

ENVIRONMENTALLY SPEAKING Peter Schwartzman**The ivory tower is turning green**

Green seems to be a popular color right now. In fact, upon reflection, it has been popular for quite a while. However, the meaning of "green" has shifted. Over the past many decades, "green" has been associated with money and making lots of it. Now, "green" is generally understood as related to or beneficial for the environment. "Going green" represents shifting away from the almost exclusive focus on economic considerations when making decisions (such as, the building of interstate highways and the erecting of coal-fired electrical plants) to one where environmental health and vitality has immense value. Yet, "going green" need not mean that economic concerns are irrelevant. In fact, doing the "green" thing also turns out to be the economically preferred choice as well, especially when true costs and benefits are measured. Making the "best" environmental choice often requires that we consider many options and be prepared to do something a little different—both undertakings characteristic of leaders (not followers). And where might we find evidence of leadership in this shift to more responsible ways of living? Believe it or not, many colleges and universities are accepting this responsibility and building sustainable pathways for others to venture.

Colleges and universities are large enterprises, often serving thousands (even tens of thousands) of students and employing many people in a variety of sectors (academia, food, housing, health, etc.). As such, their budgets can be enormous. Their energy use and consumption of resources can also be very sizable. And given the magnitude of their energy and resource requirements, institutions of higher learning have a great opportunity to serve as leaders in the shift to greener, healthier, and sustainable ways of living. Fortunately, some are recognizing this and making the shift.

Less than two weeks ago, I was very fortunate to accompany sixteen former and current Knox College students to a conference held at Luther College (in NE Iowa) on the topic of Campus Sustainability. We left at 7:30 Friday morning and didn't return to campus until 10 PM Saturday night. This ~38 hour trip northward ended up being a profound experience for the Knox contingent, including me. Not only was I energized by the positive energy that the speakers and presenters exuded, I was blown away at all the projects and plans that have been completed (or are underway) at schools throughout the Midwest. Let me share some of the more inspiring examples of what I discovered:

- Students at Macalaster College (in St. Paul, MN) and Luther College have both begun an assessment of the amount of greenhouse gases that their institutions produce. Albeit somewhat complicated, this work, which sets a baseline, is an absolute prerequisite before any attempts to make reductions can be appreciated. Early results from their studies have been informative and sometimes surprising. Both schools determined that their direct energy use (for heating/cooling and electrical needs) accounted for over 80% of their greenhouse contribution. One school found that students studying abroad accounted for nearly 15% of their total emissions (due to the immense volumes of gasoline burned during airplane flights); interestingly, the school decided not to count this portion to their college's total arguing that since the students were studying elsewhere, it could be ignored.

- Two schools in Minnesota (Carleton and University of Minnesota-Morris) have actually put up wind turbines within two

miles of their campuses. Each turbine uses advanced technology to harness the winds and at Morris the turbine now provides a significant percentage of their total energy needs. You might think the Morris campus would be satisfied at being one of the few schools in the country now getting direct energy from wind (no "middle men" are involved; alternatively, Carleton negotiated a contract with the local energy provider). No way. They are planning to put up a second one very soon and even talking about a third turbine which they may split costs (and benefits) with a local Native American community. Significantly, both schools emphasized that national grants and tax breaks made it possible for them to consider wind as an option. Unfortunately, many of these government programs are being phased out, which will only make it harder for other schools to take this grand step towards renewable energy and energy self-sufficiency.

- Another Macalaster student at the conference talked at length about an eco-house that he and other students designed; we actually have an ecohouse at Knox, albeit one in earlier stages of development. Given only \$50,000 to work with, these students took a local residential house and converted it into something certainly futuristic. Changes included: blown-in cellulose insulation; installation of a solar hot water heater; a steel roof (that will last for 50+ years); a native and edible plant landscape; and, a large worm compost (vermiculture). They also expanded countertop space several-fold making the student occupants much more likely to cook their own meals (something they felt was not only in their best interest for financial reasons but also a valuable contributor to improved health—an environmental benefit often marginalized.)

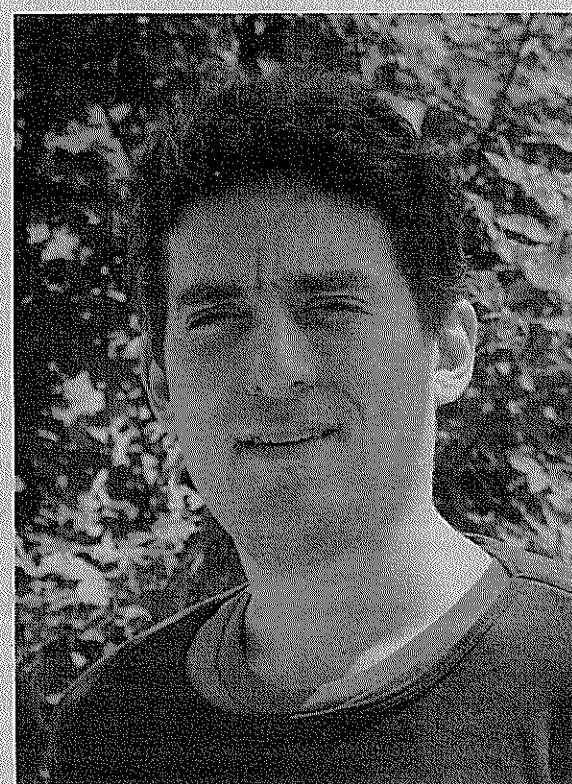
- As is true at many environmental conferences, entrepreneurs were in attendance looking to promote their products. One of the most interesting one of these came from the company ecoenvelopes. Every envelope they make can be used at least twice and is completely recyclable. This not only saves on paper (and, thus, deforestation and bleaching agents as well) but also on postage (since the envelope doesn't need to include a return envelope inside of it). You have to see this to believe it, and you can at: www.ecoenvelopes.com.

- Lastly, John Turenne, founder and president of Sustainable Foods Systems, LLC, and former executive chef at Yale University, gave an incredibly informative and motivational keynote presentation about foods on college campuses. Long trained in "mainstream" food service, which puts quantity and diversity well above concerns about quality (in taste, nutrition, and environmental impact), John recognized the need to revolutionize the college food service industry when he began to look at food as a system. He realized that organic and seasonal foods can be less expensive than alternative foods (such as corn in February), and, more importantly, they always taste so much better (not to mention their superior nutritional quality as well). Once he started serving this higher quality food (in one of fourteen cafeterias at Yale), students began to create fake IDs just so that they could get access to some of it (cafeterias were available to students based on where they were living). At this point, John realized that he was on to something really profound. He started working with local farmers and found out that good, nutritious, and locally produced food made his clients happier, healthier, and more respectful of their surroundings. That is a

triple play: Win-Win-Win!

Personally, I was only able to attend five of the concurrent sessions. (Amazingly, there were thirty such sessions during the two day conference.) I heard many spectacular things from other conference goers (which had about 200 total attendees), so my list is far from comprehensive. I look forward to going to next year's conference, hopefully with some "bragging rights" based on things we are doing at Knox.

As you can probably tell, this wasn't just any other conference. I came back very inspired to continue the work that Knox College has started in this area. Though not covered in the local press, Knox has taken several major steps recently on the path towards sustainability. In the past few years, Knox has upgraded its heating and cooling infrastructure (to the tune of several million dollars) and has also changed hundreds of light bulbs to more efficient fluorescents. In 2007, President Roger Taylor added sustainability language to the college's strategic plan and brought in a leader in the Higher Ed sustainability arena to speak to the campus in Fall 2007. These actions seemed to catapult the students into organizing themselves around this issue. First the student senate formed a subgroup on sustainability. Next, the student senate voted in a Green Fee for all students—\$5 per trimester—which will go into a Green Fund from which students (individually or in groups) can draw to support/implement sustainability actions on campus; the fund goes into effect next academic year. Not to be outdone, President Taylor formed a Task Force on Sustainability early in 2008. Since its formation, more than ten students, faculty, and staff convene almost every week at 8 AM not only to bring in a new day but to discuss the future of sustainability at the college. I think Knox College has taken some



big steps and I hope we continue to consider actions/changes that are in keeping with a sustainable future. Lastly, I want to thank President Taylor for providing the bulk of the monetary resources necessary for all of us to go to the conference in the first place. It will be an experience I (and others) won't soon forget.

Peter Schwartzman (email: wordnerdauthor@gmail.com) is associate professor and chair of the Environmental Studies Program at Knox College. Father to two amazing girls, Peter hopes that their lives will be lived on a cleaner, more just, more environmentally-aware planet. A nationally-ranked Scrabble® junkie, he is also the founder and maintainer of websites dedicated to peace and environmental well-being (www.onehuman.org & www.blackthornhill.org) as well as cofounder of The Center (thecenteringalesburg.org).

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