

EnviroAlums (E )  
Steering Committee Meeting  
17 September 2004  
Lewis Center, Oberlin  
9:00 AM - 1:30 PM

Present: Susan Bernat, Carl McDaniel, Robert Stenger. Guests: David Benzing, Karen Florini, Bonnie Lancraft, David Orr.

Absent: Michael Bobker, Rachel Cohn, Erik Jansson, Mira Inbar, Claire Jahns, Rosalyn Johnson, Michael Lythcott, Julie Maxson, Michael Murray, John Petersen, Peter Racher, Paul Treuhaft, Pat Tarnow.

Appointment of Steering Committee members (term: 9/2005-9/2008): Gibert Lewis, Carl McDaniel, John Petersen, Naomi Sabel, John Schaefer, Robert Stenger, Bonnie Yelverton.

Election of chair and vice-chair: Carl McDaniel and Susan Bernat accepted positions of chair and vice-chair, respectively, for one year terms. Susan subsequently elected to remain on SC, but not serve as vice-chair.

David Benzing's perspective on Environmental Policy (EP): David Benzing has been a member of the Biology Department since 1965 and associated with environmental programs at Oberlin from their beginnings. He has been on the Environmental Policy Advisory Committee (EPAC) for its 5 year existence and did the editing of the EPAC report that the Trustees approved in March 2004.

David recounted the history that led to EPAC and then EP. The environmental studies program (ES) had low status in the beginning partly because the one fulltime ES faculty was always of junior rank. The Faculty Council decided in the late 1980s to hire a senior ES faculty and thereby raised ES status. David Orr was hired and came to campus in 1990. The program was, however, held back by President Starr's conservative political agenda that included general hostility to ES. Early in President Dye's administration, Orr was granted permission to raise, on his own, the funds to build an environmental studies building. Orr secured the naming gift of \$3.2 million in 1996 from the Lewis family and the Lewis Center was dedicated in September 2000.

The Lewis Center is a beacon that has attracted students and inspired many off-campus initiatives in academic and non-academic, public and private, and for-profit and not-for-profit settings. However, on campus, not only making the Lewis Center happen, but also moving forward on greening the campus has been a real struggle. Truth be told, pushing green at Oberlin has been possible only because of the persistent efforts of about half-a-dozen dedicated people. Designers and builders of the new Science Center did not take-up the idea of being any shade of green—no effort was made even for the low hanging fruit. What was learned about high-efficiency buildings and about raising money for green buildings by doing the Lewis Center was not utilized. Oberlin has a wonderful building for doing science, but it must now live with a low-efficiency building for decades. For example, because of the "logic" of design in the electrical systems, retrofit is too costly to make. The ten buildings north of Union Street—the first phase of new dorm building—were built business-as-usual. EPAC was never consulted. These two examples are representative of a host of other lost opportunities.

Benzing deeply believes that the administration failed to take a once-in-a-century opportunity for a place like Oberlin to truly live up to its reputation as a place that does the

right thing at the right time, despite strong head winds. Oberlin squandered the unique set of circumstances in the 1990s that positioned the college to lead the green campus movement well into twenty-first century. Other institutions of higher learning have now seized the vision of greening the campus and are thereby moving with, and also leading, the public and private sectors to do likewise.

Aggressively implementing IP could enable Oberlin to play an important role in the green campus movement and to gain the high moral ground required to transform higher education's role to that of preparing students for the great work of creating an ecologically centered civilization. This will require a college community in general, and an administration in particular, that learns from past failures and lost opportunities. A good start would be to apply everything that has been learned from the Lewis Center and other such projects to the second phase of new dorm buildings. This would be but a beginning: all of EP must be implemented in an aggressive fashion. In the long run, the very survival of the college, and civilization as we know it, depends upon bringing human activities in line with biological and physical reality. Implementing EP is a start and the right thing to do.

#### Things to do in the coming year:

##### A. General Discussion:

We considered having a speaker series that would build momentum for implementing Oberlin's Environmental Policy (EP). To achieve this, we must reach all constituents of the Oberlin community, in particular faculty, staff, and trustees. Students are also critical and they have a very active group: Environmental Policy Implementation Group (EPIG). All agreed that we need, in addition to all of the small things, a big event that can inspire, motivate, and create inertia. We know well that trivial things supplant important things—clearly the case when it comes to addressing our environmental challenges—and we must focus on the important things.

Susan Bernat suggested Robert Kennedy for a major talk/event, because of his reputation and championing important environmental causes, including prosecuting corporate polluters such as Exxon and General Electric. Carl McDaniel suggested Ray Anderson of Interface Corporation, because he has been implementing successfully an environmental policy at Interface for the past decade. Since the Board of Trustees has fiscal responsibility for Oberlin and Interface clearly has to make sound financial decisions to stay in business, Karen Florini supported the idea of having Anderson speak to and interact with the Trustees Friday evening at their March 3-5, 2006 meeting. David Orr knows both Kennedy and Anderson and indicated he would assist E in bringing these people to Oberlin.

##### B. Activities for next year.

1. Susan Bernat will work with David Orr to establish what fee, if any, Kennedy would charge to come to Oberlin. If he will come for expenses and no fee, or some modest fee, she will pursue the possibility of an event with major participation from students, faculty, and staff. The entire cost (expenses and honorarium) for Kennedy needs to be \$1,000 or less, unless funds from other sources than E can be found.
2. Carl McDaniel will work with Karen Florini and David Orr on the possibility of having a Trustee-Anderson dinner and evening of discussion on March 3, 2006. If this

can be arranged, then Carl will work with Orr, Petersen, Janda, Benzing, and other people at Oberlin to have a program for students, faculty, and staff on Friday and Saturday (March 3 and 4, 2006). Again, E would be able to provide up to \$1,000 for this event.

3. Rob Stenger will research the extra costs and the benefits of the various LEED standards and write a draft letter that E SC and members will send to Nancy Dye and the Trustees concerning making the new dorms the highest LEED standard possible. Rob will send draft to Carl McDaniel for editing and then approval by SC. The letter will then be sent to E members for their names to be added. The letter with all names will then be sent to Dye and Trustees.

4. Rob Stenger will let leaders of EPIG know that E currently has about \$1,000 to support student activities for EP implementation and other things like storage of tables, chair, lamps, etc. from spring (when they are being discarded by departing students) until August (when they are needed by new students). Requests are to be made to Carl McDaniel via email ([mcdanc@rpi.edu](mailto:mcdanc@rpi.edu)) for evaluation and possible funding.

5. Carl McDaniel will work with Kelly Viancourt, Editor of the Alumni Magazine, to have a major article in the Spring 2006 issue on EP and the importance of its implementation.

Steering Committee members and terms: Claire Jahns, Susan Bernat, Michael J. Lythcott, Peter Racher, Mira Inbar (expire in 2006); Michael Bobker, Rachel Cohn, Walter Galloway, Michael Murray, Erik Jansson, Robert Stenger, Pat Cobb Tarnow, Paul Treuhaft (expire in 2007); Gibert Lewis, Carl McDaniel, John Petersen, Naomi Sabel, John Schaefer, Robert Stenger, Bonnie Yelverton (expire in 2007).

Respectively submitted,  
Carl N. McDaniel  
Chair, EnviroAlums