



Serving the Campus Sustainability Community

Application for AASHE Student Sustainability Leadership Award

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My approach to sustainability is a bit... old. Sustainable development requires a shift in thinking from "progress" to "sustenance" – fixing what's broken, not just creating anew. When I came to IC in 2005, sustainability was already here. I've avoided "green initiatives," "new committees," and "sustainability events," because what our community needs has never been initiatives or organizations- we have plenty! We've needed more student and faculty engagement with the already impressive sustainability initiatives on campus, educational tools which could be reused year after year, and better utilization of the many green resources in Tompkins County. These are the three ways I have improved sustainability efforts at IC, using topics ranging from the well-known local food movement to the lesser-discussed 'sustainable menstruation!' I have approached each of my contributions not as an innovator, or groundbreaker, but a *connector*: of students, faculty, and staff, to resources, information, events, and the local community.

Where to begin? The witty "*Be Sustainable. Or Die.*" campaign? The overwhelming request to design a course on ecofeminism? What about those hours spent creating a tight-knit community in the Sustainably Conscious Living Dorm? Freshman year I was a member of a group which began the local-foods section of our dining hall, and also designed a series of educational newsletters about a proposed wind-turbine on campus. The next year, I was recruited for the position of Sustainability Intern. Having heard my first year at IC students voice their frustrations in finding information about Ithaca's sustainability initiatives for courses, projects, and campus-improvement campaigns. Too many individual and organizations were re-creating projects already completed, or working blindly on the same initiative. So my first connection as Sustainability Intern was student → student → internet → information, by creating an online resource repertoire which brought sustainability events, course-related articles, and institutional contacts within reach of the student population. For the "CHASE" Program (Combing Higher And Sustainable Education) I created a suite of multi-interfaced online calendars, and posted all sustainability-related events on campus and in the town of Ithaca¹.

I also wrote and developed a website treatment for a student-centered web-portal, complete with a "green avatar" whose name is, obviously, 'Chase,' (actual development taking place this August), and made *myself* a key resource by opening a 24hr instant messenger name "icsustainability" and sending out a campus-wide email with my contact information explaining how I could be used as a student resource. Encouraged by success with the AIM service (Should I recycle condoms? is to this day my favorite question), and wishing to expand student engagement with some of the many resources offered at nearby Cornell University and downtown Ithaca, I opened a shared blog at sustainithaca.org that any campus or community member could use to share ideas, resources, and events. As a result of these efforts, student attendance at campus events, speakers, and even enrollment in sustainability courses, slowly increased, and I was glad to see some new faces at some of the many creative events held every week.

Through my position as Sustainability Intern, I also convinced the Department of Residential Life (ResLife) to require mandatory sustainability training for all 103 Resident Assistants and 9 Resident Directors on campus. I then designed and held these trainings, which covered: 1) creating

¹ You can access one format using Google Calendars by searching for "Sustainability: Ithaca, NY" in any Gmail account

community rules which encourage water and energy conservation, 2) how to minimize disposable waste during programs, and 3) options for local environmental field trips. Soon after I applied for the position of [Resource and Environmental Management Program \(REMP\)](#) Student Coordinator. With both positions in tow, I went on to design and put on 12 different residential-hall programs with topics ranging from “The Long-term Viability of Snowboarding” to “Cubas Peak Oil.” These programs include bulletin boards, PowerPoints or lecture notes, and a guide for other RAs or future REMP coordinators on how to present the lectures themselves. In fact, the following year several RAs requested to host their programs themselves- with great success!

I already had experience with residential programs in my tenure as Resident Assistant of the Sustainably Conscious Living Community (SCLC). I entered SCLC in its third year, and realized that without better integration of residents and programming, and a recruitment campaign to attract new students, the program was in danger of failing. I began a weekly tradition of cooking farmers-market-bought, vegetarian/vegan dinners “community dinners” (cooking, and cleaning reusable dishes, with 45 students, is quite an exercise in cooperative living!), furthering the IC Dining Service commitment to “Sustainable, Healthy, Fresh,” foods on campus. I also designed and promoted an SCLC website through WebCT, which kept all IC residents up to date on the buildings activities and programs, so anyone on campus could participate. Soon our field trips to the local EcoVillage, “sustainable snowperson contests,” and social sustainability web art project were the talk of the campus. I created committees within the dorm which allowed students to share responsibility for tabling, providing web announcements, and creating a flyer-campaigns to increase enrollment in next years program.

This year, we had over 140 applications from returning students alone (as compared to 12 the year before, and 10 the year before that!) Encouraged, I contacted ResLife about expanding the program, and they have agreed to help SCLC grow over the next three years. They will be retrofitting two new dorms with energy efficient lighting, water saving measures, in-house composting, creating a small, shared organic garden, and building community dining space. A group of upperclass students who had lived in SCLC approached me this summer about creating an apartment style² sustainable living option. They designed the house rules (recycle electronics, buy only 100% recycled class materials, etc...), and I acquired funding to retrofit their apartment with EnergyStar appliances, water saving devices, and a porch garden for growing organic produce. Their program- *The GreenHouse*- will begin in 2008.

As my senior year approached I realized I could no longer work as an RA, but still wanted to engage students with community and campus resources on the personal level allowed by dorm-life. With the permission and funding of the REMP Coordinator Mark Darling, this summer I have developed a new “JumpStart” program entitled [Sustainable Community Challenges](#). First-year students have always had the option to move in early and participate in community service, camping, or leadership activities- I simply added a sustainability option. We already have a full roster, and I have organized a biodiesel bus trip around Cayuga Lake which includes an organic grape-juice tasting (courtesy of Finger Lakes wineries), tour of the Lake Source Cooling Facility, stops at the [Haudenosaunee SHARE Farm](#) which is working to reclaim land to its native ecological and cultural state, at the [Montezuma Wetlands preserve](#), and an evening of cooking a local-foods at [Ithaca EcoVillage](#) with community members who volunteered to talk to the students about their alternative living style. By working with the JumpStart committee this year, I have also convinced them to change their ‘give-away’ from t-shirts to reusable lunch bags (which will be used to carry meals instead of plastic packaging in the past!), and incorporate more local foods in the program’s meal options.

For my efforts on campus, I have been awarded the *Peggy R. Williams Award for Academic and Community Leadership* (Spring 2008), and the *Class of 2006 Leadership and Involvement Scholarship* (Fall 2008). My major’s department- Strategic Communication- created an award in my honor called *The Brylinsky Sustainable Life Award* (Spring 2008) in honor of my willingness to go above and beyond course assignments to incorporate the greater IC community for sustainability. Outside of IC but within the realm of higher education, I was awarded the *High Concept Award* for my business plan to increase alternative transportation use on campus, at the oikos Business &

² Ithaca College has upperclassmen living options in the form of small individual apartments which are separate from dormitory housing but still considered and maintained as on-campus housing.

Sustainability Conference (Winter 2007). And on a lighter note, our school newspaper presented me with an award at the end of my Junior year (2007/2008) for breaking the record for the most times a single student had appeared in the paper in one year – all but one issue!

I was also the first undergraduate to apply for and receive the Ithaca College and EcoVillage Summer Institute *Development for Sustainable Curriculum Grant* (Summer 2007), with which I created the college's Park School of Communications course on sustainability: a 300 level elective on *Strategic Sustainability in Communication*. The course will be taught Fall 2008 by my project mentor, Dr. Cory Young. I also traveled as a research assistant to the Fundacion Maquipucuna in Ecuador and designed a study-abroad exchange program between the cloud-rainforest protection NGO and Ithaca College which is being reviewed by both institutions at this time. After this course was approved by my department, I received an offer to help develop the college's first course combining women's studies and environmental issues: *Ecofeminism: Violent Progress and Ecological Beginnings*, a 400 level sociology seminar. Exploring the contemporary connections between progress and development, military occupation, and women's issues, the course will be taught in Spring 2009 by the Chair of the Sociology Department, Dr. Judith Barker.

This course was a manifestation of my resolve to connect feminist and environmental interests on campus. As President of the IC Environmental Society (ICES) and President of the IC Feminists, I organized the *Natural Beauty Campaign*, a media-seminar held during EarthWeek 2008 which featured a minerals specialist discussing toxins and chemical compounds in mainstream medicine, free "alternative" beauty product sampling through collaboration with the local Greenstar Co-Op, and screenings of commercials and pop culture film snippets which provided a foundation for the question: how is this unhealthy for our bodies, our body-image, and our world? By the way, do you know what's in a tampon? Aluminum, alcohol, fragrance, hydrocarbons, and *dioxin*. This was the topic of the 3rd annual Sustainable Menstruation Fair, part of another collaboration between environmental and feminist organizations on campus. Merging themes such as alternative menstrual products, toxicity in tampons/pads, bleach and dioxin levels, landfill waste, consumption marketing by the media, and popular conceptions of what constitutes a life-sustaining act, or a dirty, disposable secret. The day-long event, complete with free give-aways sponsored by Greenstar, "pin the egg on the ovaries," and lectures by professors, led to connection between Ithaca College and the local community, as another student and I were asked to teach a FreeSkool course on Sustainable Menstruation. I have taught this class to a full-course twice, and given a powerpoint presentation on the topic for a seminar series, "The Sustainability Café" at IC, and for a junior-level health course.

Sustainability the acknowledgment of connectiveness. Learning to reconnect to nature, to connect with our own needs in order to avoid wasteful consumer impulses. Connecting economic and social priorities to environmental ones. Connecting the classroom to the physical campus. As a student connector for sustainability at Ithaca College, I hope to have strengthened the already steady web of sustainable activities between students, staff, faculty, and administration. With tools such as the CHASE suite, SCLC website, wind-turbine materials, RA training and residential programs, future Ithaca leaders will be a step ahead in engaging their peers. With a higher percentage of the campus engaged and informed about existing initiatives on campus, more people can use sustainithaca.org, the new student sustainability website, and I hope creative and beneficial alliances such as that between IC Feminists and ICES continue to arise. And having reinforced connections with our surrounding community through the Jumpstart Program, EcoVillage field trips, farmers-market food dinners, I know IC can continue to invest as much into Tompkins County as this wonderful region provides for us. I have one year left here at Ithaca, with projects in the works to revitalize the once-existing bike-share program, send 25 presenters to the AASHE conference, increase student enrollment in IthacaCarshare, and provide compost-bins to every department on campus. These are just some of the projects I have underway, but surprising connections in the realm of sustainable development are always underfoot - who knows what will come up by November?