

Sustainability Committee meeting minutes

4 May 2010, Kohlberg 226, 2:30 -3:30 pm

Attending: HG Chissell, Maurice Eldridge, Amanda Bayer, Evelyn Strombom, Camille Robertson, Nicole Lewis, Ralph Thayer, Eric Chiang, Kendall Johnson, Nadine Kolowrat, Carr Everbach; guests: Tom Gilbert, Alexa Ross, Michael Roswell, Emily Dolson (briefly)

Camille introduced Alexa Ross, who will be a student member of the committee next semester. Carr also introduced Tom Gilbert '80, who will serve in the fall as an alumni representative. Carr announced that John Caskey, economics professor, will replace Amanda as a faculty committee member next year. Yvonne Socolar and Erin Curtis will be the other student SusCom representatives; all other members will continue (assuming SusCom's charter is renewed).

Emily Dolson had proposed the drying rack purchase for the NYTimes grant. Ralph asked Emily where drying racks would be stored. Emily replied that the systems have differed by dorm, and gave examples of how current systems in Mertz and Willets have been working. Camille asked how Emily could foresee the program expanding if the pilot is successful, and she replied that the group would decide how to expand most effectively when the time arrives.

The committee discussed potential alternative funding methods for the drying rack and compostable cup proposals, including the Revolving Fund for Resource Conservation—Tom estimated that not running the drier for a half hour load would save about 7 cents worth of electricity, making it necessary for the drying rack to be used approximately 150 times to pay back the cost of purchasing the rack—and the Swarthmore Foundation incidental fund, possibly available in the fall. Camille conveyed Deb's request that student applicants talk to her about this option.

Nicole explained that Jeff Jabco does not consider the Ashton house to be the final site for the proposed beehives, but merely a tentative location; he is confident that grounds will be able to find a good site. Michael, one of the proposers, spoke to the risk and liability of the beehive project; his research and communications with college staff have indicated that neither should be an issue. Maurice said he does not see a problem with the chance that residents would complain.

The committee then voted formally to fund the Good Food beehives project. The committee also voted to recommend that funds be located to allow the other two projects to be implemented as well. Camille added that securing those funds for the compostable cup proposal would be especially useful if done before the end of the semester so that they can be instated into the current composting system as part of War on Waste's awareness campaign starting as soon as the fall semester begins.

Nadine stated that she would like the committee to recommend that Rebecca Chopp both sign the President's Climate Commitment and attend the AUPCC Conference of president signatories in October, 2010.

As discussed in the previous SusCom meeting, the biggest challenge to meeting the requirements of the Commitment will be developing an Action Plan that indicates a local, reliable way of offsetting carbon emissions. The AUPCC indicates that carbon neutrality is the ultimate goal, but allows institutions to determine the method and timing of achieving that goal. Carr said that he would like to see the committee make the recommendation that Rebecca Chopp sign it. HG recommended that we make this recommendation with a specific statement that we would strive to achieve carbon neutrality, though we don't know how we will accomplish it. HG explained that in his conversations with Swarthmore alumni senior executives, he has been met with concerns and criticism about supporting sustainability at the college while Swarthmore's president has not signed this commitment. Agreeing to attempt carbon neutrality even though we do not yet know how we will achieve it is an important gesture; it is symbolic but also a goad driving us to stronger action. Evelyn added that many other institutions have signed the commitment under similar conditions, leaving their Action Plans open-ended to accommodate them.

Tom suggested that another line in the college's budget be created indicating the carbon cost of purchases. Ralph stated that the overall carbon offset costs of the college are relatively miniscule that could perhaps get absorbed, though there is no way to know what will happen to the cost of fuels. Michael commented that a cost-benefit analysis will be necessary as an intermediate step.

The committee unanimously voted to recommend to Rebecca Chopp that she sign the President's Climate Commitment, with the proviso that she also seek to attend the meeting in October to discuss the matter with other signatory presidents. Carr agreed to go with her, if needed.

Nadine reported that Ken Dinetz is evaluating her draft of the Sustainability Action Plan, which will be made available to the committee on Swatfiles when approved. Carr agreed to write up an annual summary of the Committee's activities for the website as well as a summary of how the Inauguration went.

SusCom will reconvene in the Fall once its charter is extended by the Committee on Faculty Procedures. Carr has requested that SusCom's ad-hoc committee status be changed to that of a standing committee.

Respectfully submitted,
Carr Everbach and Camille Robertson