

Skidmore College - Educational Foundation of America
Campus Sustainability Interim Report, June 2008

Background

Skidmore College recognizes that it exists as one of many interconnected communities and that all are affected by personal and institutional choices. With the remarkable support received from the Educational Foundation of America, Skidmore has made significant and important progress this past year regarding sustainability issues, and we are most grateful. The centerpiece of this grant was the hiring of a Campus Sustainability Coordinator. The search committee for this position, appointed by the President, was comprised of two faculty members in the Environmental Studies program, a student in that program, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and the Vice President for Finance, Administration and Treasurer of the College. The committee worked over a period of three months to follow all appropriate procedures and attract the best person for the job. This past winter our new Campus Sustainability Coordinator, Erica Fuller, started at the College. A copy of her resume is attached to this report.

Skidmore's campus planning includes strong sustainability actions in college operations in concert with academic and research initiatives. Our work deliberately resists the recent trend toward symbolic gestures that are not likely to lead to substantial improvement in performance and community awareness or that shift focus away from meaningful actions to reduce environmental impact. Instead, the College is taking the approach to reducing negative impacts, selecting specific objectives in areas in which we can achieve real and measurable progress.

Objectives- Proposed to Actual

Objective 1: This spring the College developed a program, known on campus as "Give and Go," designed to divert used goods that students leave behind at the end of the school year to where they can be reused. Over thirty students, faculty, staff and community members volunteered to help plan and carry out the event. The volunteers collected about 15 van loads of goods, including 25 refrigerators, 92 lamps, 40 fans, 14 TVs and about 80 bags of clothing and shoes. Recipients of the used goods were the Salvation Army, the Backstretch Employee Service Team, and the Ballston Spa Animal Shelter. In addition to minimizing items from going into the waste stream, disposal fees and related, the reuse of these items saved members of the community significant additional costs compared to purchasing similar items at retail.

In an effort to expand our energy conservation initiatives, the College recently invested in an energy savings and climate pilot initiative that featured purchasing occupancy motion and infrared sensors to control lights for the rooms in the Case College Student Center. The sensors in the public areas will be accompanied by signage to educate the community about their energy savings. We will analyze data from the sensor pilot project with the goal to extend the program to other parts of campus. This past semester, Erica also began attending certain administrative departmental meetings to discuss the new position and its role at Skidmore, some of the campus greening initiatives planned for the year, and ways in which employees and students can reduce their environmental impact. This process provides staff and students the opportunity to ask questions about the recycling program and other initiatives and best practices. As part of these visits, we have retrofitted overhead lighting with high-efficiency lighting and sponsored a compact fluorescent light bulb exchange.

Skidmore is also in the process of organizing a greenhouse gas inventory. We plan to hire an outside agency to help implement and verify the inventory; however, we also will work with faculty and students to foster community engagement and an educationally sound process. Within the greenhouse gas inventory, the College plans to include a sustainability survey designed to measure environmental awareness on campus and behavioral habits that affect Skidmore's environmental footprint. The greenhouse gas inventory will create a baseline for accounting Skidmore's greenhouse gas emissions. This analysis will indicate potential areas for targeted reductions, and will help guide mitigation strategies.

The College this year through the Campus Environmental Committee promoted the new CDTA bus system available for free to Skidmore community members during its "Leave Your Car At Home Week." This service is free to our community, as it is subsidized by the College. In addition, the College developed and produced a Carpool Hot Zone map to help employees find others for ride sharing. Skidmore hosted a sustainable food consultant this past spring for a presentation and round table discussion surrounding sustainable food on campus. Out of these discussions came the idea for the formation of a "lead team" to help support dining services promote green initiatives as well as offer some new suggestions for greener dining. We will also be working with the Alumni Affairs office to vision and plan for how Skidmore can "green" our future commencement and reunion weekends.

This year, the College also hired two student recycling interns and developed a new web site--www.skidmore.edu/recycling--to increase awareness of the recycling program on campus. The College also adopted a proposal for double-siding printing whenever possible and the installation of four plasma screens in the Case Student Center in an effort to reduce the volume of printed material on campus. In addition to the current initiatives, the College is researching several larger projects for possible future implementation at Skidmore, including installation of occupancy sensors campus wide, a pilot wind project, analysis of the potential to install on a pilot basis light emitting diode (LED) street lights, an educational solar pilot project, and an educational biodiesel pilot project.

Objective 2: This spring, the College hired two student interns to work as North Woods Sustainability Stewards (please see attached brochure). The stewards will work on trail maintenance and environmental education surrounding the North Woods as an important natural resource at Skidmore. They will also work on an educational signage campaign around campus, on developing a manual for the pilot Eco-Rep program (described in more detail below), and on planning for new campus greening projects.

Objective 3: During the spring semester, Erica met often with various faculty, staff and administrators as part of her orientation process and to explore potential new sustainability projects. In addition, she has attended the weekly executive board meetings to stay informed on student initiatives and ideas. She has also provided guidance on several academic projects including environmental art, environmental journalism, environmental sociology, and a fall senior thesis.

Interfacing with students is just one way this position has worked to increase the awareness of environmental issues and initiatives on Skidmore's campus. In March, Skidmore joined the Association for Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). Activities resulting from this membership will help to increase public awareness of sustainability initiatives on Skidmore's campus. This spring, Erica began meeting with the Skidmore student ambassadors (tour guides) to help them incorporate conversations about sustainability in their tours to prospective students and parents.

Adding to the visibility of sustainability on campus, we are working with two student interns this summer to design signage for our geothermal buildings, our new occupancy sensors, and our CDTA bus pass program. We are continuing collaboration with the First-Year Experience and pre-orientation staff to weave sustainability into the context of first-year orientation. Also this summer, the North Woods/ Sustainability interns and this office will develop a manual and pilot Eco-Rep program, a program in which selected residential students will be paid to lead educational programs in the residence halls. Eco-Reps will offer information on environmental topics, serve as a sounding board for environmental concerns in the residence halls, and offer sustainability activities.

Objective 4: On April 17th, 2008, and with much publicity, the College launched the first iteration of Skidmore's sustainability website, <http://cms.skidmore.edu/sustainability/>. This site is designed to highlight campus greening initiatives and events, serve as an educational tool for sustainability and provide resources for personal behavior change. The Environmental Studies Academic Program Coordinator has added Skidmore's Campus Sustainability Coordinator position to the Northeast Campus Sustainability Consortium's (NECSC) steering committee. Through this organization, we have connected with many university and college campus sustainability professionals in the Northeast. In April, Erica attended the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) Smart and Sustainable Campuses conference.

The College sponsored a full week of Earth Day activities from April 16 – 22. This year, Skidmore also participated in Focus the Nation, a national project to raise awareness of environmental issues timed to coincide with the presidential primary season. Working groups included sustainable food, transportation, and energy conservation and reduction. From this planning meeting came several initiatives, some of which were aired by our local NBC TV affiliate, including

- Leave Your Car At Home Week. Sixty-three people who registered their human-powered commutes saved 1,212 miles and 1,248.5 pounds of carbon dioxide that week.
- Students successfully lobbied US Representative Kirsten Gillibrand to sign the Climate Bill.
- The College led a discussion with Jeff Goodell, author of *Big Coal*.
- A poster session of student and faculty climate-related work and an International Perspectives panel of students from four countries.

Impact- Proposed to Actual

1. The challenges addressed in the grant proposal were the need to streamline and coordinate existing campus environmental efforts and the need for more dedication of time and energy to designing, implementing and highlighting campus greening projects. The appointment of the

Campus Sustainability Coordinator is a direct step towards increasing the time and energy spent on sustainability at Skidmore. The above narrative demonstrates the tremendous effort focused on sustainability at Skidmore thus far. In short this grant and the related funding for this new position have helped bring sustainability to the front of the College agenda. Awareness of the Campus Sustainability Coordinator position on campus gives the community a place to voice their ideas, concerns and questions, and it provides an information clearinghouse on sustainability. As mentioned in objective 3, the College this year was able to support several student academic projects and coordinate communication between the EAC, the CEC and certain environmental classes.

2. The goals of the program have not changed, however the timeline of the program has shifted by one semester at this point, reflecting the additional time that was needed by the College to ensure a thorough, planned, and successful search for the new position. Skidmore has dedicated significant additional resources to sustainability as a result of the early success of this grant and the excellent work of our Campus Sustainability Coordinator, and is planning to provide more resources in the future. As an example of one such proposed project under current consideration is a new geo-thermal initiative for the Saisselin Arts Building and possible extension of this project to the Filene Music Building and the Janet Kinghorn Bernhard Theater. This project will complement major geo-thermal initiatives already completed in our Dining Hall, Northwoods Village Apartments, and Arthur Zankel Music Center.