

Skidmore College- Educational Foundation of America Campus Sustainability Final Report, February 2010

Background

Skidmore College has made significant progress towards reducing its environmental footprint and creating a permanent sustainability program. The extraordinary support the College received from the Educational Foundation of America (EFA) allowed Skidmore to hire a Campus Sustainability Coordinator, initiate campus greening projects, and engage students through internships and the entire campus community through sustainability events and initiatives. Thanks to the EFA, Skidmore has had a remarkable two years moving sustainability to the forefront of the College's agenda.

Throughout this report there are examples of projects where the grant served as the springboard for sustainability initiatives by funding pilot projects or programming. This grant, and the activities it has supported, has played a crucial role in helping President Glotzbach and his Cabinet move this agenda forward. The fact that the Sustainability Coordinator reported jointly to the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Vice President for Finance and Administration and Treasurer helped ensure the new position's success and led to investments in sustainability beyond the scope of the grant. We are tremendously grateful for the remarkable opportunity EFA has provided to the College to "jumpstart" and leverage our sustainability efforts.

Objective 1: Design and implement smaller-scale and larger-scale projects

During the fall of 2008, the College installed individual electricity meters on all of the residence halls on campus. This permitted Facilities Services to more closely monitor the electricity consumption of the residence halls and enabled the Sustainability Coordinator to give students feedback on their energy behaviors. The grant supported the programming for an electricity conservation competition in the residence halls called *Skidmore Unplugged* (details in Obj. 2), and the College matched this investment by purchasing the required electricity meters.

To continue improving our ability to measure and track energy data, Skidmore initiated its first institutional greenhouse gas emissions inventory in the fall of 2008. An impressive 30% of the College community took the travel and commuting survey during the spring of 2009—a figure triple the rate required by the Clean Air Cool Planet Carbon Calculator, which is the tool that many colleges and universities use to assess their greenhouse gas emissions. The rest of the data collection and analysis was completed during the summer and fall of 2009. Our plan is to communicate and engage the community in "digesting" the inventory during the 2010 spring semester. The inventory is serving as a greenhouse gas emission baseline as the College works towards creating a climate commitment with targeted carbon reductions and a timeline for achieving these reductions. As this work progresses, the College is also working on a Climate Action Plan with confirmed and potential projects that will help us reach our climate commitment. Our efforts are geared toward intentional goal setting and action planning. In this regard, the completion of the baseline greenhouse gas inventory, and our steps towards creating an informed climate commitment, is a milestone for Skidmore's sustainability efforts as well as, we believe, a model for other colleges and universities who seek to take practical steps toward real carbon reduction.

In an effort to expand our electricity conservation initiatives, Skidmore installed occupancy sensors campus-wide in classrooms, offices, and bathrooms. We used grant funds for the initial pilot project as well as to subsidize the campus-wide installation.

The projects described above are just a few of the energy conservation and management projects that Skidmore has embarked upon in the past 2 years. Between 2008 and 2009 the College reduced its electricity

consumption by 4%. Completed energy conservation projects include residence hall roof replacements (improved insulation), a boiler plant upgrade, efficient lighting upgrades, 3 geothermal system installations for heating and cooling (including a new installation at the Zankel Music Center), programmable thermostat installations for a residence hall and an apartment complex, and a campus-wide building temperature initiative. Skidmore is also beginning to install point-of-use boilers in all buildings, which will allow us to increase our heating efficiency (elimination of energy loss in the central loop piping system) and shut down our aging central boiler house. We have engaged engineers to help plan the installation of a small cogeneration plant that we recently purchased and to investigate the feasibility of a wind turbine. Additionally, there are preliminary plans to expand our geothermal program to include several other buildings on campus. These projects illustrate Skidmore's commitment to real energy reduction projects, a commitment that will continue after the grant's conclusion.

During the spring and summer of 2009, Skidmore used grant funds to support the Skidmore Student Garden. The Sustainability Coordinator oversaw this student initiative, which proved to be successful beyond all expectations. The College allocated a high-profile plot on campus for the students to turn into a 40' x 60' vegetable garden. Students donated last year's crop to the dining hall; however, this year the dining hall has committed to paying for the food to help sustain the garden. During the summer, students offered tours of the garden for Camp Northwoods participants and in the fall, the Coordinator worked with several professors to incorporate aspects of the garden into their classes, including two First-Year Seminars. At the end of the season, the students hosted a harvest dinner, which served over 150 students locally produced food from the student garden and the Saratoga Farmers' Market. The garden was highlighted several times throughout the growing season in the local media, as well as in our Skidmore community publications (please see Appendix B for media portfolio).

Skidmore organized its second annual *Give and Go* program, offering used goods that students leave behind at the end of the academic year to local charities. Once again, this program proved to be a tremendous success, engaging volunteers both from Skidmore and the Saratoga community and donating over 5 small moving truck loads of used goods. Recipients included the Salvation Army, the Backstretch Employee Service Team, and the Captain Program (a homeless shelter for teenagers in Saratoga County). Over the past two years, this program has gained recognition in the community, and, as a result, a local company has donated laundry service to wash and fold all of the clothing collected this coming spring. This program helps the College reduce its waste as well as offering Skidmore students an opportunity to give back to the larger Saratoga community.

Objective 2: Increase student involvement in campus greening projects

The Sustainability Coordinator works closely with the Director and Program Coordinator of Environmental Studies, which increases student involvement on most projects. Projects may originate in classes, student clubs, and/or the office of the Sustainability Coordinator. Below are a few highlights from these projects.

In 2008, Skidmore hired its first Eco-Reps. The Eco-Rep program consists of 10 student internship positions and is designed to increase environmental awareness and inspire behavior change through programming and educational initiatives in the residence halls. Eco-Reps offer information on environmental topics, serve as a sounding board for environmental concerns in the residence halls, and offer sustainability activities. Hiring Eco-Reps in the spring allows Residential Life to house them where they are assigned to work and incorporate them into some of the Residential Life staff training. This in turn helps the Eco-Reps get to know the Residential Life staff in their hall and facilitates programming co-sponsorship. To learn more about the Eco-Rep program, please visit <http://cms.skidmore.edu/sustainability/ecorep/index.cfm>.

For the past two years the Eco-Reps have run *Skidmore Unplugged*. Last year, the winning hall reduced its consumption by almost 7% and this year's winning hall reduced its consumption by 12%. For the first year

of the competition, the Sustainability Coordinator worked with a graphic design class, which created the logo, a real-time electricity dashboard Website (<http://cms.skidmore.edu/sustainability/dashboard/index.cfm>), and other promotional materials, as well as with a sculpture class, which created a *Skidmore Unplugged* trophy.

The College also improved its stewardship of the North Woods by offering two stewardship positions throughout the summer and one position throughout the academic year. The stewards work on trail maintenance, environmental education, and public outreach by building the Friends of the North Woods network. The summer stewards work both in the North Woods and on a sustainability project. During the first summer, the stewards helped write the Eco-Rep program manual and, during the second summer, the stewards helped in the Skidmore Student Garden. The stewardship program organizes North Woods Stewardship Days in the spring and in the fall to offer the community an opportunity to participate in trail projects, clean ups, and educational walks. The walks have grown tremendously popular, sometimes with up to forty people on one walk, and we've begun to offer several walks per Stewardship Day to accommodate the crowds.

In addition to working with the paid student positions, the Sustainability Coordinator assists with a steady stream of student projects both through academic programs and student clubs. She has supported several honors theses, capstone and club projects including a wind feasibility study, a composting feasibility study, a rain garden, and an organic vegetable garden.

Objective 3: Raise ecological consciousness of entire campus community

Each semester, the Sustainability Coordinator visits classes to talk about Skidmore's sustainability efforts and offer support for student projects. In addition, the Sustainability Coordinator is part of Residential Life staff training as well as First-Year Peer Mentor training. Working with these groups is particularly impactful because of their contact and influence on first-year students.

The Sustainability Coordinator also works closely with Skidmore's Office of Communications to promote sustainability events and initiatives via internal publications. Appendix A includes the extensive internal and external media coverage of the Sustainable Skidmore program.

The Eco-Rep program has helped bring environmental awareness to the forefront in the residence halls. The Eco-Reps are often asked to attend activities planned by other programs and help create a green theme. A significant part of their work is bringing environmental consciousness into "non-eco" themed events. This helps create a context of environmental action in students' daily lives.

The Sustainability Coordinator planned several campus-wide events to raise environmental awareness. These include guest lectures, panel discussions, and environmental movies. In spring 2010, Skidmore is scheduled to participate in a nationwide teach-in on global climate change. Last year's theme investigated the climate change expectations of the Obama administration for its first 100 days. The series included a webcast followed by an interdisciplinary panel discussion, an interfaith environmental movie, the launch of our greenhouse gas inventory by way of a commuting/travel and environmental awareness survey, and a keynote lecture by the President of the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies, Dr. William Schlesinger.

This year's event series theme is "Debriefing Copenhagen," referring to the recent United Nations Conference on Climate Change. Our main event is a teleconference with three U.N. ambassadors through the United Nations Ambassador's Club, which is organized by Ambassador Kamal from Pakistan. This outreach program allows educational institutions such as Skidmore to engage in lively discussions about global issues. During this series, we are hosting a discussion with a recent Skidmore graduate who works in the climate change field and attended the U.N. Climate Conference. We are also showing the documentary

about the first climate refugees, *Sun Come Up*, followed by a discussion with the film's producer. We are working hard to engage community members who have not participated in these events in prior years. To help us achieve this goal, we are partnering with the Office for Campus Diversity Programs as well as the Office of Intercultural Studies. These events are free and open to the public. This series is another example of programming that the grant catalyzed and that the College will continue beyond the grant period.

Objective 4: Increase campus greening visibility to outside community

The Campus Sustainability Coordinator continues to use the Sustainable Skidmore Website to communicate information on sustainability initiatives at Skidmore. Skidmore's sustainability Website and some of our programs are included on the Association for Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) as resources for other colleges and universities. Skidmore continues to be a member of this organization and has had several of its initiatives (Eco-Rep program, Skidmore Student Garden and *Skidmore Unplugged*) highlighted in their national publication. Skidmore has gained national media attention as an example of a school that has gone "trayless" in our dining hall. Our local media have also highlighted Skidmore's sustainability programs throughout the duration of this grant.

The Sustainability Coordinator continues to attend national sustainability conferences including AASHE's conference in the fall of 2008 and the Northeast Campus Sustainability Consortium's (NECSC) conference in fall of 2009. The Sustainability Coordinator attended several conferences early in the grant period, but has selected only a few to continue to attend during this difficult budgetary time. Skidmore continues to hold a seat on the steering committee for the NECSC and played a leadership role during the conference in the fall by facilitating several round-table discussions.

Outside organizations (such as the Sustainable Saratoga Taskforce, our local government's Green Committee and our local Rotary chapter) have reached out to Skidmore's Sustainability Coordinator for advice on initiatives and for presentations on Skidmore's sustainability program. The Coordinator has also participated in Skidmore's community breakfast, featuring roundtable discussions, and she presented to families during Celebration Weekend and the Friends of the Presidents gathering, and to other Skidmore alumni groups.

Impact: Proposed to Actual

The appointment of the Campus Sustainability Coordinator position was a major step towards meeting the challenges addressed in the grant proposal. The Coordinator's position dedicates time and energy for sustainability projects, which allows for continuity—particularly for student-initiated projects. The position also offers the broader community a resource to field questions, concerns and ideas for future projects. The narrative above details some of the substantial effort that Skidmore has focused on sustainability for the duration of this grant period; however, it is important to note that sustainability will continue to remain high on the College's agenda. Skidmore has dedicated significant resources, particularly during this difficult economic time, towards supporting sustainability initiatives—many with a focus on energy conservation and limiting "greenhouse gases". Most recently the College committed to fund the Sustainability Coordinator position and programs for fiscal year 2011.