

Sustainability Committee meeting minutes

20 April 2010, Kohlberg 226, 2:30 pm

Attending: Deb Kardon-Brown, David Burgy Nadine Kolowrat, Evelyn Strombom, Camille Robertson, Nicole Lewis, Ralph Thayer

Sue Welsh asked Nancy Nicely for a recommendation of which sustainability survey to participate in. Nancy Nicely in turn requested a recommendation from the Sustainability Committee before committing to any campus sustainability survey, many of which request participation fees.

AASHE allows us to compare us to ourselves, tracking progress, unlike others that compare us to schools that are dissimilar in size, location, etc. Ralph personally likes the program because as part of their test case, they directly approached Facilities staff, seeking information from the people who actually have their own knowledge. AASHE also would allow us to make comparisons to institutions of similar size with like information. STARS, a subset of AASHE, asks schools to go back to 2005 and make comparisons to that benchmark year. Before that data is likely unavailable or unreliable. We will be able to see quickly what kind of progress we have made because we have collected a large amount of data already. Also, the big environmental push started in 2005. There is a STARS representative who is available to us to ask questions and receive guidance on providing information and actively look over what data we are collecting, to correct any anomalies early on. Since most programs use common data, it is still possible for the college to use other programs that assign grades if they would like to continue receiving them for publicity.

David asked if we have any longevity assurance of the AASHE program. Ralph explained that while it is a new program and there are no guarantees, he believes that the framework that they have set up is strong and beneficial in a way that he feels will make it continually desired. If they do fold, we can continue to use their formulism to process our data. The service they provide is analyzing the data, which we would be able to do internally for our own measure

Green Report Card, Sierra Club, Princeton Review will likely continue to grade us anyway, whether or not we provide data to them. Our SEI grade went up after we gave them the information they requested and increased transparency. Nadine expressed her view that we should continue with SEI this year since their assessment will be made before our AASHE data would be available; RFRC and other initiatives this year would likely reflect well on the college's grade. She recommended that we participate this fall without making the \$700 contribution—they will evaluate schools that participated last year regardless of whether they provide information—and then desist in the spring if we begin the AASHE program. The committee agreed with this plan and will make this recommendation to the college administration.

Nadine hopes to have a preliminary draft of a Sustainability Plan for the committee by next Monday. She already has a large amount of information, which she will upload to Swatfiles. This timeline will give the committee two weeks to finalize the document before the inauguration.

Ralph expressed concerns with the President's Commitment to Climate Change: He views that carbon neutrality is only attainable by ceasing to exist or selling our problem to someone else, making it invisible i.e. carbon offsets. Nicole: if we are committed to reducing our carbon emissions as much as we can, better to offset what we can't; better to do something than nothing about the emissions we will be unable to eliminate. She feels that we should reduce emissions as much as we can. neutrality should be our goal.

Looking at the second scope of the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment, committee members commented on which items Swarthmore is already committed to and which requirements might be flawed. Nadine suggested considering a (LEED but not silver), b, e, and f and communicate with student groups about considering g. David and Ralph expressed reservations regarding possible flaws of the LEED, ENERGY STAR, and carbon offset programs. Money would be a limiting factor in many options. Nadine reminded the committee that 1c. could be a stumbling block; we will need to discuss who will be responsible for coming up with this plan.

Maurice sent an e-mail that Ralph drafted to the Swarthmore community about an hour-long power reduction on Earthday. Deb would love to see students make a big push for energy reduction in dormitories and academic buildings. Students stand by elevators to encourage people to use stairs?

Nadine asked if anyone was interested organizing a tour of the trash incinerator in Chester. She thinks that a useful first step would be for members of the Sustainability Committee to visit the site to inquire data about what Swarthmore contributes. Deb mentioned that the DelCo Alliance might already have this information. This is a Chester-based environmental justice group high incidence of asthma and nerve-related cancers—working to relocate residents from Booth street, an unremediated Have they already calculated data about the large institutions sending waste to the incinerator?

Camille said David said that a group of engineers with Art MacGarity toured the facility last year, but he was unable to attend. Committee members mentioned tie-ins to the Environmental Studies capstone, the student EJ group, Chester Fellows, and Camille's summer S2A2 project. Everyone agreed that there is not enough time to plan a visit this semester, but Camille and Deb will work on planning a summer trip, which if successful, can hopefully be repeated in the fall.

Committee members will do research into other schools' Climate Commitments and Action Plans and come prepared to discuss what commitment to carbon neutrality Swarthmore College would like to and is able to make.