

Sustainability Committee Meeting minutes

9 April 2010, Lang Center, Keith Room, 12:30 pm

Attending: Debra Kardon-Brown, Eric Wagner, Eric Chiang, Maurice Eldridge, Nicole Lewis, Carr Everbach, Evelyn Strombom, Camille Robertson, Nadine Kolowrat

Carr opened the meeting with a request that SusCom identify themes for discussion in the May 8, 2010, Sustainable Living panel during Rebecca Chopp's inauguration. Carr read email comments from two of the panelists, Matt St. Clair and Chris Laszlo, who raised issues about Swarthmore's historical culture. Nadine thought that an interesting discussion point might be mediating between pushing cultural change (i.e. more sustainability) on the one hand and avoiding becoming the "culture police" (i.e. forcing more sustainability than people are ready to accept) on the other. Chris Laszlo had noted the financial opportunities of going (more) green, and Maurice made the point that Quakers have long been known to do well by doing good. Eric Wagner asked what is Swarthmore's niche among colleges in advancing sustainability. Evelyn thought Swarthmore should at least track what other schools are doing but Ralph and Debra objected that we shouldn't worry so much about keeping up with them. (In an email exchange later, the point was crystallized by Ralph's recommendation for Swarthmore to participate in the AASHE STARS program of carbon tracking/sustainability, rather than cater to the Sustainable Endowments Institute, the Sierra Club, and the Princeton Review as regards their green report cards. These report cards compare institutions, sometimes unfairly, failing to take into account each institution's special circumstances).

Camille thought that what makes Swarthmore distinctive is its receptiveness to student input and activism. She named another school with a strong green reputation that is so top-down that most students do not participate in the process. That institution has its own farm, but it is managed mostly by paid staff, and students have little stake in its disposition. At Swarthmore, the administration doesn't give the students everything they ask for, but they listen to the students and over time the policies are driven by their requests. Not only in sustainability, but also in many other policy areas, Swarthmore encourages students to take responsibility for pushing it forward.

Evelyn agreed that students do an extraordinary job in activism, but hoped the Administration would take a more active role and not just react to students. Camille agreed that it was vital to avoid hypocrisy, that the faculty/staff should practice sustainable policies if they wanted the students to learn them.

Maurice concurred with the importance of tangible action, and noted that at a recent faculty lunch, a speaker said the oceans do not pause in their deterioration while the nations develop a sensible ocean policy. Maurice further noted that the push from students is important, but so is the response from the administration. Students should recognize that the administration is doing many things to promote sustainability that they might not be aware of. How do we assure that a majority of students graduate with heightened awareness of sustainability issues?

Camille pointed out that the Green Advisor program is making that a priority. The GA Charter is being written next week, with its own budget, a steering committee, etc., and will hold themselves accountable for performance, since there is a gradient among effectiveness of individual Green Advisors. Jacob Philips will be stepping up to take over from Hannah Jones as GA leader. RAs are on board with composting as part of the War on Waste, with assistance from Rachel Head to get a composting bucket available on every floor of every dorm.

Debra pointed out that we want students asking why don't we have composting, rather than being surprised to find out we have composting. Eric Wagner asked who is coordinating the GAs with SusCom and Earthlust, since it is a goal of SusCom to facilitate such communication. Camille pointed out that personnel overlap among SusCom, Earthlust, Green Advisors, Good Food, and Environmental Justice is desirable. "Push-pull" between students and the administration (including SusCom) is a conservative way of moving toward sustainability in that everyone pretty much as to be on board to effect policy changes; Quaker consensus.

Nicole offered the rebuttal that the Administration often creates and pushes for things the students didn't even know about or that later became a shared venture. Maurice noted that there are really two parallel tracks: the institution and its footprint on the one hand and the students' education on the other. Both are equally important.

Carr read a reminder from absent member HG Chissell that there is a Green Garnet mixer next Friday, April 16, 2010, starting at 4:00 at the Kohlberg Coffee Bar. He also asked if there were an email list or listserv that would include all the green groups, SusCom, ENVS, etc. There was discussion about setting up such a list as sustainability@swarthmore.edu, and Carr will ask Mark Davis if that is possible.

The application deadline for the NY Times has been bumped back to April 27 to allow time for people to response. Camille gave the group the names of the ITS folks who are responsible for posting the "green tips" on the student dashboard.

Maurice suggested that Carr contact COFP about requesting that SusCom, an ad-hoc committee, be reinstated for one more year.

The meeting adjourned around 1:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carr Everbach

Upcoming meetings:

Wednesday, April 14, 8:30-9:30 am, Sharples Rm 4. Agenda: discuss remaining tasks for the 2009-10 year.

Tuesday, April 20, 2:30-3:30 pm (Everbach away; open meeting)- Kohlberg 226

Wednesday, April 28, 8:30-9:30 am, Sharples Rm 4 – discuss NYT proposals

Tuesday, May 4, 2:30-3:30 pm (last meeting before Finals and Inauguration; open meeting) – vote on NYT proposals
