

Sustainability Teach-In

Thursday, February 11, 2010

Address to Connecticut College Students, Faculty and Staff Launch of Collegewide Sustainability Initiative

I am pleased to welcome you all here today to help the College launch a new environmental sustainability initiative. Hopefully, many of you have already reviewed the Environmental Sustainability Baseline Assessment available on CamelWeb, and you have seen that we have much to be proud of. We are already operating in many ways that connect sustainability to our educational mission.

Let me mention just a few points of pride: For example, the College's land conservation efforts – did you know, for instance, that only 8 percent of colleges manage more than 70 percent of their land for conservation, and Connecticut College is in that small, elite group? In fact, with the leadership of the Arboretum, 75 percent of our land is managed for conservation. We are also very strong in recycling and, through our strict policies for managing athletic fields, we are using less water for irrigation than most of our peer schools. The assessment also notes that we were doing carbon offsets before almost anyone else – and we were among the first to have environmental studies as an academic discipline. And of course our Goodwin-Niering Center for the Environment is a nationally recognized leader in interdisciplinary approaches to environmental issues.

I would like to stop here and recognize the work of faculty and staff from a wide range of departments that incorporate sustainability issues into the educational program and the life of the College. This baseline assessment would not have been possible without the leadership of Candace Howes and Gerald Visgilio and the tireless efforts of the Environmental Model Committee. I am also proud of the leadership role that our students have played in this area. As advocates for environmental stewardship and sustainability, you are living up to the mission of the College – you are truly putting the liberal arts into action.

So today is, in one way, a milestone in the history of Connecticut College, and a celebration of achievement. But at the same time, it won't surprise any of you to know that there is even more hard work ahead of us. As you all know, we are operating now in what is arguably the most difficult economic environment in the history of the College. I am proud to say that the College continues to be extremely successful – as we have seen in this year's 12 percent increase in applications, a new record. At the same time, the College has many pressing needs, and we face

many challenges. So, as we move forward, we will need to balance investments in sustainability against other critically important needs of the College.

Even within the sustainability initiative, as this report shows, there are many competing priorities, from curriculum development to greenhouse gas emissions, energy use and waste management. Going forward, we must manage expenses and make decisions that are thoughtful and purposeful, and that make good business sense for the future of this institution. We cannot do everything as it relates to sustainability. We have to prioritize. And we should always be asking ourselves how our environmental priorities connect to the College's core educational mission, how we can assess competing sustainability priorities and which priorities will have the greatest impact?

For example, there is a strong recommendation for an energy conservation study. I am happy to announce that we are in the process of selecting a firm to partner with on this study. This type of study would provide recommendations for reducing energy use while also providing realistic estimates of what investments will be required to achieve those reductions and what savings can be recouped over time. This is the kind of work we need to be able to make informed decisions about how to move forward in conserving energy.

I am happy to announce that the energy conservation study process will be overseen by Vice President Ulysses Hammond and the newly appointed Sustainability Steering Committee. This committee – chaired by Dean of the Faculty Roger Brooks – will work closely with the well-established EMC and will include the chair of the EMC, Professor Jane Dawson, in its membership. Today's teach-in is one of the first of what will be many collaborative efforts between the new committee and the EMC.

I am charging the Sustainability Steering Committee with developing a long-term, comprehensive strategic plan with a list of priorities. This committee will be the go-to place for all sustainability initiatives and will make recommendations based on the College's long-term strategic plan.

During today's teach-in, you will be looking more closely at the various components of the baseline sustainability report. As you do that, I hope you will also be thinking about two important questions: how we will define sustainability for Connecticut College and how we can best prioritize our sustainability initiatives. These are hard questions, challenging questions, but seeing you all here today, eager to help, I am encouraged that we will find answers, good answers. I look forward to hearing your ideas and recommendations for moving this College forward in this critical area.