

Sustainability Committee Minutes 16 Nov 2009
Lang Center Keith Room, 11:30 am – 12:30 pm

Attending:

Ralph Thayer, Nicole Lewis, Carr Everbach, Nadine Kolowrat, Amanda Bayer, Rebecca Ringle (LCI), Debra Kardon-Brown (for Joy Charlton), guests from Alumni Relations: Lisa Lee '81 and Geoff Semenuk

Don Cooney from Development was invited to meet with the Sustainability Committee but neither he nor any of his staff were able to attend due to a conflicting meeting. However, Geoff and Lisa from Alumni Relations were able to attend. They explained that the goal of their office is to keep alumni engaged with the College on a number of levels: intellectually (e.g., via faculty lectures on the road in Alumni Relations sponsored events), via on-campus social visits (e.g., Alumni Weekend every June), and a lot electronically (email, web) to allow people to find each other and to communicate with the College. In addition, alumni are tied to the College through any number of affinity issues (e.g., athletics, music, academic departments, classmates, sustainability). The Alumni Relations office is part of the Advancement Department, which also includes Alumni Records, Office of Institutional Research, Fundraising, and Development. Within Development, there are other subdivisions, such as Major Gifts, Annual Fund, Gift Planning, Wills and Annuities, Corporate and Foundation Relations (Nadine's office), and other support offices.

In Don Cooney's absence, Carr emphasized that discussion should focus on non-fundraising aspects such as the social connections of alumni to the College on sustainability issues. SusCom can work with the Alumni Relations office to enrich contacts and feedback with alumni.

Lisa agreed, and reminded us about steps already taken including the Linked-In Sustainability Alumni group set up by HG last summer. Lisa's office already maintains an online Community Portal, containing a searchable database of alumni, accessible to all alumni and students after their first semester. Visitors can contact other alumni through the portal. By the end of 2009, there should be a whole set of new discussion boards planned for the site (by class year, by affinity group, by geographical region, etc.). Lisa would like to start some conversations on the discussion boards prior to the launch, and would love it if SusCom contributed.

Carr asked that Rebecca Ringle, as Lang Center Intern to SusCom, start monitoring these discussion boards, and add a link to them on the SusCom website after launch.

Debra noted, however, that Rebecca will be away next semester in New Zealand on study-abroad, and so SusCom will need to train her replacement (n.b., Rebecca has suggested her successor and there will be further discussion with Joy and other Lang Center folks about this issue).

Lisa noted that during the 2009 Alumni Weekend, Nadine led a Crum Woods tour and Carr gave an update to about 50 alumni on campus sustainability efforts. She

suggested that it may be possible to develop a topic that could become a traveling “road show” that would draw alumni to various meeting venues around the country.

Carr emphasized that the President’s office should decide if SusCom is to have that role since we are appointed only to advise the President and other College community members.

Lisa clarified her suggestion, which is to draw alumni with a topic (for example, Mark Wallace’s work on Christianity and the Environment), not a committee report. Certainly there might be topics involving campus greening that might be interesting to alumni .

Nadine noted that the current model is faculty lectures on topics of their expertise, but indeed our committee has expertise in areas such as grounds and facilities that are rarely shared and which alumni might be interesting. Are there formats other than faculty talks that could go on the road?

Lisa replied that the Alumni Office is interested in media-ready polished talks, but could think about the idea and bring it up during upcoming Volunteer Leadership Weekend. Geoff pointed out that if SusCom members went on the road with a talk, they would be grilled by alumni, who often asked pointed, insightful questions.

Lisa gave the example of the Scott Arboretum, which has a huge audience and sponsors frequent well-attended talks about plants. Alumni will come out for students if the presentation is a polished one.

Nadine asked if it might be possible for SusCom to sponsor a panel discussion during Alumni weekend, and Lisa thought there might be a possibility for Sunday. Carr thought that such a panel might consist of one each of faculty, grounds, facilities, and students.

Geoff agreed that a panel discussion might be a good venue to try out on campus first, before taking it on the road.

Carr made reference to his Spring 2009 course on “Living Lightly on Earth” in New York City with Gil Rose’s Lifelong Learning program. 16 adult alumni students were very interested in the sustainability topics, but mostly how these could apply to their own lives (not so much Swarthmore’s campus). By analogy, might not a SusCom road show focus on lessons learned on campus that could apply to alumni members’ lives?

Nadine noted that the Arboretum supporters are a distinct population in comparison to the sustainability-interested alumni, though there may be some overlap.

Amanda broached fundraising again with the idea to create a new funding source for sustainability improvements on campus rather than nickel and dime alumni (e.g., by asking support for specific issues/events). Lisa replied that alumni activities serve

to “seed the ground” for fundraising when a decision is made to reach out, but that those decisions are separate from her office. An exception is the Carbon Neutral Alumni Weekend fund, in which individuals attending reunions are urged to add \$10 to their fees to offset their carbon to travel to/from the College in June. It is the 3rd year for this fundraiser and time for us to update the dollar amount of the offset and report on how the previous years’ funds have been spent.

Carr raised the “wagon wheel lights” in Sharples as Ralph’s Suggestion #1 for the “Renewing Fund for Resource Conservation” (RFRC) to be debated in our December meetings. Could not Carbon Neutral Alumni Weekend offset funds be spent to replace the incandescent bulbs with LEDs, allowing RFRC to diversify its investments?

Geoff asked if the Carbon Neutral Alumni Weekend funds could not just be added to the RFRC, but Nicole noted the perpetuity of the RFRC and the one-time nature of the carbon offset monies. Lisa thought putting Alumni Weekend funds into the RFRC would count as general fundraising and therefore be in the domain of the Development Office. Nadine offered that Ellen Monsees might have an opinion on the stewardship issues regarding this idea, since keeping the Carbon Neutral Alumni Weekend funds separate allows us the opportunity to report back to alumni about what we did with their money. Carr noted that there is no reason why part of the wagon wheel lights could not be paid for by the RFRC and another part paid for by Alumni Weekend funds. Nadine suggested a plaque or marker on the Sharples wall acknowledging the contributions of alumni to the light replacements.

Debra asked about the details of the RFRC and Geoff asked how it is publicized. There was general agreement that SusCom should use the RFRC as a vehicle not only to green the campus but also to draw in alumni and engage as many stakeholders as possible.

Geoff suggested that a possible SusCom road show topic might be, “how does the College create institutions that will increase sustainability efforts on campus?” Even alumni who are not particular interested in what greening activities are occurring on campus might be interested in the meta-issue of how institutions are created. There may be applications in their own lives, for instance, to increase sustainability efforts in a church group, or business, or household.

Lisa agreed, and offered that an example is how the City of Philadelphia (partly through the efforts of alumnus Mark Allen Hughes) created institutions to improve sustainability. Though now in a new academic department (Urban Planning?) and hence no longer the City’s Sustainability Director, Mr. Hughes might make a fascinating guest lecturer on this topic. Nadine pointed out that a video of his talk at Swarthmore is on-line at:

http://media.swarthmore.edu/featured_events/?p=58

Geoff asked how the approximately 18,000 alumni who might wish to contribute to the sustainability discussion be best engaged?

Carr suggested that hot “green” topics such as solar panels, roof gardens, LEDs, and green architecture might be good roadshow topics.

There followed a discussion of the wagon wheel bulb replacements in Sharples, focusing on the color and brightness of the LEDs in comparison to the current incandescent bulbs.

Lisa said that Carr should be hearing from her colleagues Wendy soon regarding scheduling of a possible Sustainability panel for Alumni weekend, and an updated carbon neutral offset calculation.

Carr mentioned that he was meeting later that afternoon with the Director of the Philadelphia International Airport to discuss recycling of cans, cups, and newspapers from airline flights arriving in PHL (n.b.: the meeting went well, and there are tentative plans for a group of Swarthmore students to perform a weeklong survey of airline recyclables at PHL in January).

Nadine reminded the group that the EPA has announced an Environmental Education grant program with deadlines in early December.

Debra announced that the Lang Center would like to hire at least one summer intern under the S2A2 (summer social action awards) program, or Chester fellows, to work on a sustainability-related project. Later, Joy asked if Debra could be the regular Lang Center representative to SusCom.

The next meeting is the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, in Sharples 8:30 am – 9:30 am and Carr wanted to know if enough SusCom folks were going to be in attendance to make the meeting worthwhile. Rebecca said she would work with EarthLust, Green Advisors, Good Food, Environmental Justice, etc. to bring forward their issues in a document prior to the meeting. Carr agreed that the meeting would take place, even if lightly attended, so that these student groups can make the points they wish to make.

The meeting was adjourned around 12:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carr Everbach

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Future SusCom meetings:

Wednesday, November 25, 2009, 8:30-9:30 am Sharples Room 4: open meeting with EarthLust, Good Food, EJ, Green Advisors, or any other group who wants to attend.

Wednesday, December 2, 2009, 8:30-9:30 am Sharples Room 4: closed meeting for SusCom discussion of finalists in Green Revolving Loan Fund proposals received Tuesday, December 1

Wednesday, December 9, 2009, 8:30-9:30 am Sharples Room 4: open meeting with EarthLust to discuss preliminary ranking of Green Revolving Loan Fund projects.

Monday, December 14, 2009, 11:30-12:30 Lang Center Keith Room: meeting open to the public for final tallied voting by SusCom members on Green Revolving Loan funding of projects.