

Offices of the President, Dean of Faculty, and Dean of Students
Amherst College

Dear President Marx and Deans Call and Lieber:

When my classmates and I arrived on campus in the fall of 2005, President Marx told us at Convocation, "Amherst College must be an exemplar of how a community cares for itself, and of how we learn from and treat each other fairly." It is time to update the model. We need a sustainability office.

As you know, Amherst has embraced environmental sustainability in its core values. Our administration has taken strong measures to enact sustainable practices on campus. The recent fruition of the efforts to create the Environmental Studies major is a testament to this commitment. In the Facilities Department, there is much to be proud of. The work of Todd Holland, the Five College Energy Manager, generates significant savings (in both monetary and carbon terms). The recycling program spearheaded by Roger Guzowski and Paul Thornton is exemplary. Our Dining Services' commitment to using some local food is commendable. In addition, energy-saving competitions and academic panels also demonstrate this institutional commitment. However, this top-down effort is not being met by individual changes. Despite high volume of recycling, we have made almost no progress in reducing unnecessary consumption, because there is no effort to integrate personal sustainability with institutional sustainability.

In addition, a growing number of students are actively engaged with sustainability advocacy, but often we are unaware of the past and ongoing initiatives on our campus, or how they could dovetail with our goals. Unfortunately, we have found – as Vickie Fang, another student in the Green Amherst Project, told me – "a million hoops" to jump through before finding the right way to pursue a change.

This has led to apathy. Many students see the college's approach as detached from them – something unapproachable that they cannot change. Not only does this sentiment fail to engage students with our own campus surroundings, but it also engenders a dangerous lack of active citizenship. In order to make environmental sustainability a long-term goal, Amherst needs a directed way to enact student and department plans, follow up on them, and collaborate across institutional boundaries. Further, we are missing many opportunities for co-curricular activities in sustainability and education.

The solution seems clear, after a discussion with interested parties. Amherst needs a Sustainability Team to coordinate its initiatives and to work as a liaison between students, administration, and various departments. Smith, Mount Holyoke, Tufts, Middlebury, Bates, Bowdoin, Williams, and Connecticut College have dedicated sustainability or environmental offices; Colby, Wesleyan, and Trinity have committees that meet regularly and employ student interns. These schools eclipse Amherst in working toward sustainability, as evidence

in waste reduction shows. I feel that Amherst would be best served by a unified Office of Sustainability Initiatives, which would advise departments, liaise with student groups, and collaborate with Facilities.

Amherst's budget is surely constrained right now, but there are less-costly ways to move toward this solution. A temporary, one- or two-year graduate position ("Green Dean") could facilitate the formation of a Sustainability Advisory Committee, composed of staff, faculty, and students, which would meet regularly to discuss and implement plans. Other responsibilities would be to prepare departmental plans for sustainability, create a better mechanism for student engagement, increase awareness of existing programs, and eventually submit a recommendation for the direction of Amherst's commitment to sustainability.

Members of the Green Amherst Project spoke with several trustees about this idea last fall and were met with encouragement and enthusiasm. In addition, the communication I have had with Roger Guzowski suggests there are alumni interested in furthering this effort at Amherst.

Students surely will understand that this plan will face budgetary hurdles. But it needs to be a priority, and we should work to find a budget where it can fit, especially given that such an office could generate savings for other departments. Amherst cannot reach its sustainability goals via the existing piecemeal approach. I urge a concentrated, centralized approach with designated staff. Please help me, and the Green Amherst Project, to pursue this goal.

Sincerely,

Jeff Gang '09
The Green Amherst Project

Enclosure: Sample Job Description

Envisioned job responsibilities for post-graduate position:

- Work with Facilities Department to research and implement energy-saving solutions, both technological and behavioral.
- Collaborate with student groups to create awareness for campaigns both on campus and regional/national
- Serve as liaison between students and Amherst administration, helping to put ideas into action
- Work with RCs, Residential Life, and EcoReps to design and implement dormitory efficiency projects and voluntary awareness programs.
- During First-Year Orientation and Interterm, actively recruit and conduct awareness campaigns.
- Represent Amherst's sustainability efforts to the public, with Public Affairs.
- Work with Dining Services to actively pursue institutional change and encourage student cooperation.
- Collaborate with academic departments to determine individual sustainability plans.
- Research other colleges' approaches and write recommendation for Amherst's long-term solutions.