

# Environmental Issues

Environmental Studies Program

Denison University

Volume 7, Issue 2

April 2008

## Focus the Nation focuses Denison on global warming

Global warming exists, there is something that we can do about it, and it is not an environmental problem; it is a global problem.

Nan Jenks-Jay, dean of environmental affairs at Middlebury College in Vermont, delivered that message to a crowd at Denison during the first-ever Focus the Nation Day, which our campus celebrated on Jan. 30 and Jan. 31. The event raised awareness all around the United States about global warming and changes that individuals and institutions can make to counteract its most devastating effects.

Jenks-Jay and a panel of Denison faculty spoke about campus and international problems and solutions. The faculty members included Tod Frolking (geosciences), Rebecca Homan, (biology), Quentin Duroy (economics), Jim Pletcher (political science), and Steve Vogel (philosophy).

Jenks-Jay gave her perspective as an insider who helped make Middlebury more sustainable .

“Change comes from the edges,” she said, as quoted in a Jan. 31 Granville Sentinel article. “Everyone in the audience can have an impact.”

Addressing global warming as a national problem, Pletcher said it is harder to combat than other crises because the steps taken to reduce carbon emissions don’t produce quick results.

### Students, faculty and staff organize

In addition to the panel discussion, Focus the Nation featured special faculty courses on global warming, a “Warm Coming Parade,” and a green dinner in the dining halls.

The planning committee, co-directed by Envi-

ronmental Studies Program Manager Jordan Mora and Andy McCall, assistant professor of biology, consisted of several faculty and students.

Professors opened their classes to the public, and molded them to concentrate on a specific aspect of global warming.

McCall taught a class on “Species Range Shifts and Disease in Response to Global Climate Change.” Annabel Edwards, assistant professor of chemistry, had her class learn about “Ice Core Data: Atmospheric CO2 Concentrations and Temperature.”

### Activists go all out

The “Warm Coming Parade” was a culmination of the planning committee’s efforts. A plethora of student organi-

zations participated with floats and banners that had messages about global warming in the march around Academic Quad on Jan. 31.

The group’s creations were judged by a group of faculty and three were awarded prizes. The Denison Chemical Society was awarded “most relevant to global warming” for their Magic School Bus that had a hose to cool down a flaming earth with dry ice. DURP was deemed “most sustainable” for wheeling around two recycling receptacles with a banner taped to them (even though the banner ripped in half during the march). And a band of Newark residents and junior Lalita Williams were awarded “most creative” for making the parade a presence on campus.

Wrapping up Focus the Nation was a special green dinner provided by Dining Services that had a greater number of vegetarian options and information posted about recycling and sustainability efforts in the dining halls.

- Jeff Green (’08)



“Warm Coming Parade”- Focus the Nation 2008

## Denison earns a “D” for sustainability from endowment institute

In the 2008 College Sustainability Report Card released by the Sustainable Endowments Institute, Denison University was given a ‘D’ for its level of sustainability. This was lower than most of the other schools surveyed, 73% of which got C grades or higher.

In comparison, Oberlin College got a B+ and Ohio State University and Miami University got a C+. The universities with A grades included Harvard University, Middlebury College, University of Vermont, University of Washington and Carleton College.

The annual Report Card surveyed 200 universities across North America with the highest endowments, and gave them grades based on the level of sustainability of their campus operations and endowment investments.

The survey was carried out by the Sustainable Endowments Institute, a non-profit organization funded by the Rockefeller foundation which researches and promotes campus and endowment sustainability.

The aim of the report card, according to the organization, is to encourage institutions to make sustainability a priority and learn from one another by conducting annual evaluations of their practices and ultimately, to challenge universities to create change both within themselves as institutions and around them.

Collecting data from the universities’ publicly-available information as well as through surveys of faculty and students, the Endowment Institute gives universities points based on their performances and practices in eight areas: Administration, Climate Change and Energy, Food and Recycling, Green Building, Transportation, Endowment Transparency (how a college shares information about endowment investments), Investment Priorities (how committed schools were in investing in renewable energy, com-

munity development and optimizing investment returns) and Shareholder Engagement (how engaged colleges were in discussing and promoting sustainable investments).

It found that many schools were taking significant steps towards improving sustainability: 45% of the universities surveyed had taken steps towards cutting carbon emissions, while more than a third of the schools had full-time campus sustainability administrators.

Denison scored especially low on Shareholder Engagement and Endowment Transparency, receiving F grades for both, though this was largely due to the lack of accessible information.

The survey recognized Denison’s recent efforts to bring in organic milk, the actions of Denison’s Green Team as well as the Barney-Davis Hall green renovation resulting in C grades in the areas of Climate Change and Energy, Food and Recycling.

However, the fact that Denison still scored significantly lower than other schools in all the areas shows that there is still a lot Denison has to do and learn from other institutions to improve its sustainability.

To quote the end of the Report Card, “...maintaining the status quo is a choice....a choice that has repercussions on the sustainability of both the endowment and the overall economy.” Let us hope that Denison steps up to the plate in the near future and takes an active role in making its practices more sustainable.

To download the entire report and learn more about the Endowment Institute, go to <http://www.endowmentinstitute.org/sustainability>.

- Stephanie Chan (‘09)

## Denison forms environmental task force assessing campus sustainability

Denison formed an environmental task force this semester to address environmental and sustainability issues within the governance system.

The task force is a temporary group comprised of 8 members, two university students, two professors, one supporting staff member, the vice president of finance and management and the director of facility services. Its goal: to determine a permanent body in the university that will decide on environmental issues. Its deadline: the last day of this semester.

“We were charged with coming up with a permanent structure, who should be on it, [and] what its job should be,”

said Abram Kaplan, associate professor of environmental studies and task force member. “If we arrive at that, we’ll be pretty darn proud of ourselves.”

Tom Schultz, professor of biology and the chair of the task force, said that in its meetings so far, the group has unanimously decided to propose the creation of an environmental council, which is like a committee but would advise directly to the president instead of going through other bodies such as University Council.

“If you have issues of sustainability, you don’t want to be bogged down with bureaucracy,” Schultz said. “Also, University Council does not deal with sustainability issues;

they are primarily a body of teaching faculty. We in a sense wanted to be able to work independently.”

Kaplan said that the task force is currently deciding what the council’s mission would be and what areas it would govern. He said their proposal will likely include the creation of a sustainability coordinator, who would help manage the council’s policies.

Junior Meredith Atwood, a student representative on the task force, said they have divided up certain areas, such as buildings and grounds, dining, energy and water, and waste management. A sustainability coordinator would manage the different areas, assess them with annual reports, and advise departments and offices on campus, she said.

Schultz and Kaplan said that the members work well together and get a lot accomplished despite their differing political standpoints.

“You can go into a committee setting like this with a lot of rancor and finger-pointing,” Kaplan said. “We have healthy dialogue and good recommendations coming from this group.”

**How it all started**

The decisions leading up to the formation of the task force stemmed from Lizzy Zultoski ’07, who proposed to the Finance Committee that the university purchase carbon credits and offset campus emissions.

The Finance Committee declined this suggestion on grounds that it would be too expensive, but instead decided that the university create a standing environmental committee to address such issues in the future. But the faculty rejected the creation of a committee last winter, and the proposal was amended to create the existing task force.

As of now, Denison has no formal environmental policies or committees.

**Moving along**

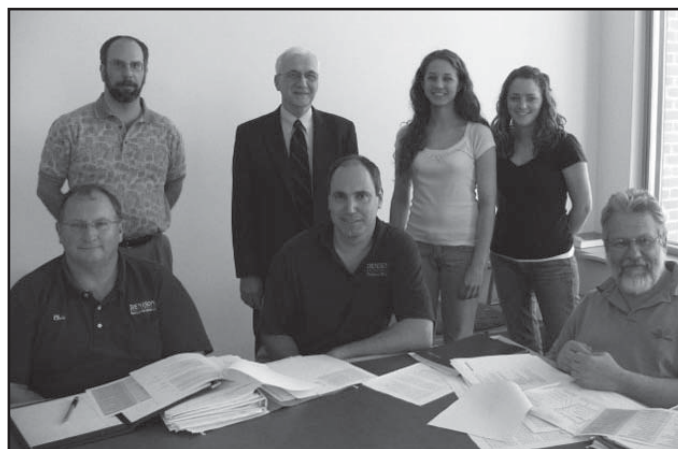
Atwood is satisfied with the task force’s proposals so far, but she says there is always more that can be done.

“It’s a step in the right direction,” Atwood said.

She would prefer to have the university adopt more comprehensive plans.

“I personally would like to see policies everyone would have to follow, instead of every department deciding for themselves,” Atwood said. “Not just idealistic principles, but actual policies, such as green building and energy policies.”

Kaplan said that University Council will review the



**Front row, left to right: Chris Hardy, Art Chonko, Tom Schultz. Back row, left to right: Abram Kaplan, Seth Patton, Sarah Granneman, and Meredith Atwood.**

environmental task force’s report, and the very earliest the faculty could vote on it would be when they meet in October this year. Whatever permanent body they propose would then be formed at the very earliest in winter 2009.

“We don’t want to wait forever by any means,” Kaplan said. “I just don’t want us to do anything foolish or rash we would regret later.”

He said they are attempting to strike a balance between cautiousness and timeliness.

“If we were to come out of this task force and say ‘Denison should be climate neutral by 2015’, we’d have to shut down the heating plant pretty quickly,” Kaplan said. “And I’d be thrilled if we shut down the heating plant, but that’s not realistic.”

- Jeff Green (‘08)

**Environmental Task Force Members:**

- Art Chonko, Director of Facilities Services
- Seth Patton, Vice President of Finance and Management

**Faculty Representatives:**

- Tom Schultz, Professor of Biology (Task Force Chair)
  - Abram Kaplan, Professor of Environmental Studies
- Staff Representative:**
- Chris Hardy, Building Services Assistant

**Student Representatives:**

- Meredith Atwood ‘09, Environmental Studies
- Sarah Granneman ‘08, Geosciences

## Alumni Spotlight: David Strong '06



**David Strong '06, Environmental Scientist (ENVS Fellows Picture 2006).**

David Strong, a graduate of the Environmental Studies Program in 2006, returned to Denison in the fall to speak with Dr. Doug Spieles' Wetland Ecology class. David is currently an Environmental Scientist working with M.A.D., Scientist & Associates LLC in Westerville, Ohio. M.A.D. does contract work in ecological surveying, risk assessment, and other wetland consulting in central Ohio. The company consists of only 4 people. David has been working with them since graduating from Denison in 2006.

Specifically, David has been working on wetland delineations, monitoring wetland mitigation sites, and doing some environmental education. One of the things he likes best about his job is that he gets to see so many natural areas around Ohio.

David has witnessed the effects of human development on wetlands, and the fragility of these ecosystems has become very obvious to him.

After speaking about his work to the wetland class, student Simonne Benoit ('08) commented, "I thought David's visit really showed the class the practical applications of what we were learning...we used some of the same assessment

techniques in lab that he uses for consulting."

David just recently married Carlyn Love ('05 Denison graduate) and together they bought a house and have a new puppy. They enjoy gardening and using other tools to live lightly on the land that they learned through living at the Homestead while at Denison. David's goals for the near future are to continue to have fun - he is not yet ready to grow up!

-Amy Cahill ('08)

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