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Green in Action

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Green in Action

In ways large and small, the University strives toward environmental sustainability.

Story by NANCY (STEELE) BROKAW '71

Photographs by MARC FEATHERLY

Think of Illinois Wesleyan's GREENetwork as a giant tree with both roots and branches spread across the campus.

The GREENetwork brings together all sectors of the University – students, staff, faculty and administrators – as they work toward environmental sustainability.

This expansive network began as one small green shoot. In 1991, Denise (Yehnert) Beard '92 launched the first campuswide recycling effort. Under her leadership, recycling bins were planted around campus. The University community began to get the idea, new at the time, that unwanted paper, water bottles and pop cans could go somewhere other than in a landfill, where they would remain for hundreds of years.

In the mid-1990s, as awareness grew, several students, supervised by Biology Professor R. Given Harper, helped keep the recycling effort going. The Student Senate and the faculty passed resolutions to make the campus more environmentally friendly. Harper and Abigail Jahiel, associate professor of environmental and international studies, put forth a similar proposal to the faculty and it passed unanimously. Officially, an environmental consciousness had taken root on campus.

In 2000, a Green Task Force was formed. It issued a report in 2001. Among its findings was an early look at how much energy IWU was using, how it was used, and how much pollution it created – elements of what is now called a carbon-footprint calculation. The task force evolved into the GREENetwork.

All-campus "dumpster dives" are among the GREENetwork's more memorable efforts. Harper reports that, on five or six occasions, members of the University labor crew, faculty and student body have donned jumpsuits, gloves and masks to dive into a day's waste. "Examining the contents of a dumpster really makes an impression," Harper says. "We find so much perfectly good food as well as clothing and paper that could have been recycled."

In 2003, partly through efforts of the GREENetwork, the IWU mission statement was revised to include environmental sustainability as a University-wide commitment through its policies, programs and practices. "That was an enormously important step," Harper says.

The GREENetwork meets monthly, pulling together more than a dozen members from all aspects of campus life. Assistant



Recycling was just the first step in Illinois Wesleyan's goal of sustainability. The University's GREENetwork defines sustainability as "an attempt to provide the best outcomes for the human and natural environments both now and into the indefinite future."

Director for New Media Ann Aubry posts news to a GREENetwork blog in order to communicate University efforts both internally and externally. Aubry adds that the blog is a great way to help get the message out. "Because it's informal, it can capture a variety of activities and programs on campus very quickly," she says.

The network's four foci for this academic year are communication, composting, carbon-footprint calculation and recycling education. Leadership rotates among volunteers. This year's co-chairs are Laurine Brown, visiting associate professor of environmental studies and health; Carl Teichman '80, director of government and community relations; and student Kari Grace '11.

"There's a lot of institutional knowledge but we need to share it with each other; the GREENetwork gets different parts of the campus talking to each other," says Meg Miner, University archivist and network member. "That's the best part – one person's needs can be met by another person's progress."



Illinois Wesleyan's commitment to environmental sustainability includes the support of President Richard F. Wilson.

In 2007, the Sierra Student Coalition approached President Wilson to sign the Talloires Declaration, a 10-point action plan for incorporating environmental sustainability into higher education. This declaration has been signed by hundreds of college and university presidents worldwide.

Before he signed it, Wilson worked with several groups on campus to ensure that the University could indeed move forward on carrying out the plans set forth in the declaration.

Three years later, Wilson sees real progress in implementing those plans as well as hitting other environmental sustainability benchmarks.

Wilson says, "The campus commitment to sustainability was formally embraced in the strategic plan that was developed and approved in 2006 and reaffirmed through our becoming a signatory of the Talloires Declaration in 2007. I have been heartened by the steady progress in turning those aspirations into accomplishments.

President Wilson (above) helps plant a tree during the 2007 signing ceremony for the Talloires Declaration.

in the student commons. The exciting development this year is a joint project with Illinois State University and the greater Bloomington-Normal community that will allow us to compost food waste.

"I also have been pleased to see the range of activity, from creating a major in environmental studies and installing a geothermal system in the new Minor Myers, jr. Welcome Center to encouraging the use of "no till" practices on farms that we own and adopting "trayless" food service

"I was pleased initially to be part of the decision to make sustainability an important priority of the University," Wilson concludes, "but even more excited to see that commitment translated into practice."



Associate Director of Admissions Chris Kawakita '98 is grateful that he can show prospective students, right off the bat, that Illinois Wesleyan is committed to sustainability.

As the first place that prospective students often visit, the Minor Myers, jr. Welcome Center, also has the distinction of being the University's first fully "green" building. Home to both Illinois Wesleyan's Office of Admissions and Hart Career Center, the center opened in 2008, earning Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification.

Some of the environmentally friendly features incorporated into the Myers Center design are a geothermal heating system, the latest in efficient fluorescent lighting and a traction elevator powered by a small motor instead of a hydraulic pump. Energy savings are considerable, estimated at between 35 to 50 percent, with a payback of seven years to recoup the equipment's cost.



Bob Murray '82, dean of enrollment management, checks the center's geothermal system.

In addition to these main design features, "we are doing lots of little things that all add up," says Kawakita, who is a member of the GREENetwork.

A recycle trash unit is located just inside the Welcome Center door. Families are offered drinks in reusable ceramic mugs that feature the IWU logo on one side and a double-meaning exhortation to "Think Green" on the other. There are no vending machines in the building, just an energy-efficient refrigerator and an honor system. To cut down on printing, the admissions department employs a "JIT" (Just In Time) system that prints brochures only as needed, using lightweight paper.

Even a picnic table outside the center is composed of 3,200 recycled milk jugs.

"It's not an in-your-face kind of thing," says Kawakita, "but in everyday actions and interactions we are showing students and prospective students that we take environmental sustainability seriously."

When it is constructed, the new Main Classroom Building will also emphasize environmental sustainability. In addition to energy-efficient windows and lighting, the building will be supported by a geothermal system that should cut heating and cooling costs in half.

New ways are being explored to build sustainability into the existing campus infrastructure. Physical Plant Director Bud Jorgenson gives the example of an activity area inside the Shirk Athletic Center track that was determined to need more light. A pre-green solution would likely have been to put up more light fixtures. Instead, brighter but more efficient fluorescent lighting units were installed, saving 50 percent on energy, says Jorgenson, who adds that sometimes it "takes money to save money."



IT support specialist Roy Bailey stacks old computers to be recycled.

Web page with tips on how to reduce printing," says Miner. Sometimes we gather up all the recycled paper and fill the display cases to make a point."

An even more dramatic example of recycling can be found at the old University Bookstore. Roy Bailey, senior desktop support specialist for information technology, points to a back room that's filled with cast-off technology equipment waiting to be recycled. "There's probably 4,500 pounds here," says Bailey, shaking his head at a small mountain of old laptops, printers, keyboards, scanners and fax machines.

Recycling computers is a tricky business, Bailey acknowledges. He uses a company that triple-erases hard drives. Useable equipment gets funneled to charitable institutions when possible. The rest is carefully recycled. "We've saved hundreds of thousands of pounds from going to the dumpster," Bailey says. It's the right thing to do. If you buy new computers, you've got to deal with the old ones."

Sometimes the best ideas are astoundingly simple.

Illinois Wesleyan's primary dining facility, the Bertholf Commons, is now trayless, meaning students visit the cooking/serving stations plate-in-hand, rather than "piling up" on a tray. The switch away from trays was made in response to a student initiative last year.

"I thought we'd have more complaints but the students adapted very quickly," says Dave Nicholson, Sodexo general manager for the campus residential dining service. "We still have trays available but almost none get used."

The same can be said of the replacement this past summer of 65 pairs of laundry machines – which after 14 years had completed their usable life – with the same number of new Energy Star machines. According to Assistant Dean of Students Matt Damschroder, the new machines use 20 less gallons of water per load of laundry than the machines they replaced. Considering that students do nearly 100 loads of laundry a day, that's 14,000 gallons a week or 224,000 gallons of water saved in a semester, Damschroder says. In addition, each new machine draws 61 percent less energy compared to the old machines.

Another adage that often applies to sustainability is "a little can mean a lot." As part of a comprehensive sustainability plan at The Ames Library, paper use was reduced dramatically when printers there were set to double-sided mode. The paper itself is 30-percent postconsumer fiber, says Meg Miner, University archivist and a member of the GREENetwork. But the overall goal is to encourage students to use the least amount of paper possible.

"We make a real effort at print-copy awareness and we have a

There's the obvious reductions in water and detergent, but the primary savings is that going trayless causes students to be more thoughtful about the food they choose. "Students used to go to three stations and get three plates of food," Nicholson says, "and one plate of that food would end up in the trash.

"The results of going trayless have been remarkable," he continues. "We went from 600 pounds of food waste per meal to 650 pounds of waste per day."

Starting in 2011, Illinois Wesleyan's food services will join a larger community effort directed by Illinois State University to compost the area's biodegradable food waste. "There are nutrients in food waste," says Biology Professor R. Given Harper, "and they are wasted in a landfill. Why not put them back into the environment?" The composted food waste will be trucked to an ISU farm north of Bloomington-Normal and dumped into long piles called windrows, where it will age into a nutrient-rich natural fertilizing agent. Organizers of the project hope that more than a thousand semitrailer loads of food waste will be diverted from the local landfill through composting each year.

Other eco-friendly changes in the University's food service include offering more organic and vegan food choices. "We go through 60 pounds of tofu a week," Nicholson says. The number of vegetarian/vegan students has increased dramatically but many other students simply choose meatless entrees. Some favorites are roasted pepper frittata, bean tostado and eggplant Parmesan.

Another popular green addition is the new "hydration station," which encourages students to carry reusable water bottles instead of disposable ones. Students can bring their bottles into the Commons any time of day and fill them from one of three attractive vessels filled with different lightly flavored waters.



"The results of going trayless have been remarkable," says Sodexo's Dave Nicholson. "We went from 600 pounds of food waste per meal to 650 pounds of waste per day."



As they study the environment, Illinois Wesleyan students are going on to change the world around them, both on campus and around the globe.

The University first began offering a minor in environmental studies (ES) in 1999 and expanded to include a major program in 2005. "Since the development of the environmental studies program, we've seen a steady increase in the number of environmental studies majors," says the program's director, Abigail Jahiel, associate professor of environmental and international studies. "We now have around 40."

Students in the program take a wide variety of classes in disciplines across Illinois Wesleyan's campus, from chemistry, biology and physics to history, political science and anthropology. They can choose either a general major in environmental studies or pursue a specialist degree in ecology, environmental chemistry, environmental policy or international environmental sustainability. The ES program addresses a broad range of issues concerning the relationship of human beings with the natural world. It is designed to provide students with a basic knowledge of the scientific concepts, societal factors — cultural, political and economic — and the ethical dimensions behind environmental issues.



A leader in the campus sustainability movement is Associate Professor Abigail Jahiel, who directs the environmental studies program.

ES students also conduct research with faculty and, through internships, gain hands-on experience with organizations such as the Ecology Action Center, Greenpeace, Illinois EPA's Governor's Environmental Corps, The Nature Conservancy and several organic farms. Students have also spent time studying around the world, either independently or through travel courses such as May Term trips that Harper leads to study the tropical ecosystem of Costa Rica.

Sixteen professors from different disciplines currently teach courses in environmental studies. Jahiel is a political scientist by training, with expertise in comparative politics and Chinese politics. Her current research focuses on environmental politics in China. The program's associate director is Biology Professor R. Given Harper, whose research includes examination of pesticide levels in birds and other wildlife. Courses offered range from "Water Quality" and "Atmospheric Pollution" to "Comparative Environmental Politics" and "American Environmental History."

"Non-major students often take an environmental studies class and then comment, 'I never knew about this — you've opened my mind,'" Jahiel says.

Demand for such a program has grown in recent years, according to Jahiel. "Students in this part of the Midwest recognize that IWU has one of the more developed programs in Illinois," she says. "One area where we'd like to see ourselves growing is in the area of environmental service."

The ES major helps fulfill Illinois Wesleyan's mission statement, which commits the University to environmental sustainability. Many students get involved in environmental efforts at the University through organizations such as the GREENetwork and the Sierra Student Coalition. On campus, the environmental studies program regularly hosts speakers and other events to spread awareness about environmental issues and interests.



Faculty research has also made an environmental impact. Ram Mohan (above, at right), the Earl H.

Environmental studies graduates have gone on to careers in green architecture and green design, waste management, energy policy, economics, toxicology and wildlife biology. Recent graduates have also pursued advanced degrees in areas such as oceanography, microbial ecology, international agriculture and public administration.

and Marian A. Beling Professor in the Natural Sciences, has led major advancements in “green” chemistry. Biology Professor R. Given Harper studies pesticide levels in birds and other wildlife. Both have collaborated with students in their research.

One such alumna is Leslie Coleman, who graduated in 2007 with a double major in environmental and international studies. She spent the summer following graduation working at an organic farm and then traveled to the Gambia in western Africa to work as a non-governmental organization development volunteer with the Peace Corps. She was joined by her husband Ryan Smith, a fellow 2007 ES graduate, who conducted environmental education work while in Africa. The pair recently returned to the United States, where Coleman earned a prestigious scholarship to study environmental law at New York University.

Jahiel is proud of such accomplishments and feels strongly that universities need to take the lead in changing how society functions in everyday ways. “We are hopeful that these changes and future educational efforts will yield further steps toward a truly sustainable university campus that teaches sustainability not only through the curriculum, but through its every action,” she says.



The roots of conservation run throughout the University

GROUNDS MAINTENANCE



In days gone by, ground crews everywhere tended to blanket-spray with pesticides. That practice has been replaced at IWU with integrated pest and weed management. “Now we identify the disease and consider the best way to approach it,” says Grounds Services Manager Eric Nelson (shown left). “If it’s a bug that’s active, it might be that way for only a week or two, or the weather might change, so we selectively approach how to handle the situation. ... If there are a few dandelions, we let them go, but at a certain level we treat them.”

CUSTODIAL SERVICES

When it comes to cleaning, the University is trying to be more friendly to the environment and efficient at the same time. A new floor-cleaning machine at the Shirk Center uses ionized water, reducing the use of water and chemicals. Dale Conover, assistant manager of custodial services and GREENetwork member, says that he and his team learn about and test new organic cleaning products and also use water to dilute cleaners to different strengths for different uses. Toilet paper and rollover paper towels also contain post-consumer recycled content.

FARMING PRACTICES

Soil conservation is among the key goals of the IWU Farm Committee, which encourages no-till and strip-till practices with all of the farmers working some 6,300 acres of Illinois Wesleyan-owned farmland. No-till slows erosion and run-off and starts to slowly rebuild organic matter, allowing more rainwater to be retained in the ground. The environment also benefits when less soil, fertilizer and chemicals are carried into the ground and surface water.

SUSTAINABLE LIVING & WELLNESS EXPO

Each spring at the Shirk Center, the Illinois Sustainable Living & Wellness Expo brings new opportunities for people to discover how to live well and live green. “This is really about people discovering resources to help improve the quality of their lives, and having a great time doing it,” says Missy Smock, director of the University’s Wellness Program, which co-sponsors the event with the local Ecology Action Center. The expo includes educational workshops, food demonstrations, music performances, an eco kids’ carnival and a venue where local artists create pieces using recycled materials. Exhibitors last year included energy auditors who helped individuals assess how to cut energy costs in their homes.