

Developing a Pre-Orientation Program on Sustainability at Smith College

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It can be a challenge to get students involved on campus when they know so little about their college's actions. Therefore, the creation of a pre-orientation program that would take place over a four-day period would allow for the environmental movement on campus to be introduced to new students from the start, hopefully instigating a spark for social action.

In 2005, an EVS 300 student named Emilee Mooney did a project titled, "Getting on the Same Page". She interviewed numerous students, faculty and staff of Smith. The faculty and staff had all had some participation in the environmental movement on the Smith campus. She surveyed 150 random students about specific environmental issues on and off campus. She found that the top three, on-campus issues that students were concerned with is food waste/disposal, paper waste and water waste. However, when asked what they believed Smith's environmental concerns were and what they thought they should be, the majority of students didn't know what they were neither did they have any idea of what they should be.

This basic acknowledgement of not knowing what the environmental priorities are of Smith, is an extremely important issue that needs to be addressed. A pre-orientation program would not only raise awareness among present Smith College students, but would target incoming students about the importance of environmental awareness at Smith. The following report will develop and explore the necessity and importance of developing a pre-orientation program on sustainability at Smith.

A pre-orientation program developed specifically for incoming students. For recent high school graduates, entering a completely new environment can be quite challenging. From making new friends to adjusting to a new home, it can be overwhelming. The goal of a pre-orientation program is to make the transition smoother.

Therefore at Smith college there are pre-orientation programs, which allow incoming students to get an introduction to Smith on a specific level and meet other new students. Already existing pre-orientation programs include Bridge and First Link. Bridge draws students interested in leadership training and First Link introduces students to the community service program at Smith. There is even a pre-orientation program that takes you backpacking for 3 days to get to know the local environment and other new students interested in spending time outdoors. However, there is no program that concentrates on the environmental aspects of the Smith community and college. Therefore, I propose to develop a program so that all incoming students who are interested in the environment and sustainability learn about Smith's initiatives. This early involvement will increase the student body push to take a part in the movement for more sustainable measures. It is most important to introduce this program from the very beginning of the new student's Smith career so that those interested get inspired and active from the start. Once the new students are educated on Smith's current environmental actions, they can develop them and do even more. This will allow students to get even more involved in their new community and introduce them to other new students who are interested in the same field of study.

The principle goals in developing and executing this pre-orientation program are to promote education, traceability, transparency and social action. Education is a major principle of the environmental movement. Without environmental education we will never be able to "recognize that formal education needs to be seen as an integral and contributing part of a broader movement of social learning towards sustainability, including media, family, community and workplace learning" (Sterling, 86). Education,

being a basic necessity in the lives of all, needs to integrate the environment into its curriculum. Without environmental education, we face the chance of losing any relationship we have with the environment. Without education, no one will care to save the trees outside, when they are in the way of development. We learn almost everything from schooling and its surroundings. Without including the environment in primary education, we will lose the natural environment, which we pretty much already take for granted.

Traceability is a concept that is not apparent to many but following is pertinent in understanding one's impact on one's surroundings. Traceability is following a product's origin to its end. It is important to not only understand, but also take a part in learning about traceability gives one a clear view of the cycle of production. How long does it take for a plastic bowl to be made? How long does it take to decompose? How long is it re-used before thrown away? Questions like these are all important to understand so that the basic cycle of environmental effects can be traced as well. Traceability is a prominent component to environmental understanding and therefore it is a necessary goal for the pre-orientation program.

Transparency is something very important to understanding traceability and the way the college environment works. At Smith there is a hierarchy already established hierarchy, for the administration has power over the student body and faculty. However the student body maintains power due to their monetary contribution and the fact that they are choosing to attend Smith College. The administration does have a lot of power in making rules and regulations that principally concern Smith students. Transparency attempts to break down this barrier. Transparency does not break down the hierarchy, for

it is important to have all the players involved so that both students and administrators learn to understand each other's needs and wants. It is hard to address at Smith College because many times it is difficult for the students to understand why the administration does a certain thing. Therefore it is important that in the pre-orientation program the goal of transparency is addressed and discussed among the students and administrators to be able to work on goals together in a positive form. Specifically, the environmental movement needs to be discussed among the many players so that it is clear what is a priority and what action can be achieved.

The final goal, social action connects education, traceability and transparency to form a positive collaboration. Instigated college students are known for participating in social action and many important movements that have played a role in political change. The influence of the young and educated has truly made a difference upon political and social movements. Without social action nothing will ensue. Social action, especially environmental social action will raise awareness and support for this extremely important campaign among the Smith community.

These four prime goals, education, traceability, transparency and social action are all components of sustainability and environmental recognition. They can stand on their own, but together they not only are able to integrate all the important aspects but they also allow one to get a well –rounded understanding of its importance. The pre-orientation program will address this issue by introducing new students to Smith's current movement and will draw upon the four goals so that Smith can develop into a more sustainable campus.

Defining sustainability is a crucial component to introducing the new students to the environmental measures that Smith has taken, and what Smith hopes to develop. According to the EPA, “sustainability is the ability to achieve continuing economic prosperity while protecting the natural systems of the planet and providing a high quality of life for its people” (EPA, 2007). This can give us an important basis for what the core of sustainability is. At the beginning of the program it is important to address and discuss the definition of sustainability so that everyone starts on the same page. At the end of the program, readdressing the idea of sustainability specifically at Smith would sum it up well. This concept of sustainability is very different for many people and therefore it is required that it be discussed in the general context at the beginning of the program and then in specifics with reference to Smith’s mission at the end.

The program would take place over a four-day period, allowing enough time to have a basic introduction to Smith. The first day would be an introduction to the concepts of sustainability and what the goal of the orientation program is. There would be an introduction of what the administration and physical plant have done on campus in the sense of sustainability. Two speakers, each representing their respective departments would present to the participants of the program. Some important components that would be addressed concerning the administration and their environmental action is the development of the Sustainability Committee and their Partnership with Clean Air-Cool Planet. Both actions taken by the administration have allowed the ball to get rolling. The Sustainability Committee meets on a weekly basis and is made up of students, faculty and staff all who play a role in influencing the environmental/sustainable movement on campus. President Christ, proclaiming her commitment to reducing the college’s

greenhouse gas emissions, signed the Clean Air-Cool Planet on April 14, 2004. This not only rose awareness on campus and throughout the Pioneer Valley cause the college to recognize the responsibility that Smith college has in taking a major step towards becoming a more sustainable campus. Physical plant has also taken some stringent measures to lower energy usage. During the 5-week period of winter break, within 35 buildings the thermostats are set back by 5 degrees, so as to conserve energy. There is a calculated potential savings of 2300 million BTU (British Thermal Unit), \$1400, and 190 tons of CO₂ per year. (www.smith.edu/green, April 2007). The Million Monitor Drive, which is a collaboration between ITS and Physical Plant has also made a significant difference. The goal is to have every student set their computers so that after 10 minutes of idling, they go to sleep, causing the monitor to shut off. This competition that was established among the three schools allows for a serious motivation for Smith students to participate, because they always want to win. The potential savings because of the Million Monitor Drive is 730,000kWh, \$60,000 and 520 tons of CO₂ per year (www.smith.edu/green, April 2007). Another achievement that Physical Plant has made is providing new insulation for many of the steam pipes. This progress has allowed for 3400 million BTUs, \$18,600 and 275 tons of CO₂ to be saved a year. There is still much more action that needs to be taken by physical plant and the administration, and student input is necessary for instigating such.

On the second day of the program, the environmental actions completed by Dining Services and the academic programs will be introduced to the new students. Dining Services has faced the challenge of having 15 dining halls throughout campus and no central location where distribution takes place. Food has to be delivered to all 15

locations separately. One of their main initiatives has been buying local food. This not only is more environmentally friendly because they cut down on the food's travel distance, but also supporting local farms is something that is greatly respected by the Smith community and environmentally conscious. They bring in food from Black River and Outlook Farms as well as Milk from High Lawn Dairy, all located in the Pioneer Valley. These places are local farms and are working hard side by side with Smith to continue the partnership. Within the dining halls themselves, all the napkins are recyclable, the "to-go" materials (found in all the dining halls) are all compostable as well as the 'Grab and Go' plastic containers from Chapin. A major investment that has been made this past semester, Spring 2007, is the reintroduction of composting in two dining halls. Cutter/Ziskind and Chase dining halls compost all their organic waste. From prep waste to student's leftover meals, everything is collected in special compostable bags and then is picked up by a local farm, which uses the waste as a fertilizer. The college has invested in this program because they see it as a respectable form of re-using waste as well as reducing the heavy water waste that comes from food. This is a short-term program and one would hope that it continues in the future, however there was only a budget set for a semester.

Academia has introduced many to the environment through the variety of classes offered. Although, not enough has been concentrated on Smith's campus itself. However, there is an Environmental Science and Policy Minor, a Marine Science and Policy Program, the Picker Engineering Program and a Landscape Studies department. All four departments address the environment and like issues that are of importance and concern to many. They offer mostly minors and allow one to get an interdisciplinary education.

(www.smith.edu, 2007) This is a start to the environmental education movement and implementing environmental awareness into the daily lives of all Smith students.

The third day will be more active as development projects on campus will be introduced as well as field trips will be taken. There have been numerous new developments on campus that concentrate specifically and/or have taken into account their environmental impact when being designed and built. The new science building, Ford Hall has taken into account its environmental impact and therefore in its building design much was done to acknowledge energy conservation. Conway house, a new building for Ada Comstock scholars was built purely with energy star appliances and solar panels, which are used for heating water. The building is brand new and very environmentally conscious, which is a very appropriate addition the Smith college campus (www.smith.edu/green, April 2007). The Cogen project is a major one that has been in the works for numerous years. It is replacing the use of the oil consuming boilers that are currently in use for heating the campus. Our electricity is all bought from MassElectric. However, with the Cogen plant in place we will not only have a way to trap lost energy, but we will be producing thirty percent of our own electricity. The cogenerator is a Heat Recovery Steam Generator, which will overall minimize our impact upon the local and global environment (www.smith.edu/greenteam, April 2007). Even though the Cogen plant does consume oil, its efficiency and re-trapping heat makes it much more respectable than any boiler. There are more specific numbers and positive impacts that this cogen will have upon the Smith community that should be further discussed within the program.

Field Trips are a very important factor to the founding goals of the program for they specifically address traceability. A field trip option to visit local landfill, recycling plant and Smith's Cogen Plant are all viable components to gaining a better understanding of the environment. Being able to take a drive and see where one's waste ends up and where one's energy is produced is very pertinent to the concept of sustainability. Without this basic method of appreciation and recognition it would be impossible to truly have a clear understanding of our human impact. Though these field trips will only show a small side of what one's human impact is, they are truly important.

Day 4 changes gears so that the new students learn about current and past student initiatives on campus. Within the houses, there is the position of the Earth Representative. The earth rep has their own board, which they can decorate and put up informational fliers for all to see. This position allows for all houses to have one or numerous representatives, which anyone can turn to with questions concerning the environment and the movement on campus. Within the houses it is very important that all students are aware of where their trash bins and recycling bins are located, again addressing the goal of traceability. Each house has a different set up and it is very important that new students become aware of where their waste goes.

An introduction to what students have already created is one of the most relevant parts of the program for the new students. Numerous environmental groups exist on campus, including GAIA (Smith Students for the Environment), Clean Energy for Smith, MASSPirg and Smith Environmental Coalition. All these organizations are purely student run and incorporate many environmental issues that are pertinent to Smith students as well as anyone worldwide. Along with these organizations collaborations

have been developed between physical plant and student initiative creating the Recycling program. This program employs 6-8 students, which become one of the main liaisons between physical plant and the student body. It allows a greater and better understanding of environmental issues to be met between students and faculty so that intelligent decisions are made. The Green Team is another collaborative effort, for it is a volunteer group that includes students, faculty and staff. They discuss the many environmental issues on campus and action that needs to take place to address them. One does not have to be part of any organization to attend green team meetings and therefore they are a great resource for all the students who do not have more time to become active on campus.

In conclusion, efforts that have been made across the board like the light bulb exchange program and the “greening” of the Campus Center should all be acknowledged as sustainable goals that were reached by student action. However numerous projects are still under development and need new voices to participate in their creation. Focus the Nation, the continuation of composting, developing an environmental science and policy major and the center for the environment are a few of the new developments that need more assistance in gaining student support. The final afternoon of the program will address the future goals of Smith as a whole, focusing on the environment. As well as brainstorming new ideas of how Smith could become more sustainable and attractive to the environmental movement. The final goals will focus on creating environmental literacy, diversity, participation, sustainable change, action and most important quality of life (Sterling, 2001). These final components to the program will allow for a true whole-hearted investment in the environmental movement on campus. This general introduction

to Smith's environmental efforts will hopefully encourage all or many of these pre-orientation participants to take a role in student action on campus.

Eventually it would be nice for this program to become a permanent workshop that all students would attend, so that environmental education and implementation become a more common component to the everyday lives of Smith students. One must start with the new students who come to college with the high aspirations and open-minds, a pre-orientation program focusing on Smith's sustainability would do just that.

References

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