation events is optional. There are weeklong Outdoor Adventure trips and part of the goal of these trips is to introduce students to the Western Massachusetts area. In addition, there is a leadership pre-orientation program that includes one event in the community. Plans are underway to drastically rework Smith pre-orientation. Under the new system, pre-orientation would be a required program. Students would arrive on campus and then choose their own path out of a set of prearranged paths for the first 2-3 days.

Prior to meeting with Rae-Anne Butera, I had developed a plan for a weeklong pre-orientation program based on conversations with fellow students regarding their pre-orientation experiences and on a desire to have a program that would help to instill a sense of place in incoming students (Appendix 1). The trip, which would mirror the Outdoor Adventure trips already in place, would explore both the ecology and the community of the area. Such a program would help students form a sense of place in the area where they live and hopefully feel a greater ease with participating in the local community. This trip would include an emphasis on exploring natural areas, trips to community attractions, and a focus on establishing a sense of community and environmental responsibility. Students could also meet officials from the Northampton community, such as the mayor, and meet staff that works on the campus such as the

gardeners or Bob Pattee. By familiarizing a few students with and inspiring them about the local area, hopefully these students will serve as leaders among their friends for initiating the first year class into the Pioneer Valley.

There are several orientation programs in place that attempt to acclimate first year students to the Pioneer Valley. For the last two years there have been orientation groups, that are not house-based, which invite the group to different activities often occur in town. In addition, this year there are going to be community service opportunities directed towards first years. Finally, the Smith Life and Learning series helps to continue the orientation process throughout the year, including events such as trips to museums, and to the Fine Arts center at UMASS.

I suggested four additions to the current orientation program including the distribution of information about Smith campus ecology and resource use at Central Check-In, an optional campus ecology tour during orientation, a presentation during orientation by Bob Pattee, Director of Physical Plant, and Angie Fowler, Head of Recycling, and a “Living Lecture Series” as an ongoing part of the Smith Life and Learning series (Appendix 1). Information regarding Smith resource use and interesting aspects of campus ecology could help students see themselves from the beginning as citizens of a special place, in which they have a direct impact. A campus ecology tour might highlight the unique flora and fauna of the campus and surrounding area, take the students by the Mill River, discuss Smith’s environmental impact, and give a brief history of the area. Such a tour would be a good way to encourage students to appreciate and interact with their surrounding environment, and subsequently think about their impact on it. A presentation by Bob Pattee and Angie Fowler would educate students on their

recycling options, on ways to minimize their resource use, and familiarize them with two important people on the Smith campus that can serve as resources and sources of information. A “Living Lecture Series” would consist of a faculty, staff, or community member leading an outdoor lecture/walk/activity regarding the ecology of the surrounding area, or their work or research on the Smith grounds or local environment. These lectures would also provide a chance for students to engage in an interactive setting with both members of the faculty and with the environment.

Discussion with Rae-Anne Butera, revealed that in light of the new pre-orientation structure, many of my ideas could be initiated, but not in the form of a weeklong trip. Ms. Butera seemed to be enthusiastic about my suggestions and seemed open to implementing them. She also was enthusiastic about the proposed changes to orientation and said she would attempt to immediately implement some of them, such as having the mayor come to speak to the first years.

Required Reading for Incoming Students:

For the past seven years, incoming students to Smith have read a selected book over the summer prior to coming to school. After arriving, students engage in discussions of the book led by faculty members and attend a lecture on the book given by the author. For the first four years of this program, Tom Riddell made the choice about what book should be read. For the last three years, however, there has been a committee comprised of faculty, staff, and first year students, headed by Tom Riddell that selects the book. In general, they look for a book that deals with issues of diversity, integrity, honesty, and ethics. While a book that focuses environmental issues has never been selected, the committee did consider *A Civil Action* and *Erin Brockovitch*, although they

did not think there was a book to go along with the movie. Tom Riddell said he would be happy to consider recommendations regarding what book should be chosen for future classes.

I wanted to recommend a book that emphasized the themes that the committee looks for in a book, but that also has a focus on local social and environmental issues. I recommended *A Matter of Freedom and Other Writings* by Juanita Nelson. A resident of Deerfield, Ms. Nelson has been active in anti-racism and non-violence movements for over 50 years. She is one of the founders of the Western Massachusetts Community Land Trust. She is an organic farmer, who sells only enough food to meet her financial needs. Clearly, she demonstrates not only the themes discussed by Dean Riddell, but also embodies living what one believes. She also demonstrates the interconnectedness of environmental and social issues. As a local resident, she may excite and inspire students about the community they are moving to. In addition, I also suggested *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature* by David Suzuki with Amanda McConnell as a second option. While this book does not have a local focus, its strong environmental content has the potential to make students consider how they impact the environment.

Creation of a First Year Seminar:

For the past five years, first year students have had the opportunity to take first year seminars. These classes have small student numbers, focus on a specific topic, and help develop student's speaking and writing skills. There are two first year seminars which will be offered next year that relate in some way to sense of place, *The Evolution and Transformation of the Northampton State Hospital* taught by Tom Riddell and *Geology in the Field* taught by John Brady. The course on the State Hospital includes

trips to the grounds in an effort to familiarize students with the land and its relationship to Smith. Geology in the Field studies the geologic history of the Connecticut Valley and includes many field trips to area locations.

I met with professors from the Departments of Biological Science and Landscape Studies to discuss the possibility of creating a first year seminar that dealt with issues surrounding the relationship between Smith College and its environment. I compiled their suggestions into a model course syllabus (Appendix 2). Every faculty member I spoke to seemed very enthusiastic about the idea of the course, and each had a distinct direction that they would like to see such a course take; however, each also emphasized that Smith is not hiring at the current time and that most current professors are too busy with their current workload to add an additional course. It is my hope that the discussion about the class and the syllabus will help to start an idea that may actually become a course when Smith begins hiring again.

DISCUSSION

The suggestions I made to augment the existing programs are all aimed at helping to foster a sense of place in the first year class by connecting them to the environment and community of the area. The hope is that, once seeing themselves as residents rather than inhabitants of an area, these students will be more conscious of their impact on the area (Orr 1992). In addition, these students may also take actions to limit not only their ecological footprints, but also that of the college by becoming more active in environmental courses, initiatives, and encouraging the administration to make sustainability a priority.

I hope that the Environmental Workers, which Kate Elmer's project helped to create and fund, can work to encourage the further implementation of my ideas and other programs relating to sense of place. While the complete or partial initiation of these programs will go some way in helping to instill a sense of place in the first year class, many more programs can be implemented to reach the same goal. While many authors focus on the importance of environmental education in increasing student driven sustainability movements (Keniry 1995, Creighton 1998), a focus on the local as a concrete example of theory, could make huge strides in helping students make connections between what they are learning and how it applies to their lives. Through these means, students could come to use their educations to think about, and then act on issues that impact their own lives and the place that they live. In all fields, including but not limited to economics, environmental science, literature, biology, and landscape studies, an emphasis on the local can help to create more conscientious learners in the broadest sense. In addition, efforts to make students feel as though they are citizens of Northampton could also increase a sense of place. Voter registration drives, more interaction between community organizations and the school, as well as more activities in the local natural areas could all help to increase a sense of citizenship and stewardship.

While a sense of place alone will not help humans live on the earth in a more sustainable manner, a deep appreciation for and connection to the place where one lives leads to a natural desire to protect and preserve that area. Re-cultivating the skills necessary to form a lasting connection to a place is a step towards creating a culture that is conscientious of its environmental impacts in both the present and the future times, as well as in immediate and the distant locations.

LITERATURE CITED

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Appendix 1.

Suggestion for Pre-Orientation Program:

Jocelyn Brown-Saracino

I recommend an optional weeklong pre-orientation program (like the outing trips now in place) that explores both the ecology and the community of the area. Such a program would help students form a sense of place in the area where they live and hopefully feel a greater ease with participating in the local community. Such an effort is in line with the Mayor's request for Smith students to be more active in the community.

I see such a trip including an emphasis on exploring natural areas (hikes on Mt. Tom, hikes to the Summit House, a walk at Arcadia the Audubon Society, canoeing on the Mill River), as well as trips to community attractions (the Peace Pagoda in Leverett, the other four colleges, the Eric Carle Museum), and a focus on establishing a sense of community responsibility (volunteering at the Food Bank or AIDS Care gardens, volunteering at a local shelter, visiting sites of Smith direct resource use such as the Northampton reservoir, the sewage treatment plant, or the landfill). Students could also meet officials from the Northampton community, such as the mayor, and meet staff that works on the campus such as the gardeners or Bob Pattee.

By familiarizing a few students with and inspiring them about the local area, hopefully these students will serve as leaders among their friends for initiating the first year class into the Pioneer Valley.

Suggestions for Orientation:

1. Information given at Central Check-In

I think that it is important that Smith students have an understanding that upon entering the campus they immediately have an impact on the ecology of the area through their activities and resource use. I think that it would be helpful to provide students with information regarding Smith Resource use and the campus. The distribution of such information may be advantageous to Smith because it may encourage students to use resources more consciously, reducing costs to the college.

An example of information and recommendations given:

Welcome to the Smith campus! Please help us keep the campus and surrounding area beautiful for generations to come.

Campus Facts:

The Smith campus is home to x-number of endangered and threatened species.

Some of the trees on campus are over 200 years old. That means they were here before the country was founded.

Smith uses x tons of paper each year, x gallons of water, x watts of electricity.

Smith uses x % of Northampton's water supply.

Smith recycles x tons each year and sends x tons to the landfill.

2. An optional campus ecology tour during orientation.
Such a tour would highlight the unique flora and fauna of the campus and surrounding area, take the students by the Mill River, discuss Smith's environmental impact, and give a brief history of the area.

A tour like this would be a good way to familiarize students with the campus and to encourage thought about how each student impacts the place that we live.
3. A presentation during orientation by Bob Pattee, Director of Physical Plant and Angie Fowler, Head of Recycling
This presentation, whether optional, or part of the orientation programming would give students information about resource use at Smith and about recycling efforts.
4. An ongoing part of the Smith Life and Learning series.
A "living" lecture series where a faculty, staff, or community member leads an outdoor lecture/walk/activity regarding the ecology of the surrounding area. A chance for students to engage in an interactive setting with both members of the faculty and with the environment. Such programs could be encouraged and announced by the house Earth Reps.

Appendix 2.

First Year Seminar:

Constructing Paradise: The Relationship between Smith College and its Environment

“Places are laboratories of diversity and complexity, mixing social functions and natural processes. A place has a human history and geologic past: it is a part of an ecosystem with a variety of microsystems, it is a landscape with a particular flora and fauna. Its inhabitants are part of a social, economic, and political order: they import or export energy materials, water, and wastes, they are linked by innumerable bonds to other places. A place cannot be understood from the vantage point of a single discipline or specialization. It can be understood only on its terms as a complex mosaic of phenomena and problems.” – David Orr from *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World*

Course Focus and Objectives: This class uses a variety of media, including frequent class field trips, guest speakers, and archival research, to explore the reciprocal relationship between the environment, landscape and thought. Using Smith College as our model, this class will look at the ways in which Smith has and continues to influence and be influenced by its landscape and environment. This course is divided into three major sections: past, present, and future. We will first investigate the history of human interaction with the environment in this region since settlement by Europeans, and then hone in on the creation and early development of Smith College, situating it in both time and space. Subsequently, we will focus on the recent history of Smith’s landscape decisions, including a focus on the relatively new Smith Landscape Master Plan. Finally, we will speculate about future development of the college focusing on the influence of litigation, conservation, and endowment.

Required Reading:

Boy Captive of Old Deerfield or the writing by the minister of Old Deerfield
Selections from Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf, and Emily Dickinson – which investigate the way the landscape of the area has impacted their writings

Changing Perspectives: The View from Mount Holyoke – Ed. Marianne Doezema
The Gardens and Botanical Facilities of Smith College: Education, Research, and Pleasure—C. John Burk

Celebrating a Century: The Botanic Garden of Smith College—C. John Burk

A Clearing in the Distance: Frederick Law Olmstead and America in the 19th Century—
Witold Rybczynski

Projects:

Choose a Topic:

1. Archival research in which students investigate how the landscape is discussed in student journals, letters etc., how this reflects their time period, and how this discussion mirrors or contrasts with the way they conceive of other aspects of their lives.

2. Compare the original campus design by Fredrick Law Olmstead with the new Smith Landscape Master Plan. What are the consistencies between the two designs and what are the differences? Discuss in terms of conservation, aesthetics, and goals.

Landscape journal – Students are spend time in and write about at least five areas on campus and their impact the campus on a whole

Field Trips:

Harvard Forest

Campus Gardens Tour

The Mount Holyoke art museum (where the images in Changing Perspectives come from)

Old Deerfield

PAST

Week 1.

A brief geological history of the Connecticut Valley

The first 100 years after European settlement

Week 2.

Thoreau and Emerson, changing relationships to nature

Changing Landscape—Deforestation, Agriculture, Regrowth and their effects on the landscape, thought, and environment of the region

Week 3.

Sophia Smith, her vision and its physical manifestation

The 1st Smith campus

Week 4.

Olmstead and the development of the Smith campus

The creation and development of the Botanic Gardens

PRESENT

Week 5.

The Smith Landscape Master Plan

Recent changes of the Smith campus

Week 6.

How decisions are made regarding the landscape:

Endowment

Attracting new students

Conservation?

Week 7.

Smith compared with Oberlin College and Pomona College. How does location frame us?

Week 8.

The power of space

Landscape journals due

FUTURE

Week 9.

New buildings, especially the new science center

Week 10.

Sustainability

Week 11.

Litigation and its role in shaping design and environmental impact

Week 12.

Final project presentations