Bijli Bicycle or “Bicycle Electricity,” the Lang Project of Mariko Ching ’16, is providing rural North Indian communities with independent and renewable sources of electricity and lighting. Working in partnership with EduCareIndia, Mariko and her team provide training to permanent Educare India staff on the construction and maintenance of bicycle-powered generator systems that converts pedal-power into usable electricity, while community members operate the system throughout the day. The electricity generated may be used to charge lanterns so that families can have access to lighting at night. This added amenity has the potential to improve the quality of life for the communities by allowing for time during the evening hours to engage in beneficial activities such as personal and community development.

Mariko reflects, “My overall experience has been nothing short of amazing. Words cannot describe the transformative challenges and triumphs that I’ve faced this past year. Living in a developing country and becoming immersed in a completely different culture and language has opened my mind and forced me to question many of my preconceived conceptions. In addition, it has allowed me to connect and apply my coursework at Swarthmore to real world problems and solutions; specifically, issues pertaining to theories of sustainable development, gender equality, and global health. While I still am unsure of what I will do upon graduation, this experience has been incredibly informative and has inspired me to ponder future education or careers centered [on] global development and health.”
After graduating in 2013, myself and five other Swatties who had met organizing with Swarthmore Mountain Justice’s fossil fuel divestment campaign came together to form our own organization, the Maypop Collective for Climate and Economic Justice. We’re committed to continuing work for climate justice and supporting other young people to join similar efforts.

Last summer, we organized an apprenticeship program supporting the leadership of eight college students and recent graduates through study, peer support, and hands-on internships with grassroots social justice groups in the city. In the Young People’s Just Transition Project (YPJTP), we wanted to bring together a small group of deeply committed young people to work intensively on projects that bolster the struggles of Philadelphia communities and transform students’ own sense of organizing. This is the type of work that pushes young people to a new threshold of commitment, a threshold where this work is no longer an extra-curricular, but becomes bound to one’s sense of self.

One of the most common reflections from participants was how important support, relationship, and healing were to their overall experience of the program. The lesson here feels clear: there is immense power in containers like the YPJTP to help re-define relationship in ways that aren’t often provided for us. We believe the extractive economy we’re fighting wrecks devastation in our communities, relationships, and selves as much as on our wetlands, streams, and mountains. We have to organize our movements in a way that include a daily commitment to affirming life, support, and healing.

Since then, we’re continuing to apply the lessons learned from this experience to how we build a movement for climate justice that sustains for the long haul. We’re moving into a campaign to challenge the South Philly oil refinery and its devastation of communities. To learn more about our work, see our website (maypopcollective.org) or send us a line at maypopcollective@gmail.com.
Power Push and the Scholar Activist Alliance
By Hazlett Henderson

In practically my first week of college, Laura Rigell, Ben Goloff and I wrote a proposal for what has become a focus of our thought and action around sustainability and solidarity with people experiencing the ill effects of fossil fuel extraction: a Pericles Project grant, which has funded our group “Power Push” throughout the past two years. We started Power Push with a large and definitely vague dream -- I still have our doc “Pericles dreaming” somewhere on my Google Drive -- but our goals and methods have sharpened as we’ve connected with communities on the frontlines of fossil fuel extraction and combustion in West Virginia, the shalefields of Pennsylvania, and northern Philadelphia. Last semester, we brought speakers from several different groups directly involved in the fight against fossil fuels, including Stories from South Central and Lancaster Against Pipelines, to campus in order to hear their stories and challenge what it means to be “sustainable” on campus. We also took a number of students on trips to see first-hand the impact of mountaintop removal and hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. And as we’ve encountered difficulties in our initial plan of connecting students from Swarthmore with communities on the frontlines, we’ve extended in another direction with the Scholar Activist Alliance. First put in place by Aurora Lights, a group in West Virginia, we adopted the SAA to connect students through their academic work with people on the frontlines, and people on the frontlines through real need with students. We want to make the interactions between students and community members meaningful and productive by matching up research needs on the frontlines and capacities for research in institutions like Swarthmore. This could take the form of testing water samples from mining sites in WV or doing policy research for communities fighting against coal companies -- requests we’ve already fielded -- but we’re eager to see what this semester of the SAA brings. For more information or to get involved with the SAA or Power Push, contact this semester’s SAA intern, Tyler Huntington at thuntin1@swarthmore.edu.