



Albion College Albion, Michigan Environmental Education and Outreach

SCHOOL

Albion College, Private 4-year, 1450 students, Albion, Michigan.

ABSTRACT

Albion College completed its first triennial sustainability themed year in 2010-11. Albion College's vision includes preparing students to anticipate, solve, and prevent problems in order to improve the human and global condition. We recognize that learning and application of learning take place both within and outside the formal classroom. Helping students draw interdisciplinary connections and translate thought to action are critical parts of our mission. To forward these goals, we initiated a themed year program in the 2010-2011 academic year, with our first year focused on sustainability. Themed years allow the whole College to address issues we believe to be important through a year-long series of coordinated lectures, activities and experiences. One example of this integration was the thread of diet, which was woven through discussions of environmental and health implications of diet in many classrooms, an all-college lecture, several films, an on-campus farmers market, and daily experiences in the student dining hall. On a three-year rotation, our themed years explore the issues of sustainability, wellness and global diversity. As we are essentially using many of the normal college functions as education, the program adds little cost, though planning and execution do take significant faculty and staff time. Surveys done early in the year and at the conclusion of the year indicate that we made progress in raising student awareness of important issues.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Goals

The goals of our sustainability themed year were to provide pathways along which students can explore and discover connections among classes and between academic experiences and their daily lives, to utilize all assets of the college in education, and to invigorate and support our commitment to education for responsible global citizenship by creating an ongoing discussion of issues related to sustainability. More specifically, our goals included broad engagement with our theme as measured by participation in non-mandatory events, by the quality of discussions of the first year reading material and of lectures, by changing habits of students and staff, and by a general survey conducted at the start and conclusion of the year.



Accomplishments and Outcomes

We were able to construct a varied and multi-level year-long program. The year was initiated by the first year reading experience, in which first-year students came to campus having read Omnivores Dilemma, which explores the relationships among agriculture, farm policy, and human and environmental health. Early in the term, Joel Salatin, a strong advocate for agricultural reform described in the book, was brought to campus for an all-college lecture and a day visiting classes. The sustainability theme was further introduced at the beginning of the term with a “week of impact.” This began with “Food for Thought” Thursday featuring a lecture by Grand Rapids Mayor George Hartwell. “Fit and efficient” Friday featured a group walk through the community. “Community Service Saturday” involved College and Community members in a river cleanup. Sustainable Recreation Sunday encouraged canoeing, disk golf, bicycling and other healthful recreational activities available locally to our students. “Mindful Monday” was a group discussion of ideas for campus sustainability. “Conservation Tuesday” initiated a monthly film series with a screening of Food Inc., and “Waste-free Wednesday” made our annual Britton Bash, which highlights student organizations, a waste-free event.



These themes were carried on throughout the year. Other significant events included speakers John Ferris, project manager for Chevy Volt development, Annie Leonard, author of The Story of Stuff, Steven Solomon, author of Water: The Epic Struggle for Wealth, Power and Civilization, and Ann Pancake, author of Strange as this Weather Has Been and mountain top removal activist. Betsy Damon, environmental artist and founder of Keepers of the Waters, spent several weeks in residence as our visiting artist. Near the end of the year, we held a student poster session where individual students and classes presented projects and research related to sustainability.

Pre- and post-year surveys of students and of faculty/staff were conducted. About 150 for students and 100 for faculty/staff responded to each survey. These showed several positive signs. More people believed that individuals can reduce their environmental impact, that sustainability is a non-partisan issue, and felt they could explain sustainability and its significance at the end of the year. On open-ended questions we received a spectrum of responses, from accusations of liberal brainwashing to claims that the individual already knew most of what could have been learned. However, many students pointed to specific lectures that influenced them to take another class, change their thesis research or otherwise had a significant impact on their lives.

Challenges and Responses

The major challenge in developing this program was to create a comprehensive year-long campus-wide program without new funding. Buy-in from the administration, facilities, and interdisciplinary academic programs was excellent. Next time, we need to work harder to include residential life, campus programs, and student organizations.

Campus Climate Action: Your School's Carbon Footprint

The principle contribution of this project was education. Our efforts were aimed at raising the awareness of all of our students. As a signatory of the American College and University Presidents Climate Challenge, Albion had already conducted a carbon audit, and continued to do so through the year of sustainability. One of our events directly related to climate was a day of open classes, when faculty across campus devoted their class to a consideration of climate change in the context of their subject areas. These lectures and discussions were advertised across campus, and many classes were open to all comers. At the two “Green Day Sustainability Fairs”, students administered personal carbon audits to their peers, using a spreadsheet specific to life on our campus developed in our “Sustainable Living” seminar.

Commentary and Reflection

One of the major challenges we face in interdisciplinary education is getting students to carry ideas and information from one class to the next. By attempting to engage the students in a broad theme, both in and outside the classroom, we have made strides in this direction with the themed year program. Anecdotally, faculty teaching issues related to sustainability now hear students saying that they talked about the same issue in another class, commonly from another division of the College.



For others planning a similar event (and for ourselves as we are now entering into the planning for our second sustainability themed year) we have several pieces of advice. First, involve as many areas of the Institution as possible. We were fortunate to have full and enthusiastic support from Dining Services, Grounds and Facilities; next year we need to work to increase involvement by Residential Life, Campus Programs and Student Organizations. Second, consider the backlash. Our assessment showed a small but vocal minority of both students and staff who resented the attention focused on issues they saw as counter to their beliefs. While it is tempting to dismiss the opinions of climate change deniers, it is better to engage them in dialog. This can happen in classes and in post-lecture discussion groups. Finally, for those intimately involved in the program, the pace of the year is fast, invigorating, but also potentially exhausting. As a planner, your job is to construct a program and to work to maximize participation in all events. Do not feel that you have to participate in every event.

ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

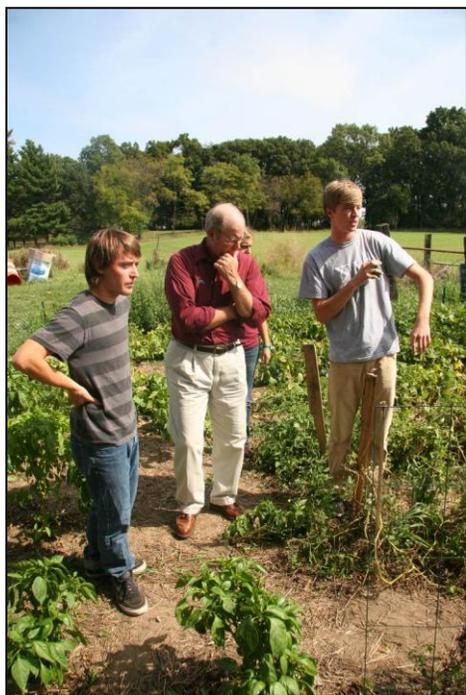
Leaders and Supporters

The program has full support of the College Administration, staff and faculty. Co-chairs of the planning committee, Dr. Doug White, Associate Director of our Center for Sustainability and the Environment and Mr. Todd Tekiele, Director of Dining services were appointed by our College President, Dr. Donna Randall. The planning committee included many heads of departments (facilities, grounds, student life)

as well as students and academic staff. This played an important role in realizing our “One College” theme.

Funding and Resources

The cost of the project depends on the means of accounting. The largest cost was external speakers. Most of these were slotted into endowed or regularly scheduled events, such as our opening convocation, first year reading experience lecture, and student research symposium speakers; thus there were no additional costs to the College for these events. Similarly, other branches of the College such as Food Services were able to offer their events within their regular budgets. The basic idea behind the themed year program is that by coordinating, focusing and openly discussing things we already do, we can have a larger impact with these things. In some ways, the notion that we are “one College” and that all of our actions can be turned to educational opportunities for our students is the most powerful concept in this program.



Education and Community Outreach

We made a conscious effort to involve the community, starting with the river cleanup during the week of impact. The community was invited to all lectures and played a major role in the success of the on-campus farmers market, one of our most popular events. In the summer following this year, several student/faculty projects involved developing gardens within the community.

National Wildlife Federation’s Campus Ecology Program

A few years prior our year of sustainability, two of our students completed National Wildlife Federation sponsored internships on campus. They completed our first carbon audit and played a significant role in developing our original carbon action plan. One of their projects consisted of starting a bicycle lending program, “Brit Bikes,” and this program has continued and expanded since the student who started it graduated. One of our assessment measures was an anticipated increased use of Brit Bikes following this year. We did document an increased use, but anecdotally noted that many of

the users were our international students, whose numbers on campus were increasing at this time. The enthusiasm of these interns and other students played a role in sustainability being selected as one of our themes.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL

Campus Sustainability History

Albion College has a continuing commitment to sustainability, expressed both in our curriculum and in our campus operations. We are signatory to the American College and University Presidents Climate Challenge, and tangibly have completed numerous electrical and HVAC upgrades to decrease our carbon footprint. Our four-building science complex construction & renovation project was awarded LEED silver

certification in 2007. As part of our graduation requirement all students must complete an environmental category course that describes significant elements of the environment and human interactions with the environment. Through our Center for Sustainability and the Environment, we offer majors in Environmental Science, Environmental Studies and, collaboratively with the University of Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines (France), Sustainability Studies. Additionally we offer Environmental Science and Environmental Studies concentrations to enhance any of the traditional liberal arts majors offered on campus. The center's website is <http://www.albion.edu/environment/>

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