The Amherst Climate Action Plan: Engaging the Campus with Sustainability through the Curriculum and Beyond

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Main Objectives

- The Climate Action Plan (CAP) aims to achieve carbon neutrality on campus by 2030. We already know how to achieve this through technical means, for example, we will use geothermal energy to generate low-temperature hot water for heating/cooling in buildings.
- However just as important is for us to go “beyond carbon neutral”.
- The information presented highlights feasible methods for improving student, staff, and faculty engagement with sustainability within and beyond the curriculum.

Why This is Important

- Amherst College’s mission is to create the leaders of tomorrow; therefore, we have a moral obligation to educate students about making the world a better place.
- We need to take advantage of the fact that the environmental/climate action that our graduates, faculty, and staff engage in will far outweigh the impact that our graduates, faculty, and staff

How We Compare to our Peers

- From Amherst’s latest Sustainability Tracking Assessment & Rating System (STARS) report -
  - Less than 3% of courses offered are sustainability courses, and approximately one third of departments offer at least one sustainability course.
  - 6.78% of faculty are directly engaged with sustainability research.

What We Should be Doing - Main Objectives

- Further incorporate sustainability into the curriculum to increase salience and promote interest in sustainability topics.
- The CAP itself provides experiential learning opportunities, for example, collecting energy data and studying the thermodynamics of the geothermal power systems.
  - Pictured right: a Carleton student and driller examine soil samples down to 500ft.
- However, we can achieve more by engaging faculty with sustainability.
  - Faculty Development Workshops – bring together faculty from various disciplines to share ideas and teaching techniques to advance the innovation of interdisciplinary sustainability topics and research opportunities.
  - Curricular Enhancement Grants – provide financial support for faculty to develop their courses to incorporate sustainability. Finances could go towards class resources, trips, and more.
  - Faculty Research Scholars – faculty scholars are given a substantive salary over the summer to apply their research to a campus challenge, giving a lecture the following year.

Engage with sustainability outside of the curriculum to embed sustainability into our campus culture

- Enviro-lunches – a weekly lunch series bringing in a speaker from campus or beyond to discuss sustainability from a unique perspective.
  - For example, Bowdoin has invited eco-activist Catholic nuns to talk about the intersection between their beliefs and the environment.
  - Sustainability Advocates – Advocates (staff/faculty) are paired with an Eco-Rep for the academic year and together they work to implement a sustainability project, creating a sustainable campus community.
  - Fosters a sense of ownership, shared responsibility, and expertise with regards to the College’s sustainability commitments.

Include students in sustainability decision-making to represent student values

- Many of our peer institutions e.g. Williams, Smith, Carleton have sustainability committees that include students; however we do not have a sustainability committee to begin with.
  - Therefore, it is important for students to participate in the CAP committee(s), both as a leadership and learning opportunity.
  - The next step is figuring out the best way to involve students, whether it be through the AAS or the general student body, or both.

Main Objectives Continued

- We should also seek to form relationships with other institutions and organizations to broaden opportunities related to sustainability.
- Smith College’s Environmental Science and Policy department is partnered with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to provide internships and research opportunities for Smith students.
- Smith College is also partnered with the Hol Chan Marine Reserve in Belize to host the Coral Reef Ed-Ventures program, in which students run environmental education camps and carry out coral reef research.

Increase student research and employment opportunities to aid in professional development

- We must recognize the importance of sustainability literacy in this changing world, especially for careers – an idea that the current careers webpage fails to convey.
- Bowdoin’s careers page is much more navigable and specific, which would benefit all students. A significant portion of these careers are linked to sustainability and specific tabs are provided for energy and environment.
- We should create a sustainability career cluster that provides a glimpse to the multitude of careers available in sustainability and climate action.
- Providing our students with a great education is essential, but they need to know what they can do with that education in order to be successful.

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