

Petitioning the ACS Academic Deans February 16, 2008

At the February 2008 ACS Deans meeting at Davidson College, thirteen environmental studies faculty members representing 12 ACS institutions gathered together to strategize. These faculty then petitioned the ACS Deans to continue to support – despite lack of external funding – three vital environmental programs: Faculty Fellows, Student Interns, and Environmental Conferences. What follows is the petition as it was presented by Birmingham-Southern College’s Kathleen Greer Rossmann (Part I, Justification), Furman University’s Wade Worthen (Part II, Accomplishments), and Morehouse College’s Larry Blumer (Part III, Action Items).

Supporting ACS Environmental Initiative Programs

I. Justification

In the absence of external funding, why should ACS institutions continue to support the Faculty Fellow and Student Intern programs, and Environmental Conferences?

A. The Primacy of Environmental Issues and our Mission as Liberal Arts Colleges

Now more than ever, environmental issues are recognized as important challenges to our local, national, and global cultures. Liberal arts colleges can re-emphasize their relevance by contributing solutions to these problems and educating students about these issues. As such, our environmental programs provide a “tangible good” for society.

Environmental issues are fundamentally interdisciplinary. They are the quintessential example of a societal problem that liberal arts colleges are designed to address by training future leaders that have a broad, interdisciplinary appreciation of the issue.

In this sense, the environmental initiative is a leadership development/team-building exercise, and a mechanism for civic engagement in the community. Although our colleges have institutionalized many of the ACSEI environmental programs, there is still work to do. Collaborative information-sharing within our consortium can still play a critical role in improving environmental programs at each institution.

B. Modeling

The environmental initiative has been an extraordinary model of campus-wide collaboration among faculty, students, administrators, and facilities services personnel addressing a common goal. Disparate parts of our institutions get to know each other better. This

structure of intra-institutional (and inter-institutional) collaboration is an “exportable model.”

In fact, this has been a model for the development of other collaborative initiatives within the consortium, including but not limited to urban studies, diversity programs, and women’s studies.

C. Benefits to Environmentally-Aware Personnel

We are a consortium, and our inter-institutional interactions continue to foster the exchange of information and ideas that improve the environmental programs at individual schools. Very much like the productive collaboration and fellowship that occurs among you, our institutions’ deans, when you meet quarterly, environmental faculty fellows, student interns, and facility services personnel who meet at environmental conferences are affirmed, stimulated, motivated, and re-energized by interactions with like-minded peers facing similar problems across the consortium. These meetings lead to lasting collaborative relationships.

The interdisciplinary nature of environmental issues attracts faculty and students with varied interests and expertise, yet environmental issues have no “home” in the typical departmental structure of our colleges. This is particularly pressing for small schools, where environmentally-aware students, faculty, and facilities services personnel are often few in number on each campus. Through their interaction with like-minded peers on other campuses, these environmentally-aware folks are given the opportunity to feel like part of a “tribe” that shares their values and appreciates their contributions.

II. Accomplishments

With seed money provided by grants from the V. Kann Rasmussen Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, ACSEI has conducted or stimulated the following.

A. Meetings and Conferences

Since 1998, there have been 40 ACSEI meetings/workshops for faculty fellows, student interns, or facilities service reps. Two of these meetings were specifically designated for student research presentations. All of these meetings stimulated inter-institutional synergy, cooperation, competition and the sharing of new ideas and best practices among peers. This is particularly useful within our consortium because our institutions have similar student bodies, similar faculty and institutional structure, and face similar local and regional concerns.

As a direct consequence of these 40 meetings, our institutions have:

- developed student environmental organizations
- developed student-life / “environmental resident” programs
- developed campus recycling programs
- stimulated collaborative, inter-institutional research
- stimulated new course development (over 60 faculty development and course

- development grants)
- stimulated the construction of Environmental Studies programs (going from 3 to 16) in 10 years
- stimulated team-building of important players at each institution – across administration, facilities services, faculty, and students

B. Inter-Institutional Collaboration and Positive Feedback

Drawing from a larger pool of faculty with a wider range of talents has allowed for novel collaborative research initiatives. For example, David Kesler (Rhodes) and Andy Gannon (BSC) created an inter-institutional research program on coral reef ecology and water quality.

Seeds produced at one institution have found fertile ground for growth on other campuses. For example, the “Eco-Cottage” at Furman stimulated faculty-student teams at Rhodes and Sewanee to develop Environmental Residence (ER) programs. These ER programs are now a model for FU, Richmond, Millsaps, BSC, WLU, Trinity, and Morehouse.

Another example is the program in sustainable development in Costa Rica, initially developed at Sewanee. This program was relocated to Rollins College, where it has grown dramatically over the years and has brought 50 ACS faculty and over 100 ACS students to Costa Rica. Two faculty at BSC who participated in this program are now creating their own Costa Rica program.

C. Development of an Environmental Ethos

The ACSEI has informed students, faculty, administrators, and facilities services personnel about best environmental practices working within the context of southern liberal arts colleges. These constituencies have returned to their home institutions after ACSEI meetings, excited and aware and committed to improving their own environmental programs. This has led to the development of an environmental ethos at each school that touches campus operations, student life, and academic programs. This ethos has permeated many of the institutions, to such an extent that a few have added an environmental component to their mission statement or strategic plan.

III. Action Items

The effect of ACSEI leadership on environmental initiatives at our schools has been extraordinary. Many elements of the ACSEI programs have been institutionalized at our home institutions.

Therefore, we now ask: having used a collaborative approach to get the ball rolling at our schools, is it time to “go our separate ways”? Or is collaboration and information sharing still useful? If it is useful, what mechanism will we create to maintain these connections?

A. Is it Useful?

We believe that the relationships developed over the last ten years in the ACSEI will be critical in the immediate future. As one example, the inter-institutional information sharing

will be extremely useful to ACS schools as they try to define (and then achieve) new environmental objectives and commitments delineated by the President's Climate Commitment (PCC). Nine ACS schools are signatories to the PCC, and most are at the same initial point in the process of measuring their greenhouse gas production. Maintaining the collaborative, cooperative connection between our environmental working groups will increase each institution's efficiency in defining and completing the goals of the PCC.

B. How Might We Maintain It?

We believe that there are four action items that should be implemented at each ACS school:

1. **Create a permanent "Environmental Fellow" position.** This will be a title given to a faculty member. Work as fellow will be recognized as an important contribution to the college or university, especially with respect to evaluation for tenure and promotion; perhaps equivalent to membership on a prominent faculty committee.
2. **Create at least one permanent "Environmental Intern" position.** This will be a position awarded to a student each year by the faculty fellow. The intern will organize and carry out an environmental project with the environmental fellow.
3. **Create an Environmental Committee on each campus** composed of administrators, faculty, students, and staff. The goal of this committee will be to define and address environmental issues.
4. **On a rotating basis, support an annual environmental conference,** to be attended by fellows and interns, and perhaps other members of an institution's environmental committee (such as interested facilities services personnel).

The fellow, intern, and committee will move environmental programs forward at each institution. Some of the responsibilities of the interns, fellows, and committees might include:

- coordinate and stimulate faculty and student interest
- coordinate with facilities, campus operations, and purchasing
- coordinate with peers at other ACS schools
- coordinate PCC initiatives
- publicize accomplishments/activities to college/community
- coordinate Environmental RA's
- liaison w/development folks
- supervise and encourage the student environmental club

The annual conference will allow inter-institutional information sharing that has been such a critical element of the ACSEI. Responsibility for hosting the conference will be rotated among ACS institutions. The faculty fellow of the host institution will be the ACS Environmental Coordinator for that year. He/she will co-ordinate the conference, compile reports from each institution, and distribute a summary report to member institutions by newsletter and/or web site. (We would expect the host institution to compensate the coordinator for this additional responsibility.)

We encourage the administration at each institution to strategize with the existing environmental fellow (and other environmental players) to determine the best strategy for

their school. Each school may carve out financial support from different budgets. For example, the fellow might be supported with faculty development funds. He/she might be part of a larger initiative, such as the Presidents Climate Commitment team. The student intern could perhaps be supported via work-study funds (7% of federal work study money must be service-oriented; therefore some institutions may choose to specify an existing work-study position as “environmental.”) Other institutions may specify an existing student research line as environmental. Or, new money might be found to support these initiatives from environmentally-oriented alumni, foundations, businesses, or local governments institutions.

IV. Conclusion

The creation and growth of environmental programs at our campuses has been incalculable. The structure and funds contributed by the ACSEI has been critical to this success. We believe that the inter-institutional connections developed by ACSEI need to be maintained by each individual campus as our programs move forward.