

Benedictine University
Years for the Environment
First Annual Report
5/25/09

The accomplishments of the Years for the Environment are many, and the credit for them belongs to many. What has been accomplished was possible only with the cooperation of administration, staff, faculty, and students. At a year-end meeting of the Years for the Environment Steering Committee, many noted that we have raised the consciousness of the community as a whole and have involved many people in some way, and so therefore, the first Year of the Environment has been a success. We accomplished much of what we originally planned, and a significant number of events not originally on the plan. In fact, we accomplished much more than we had hoped. Projects fell under roughly four headings.

Educational Initiatives played a key role in our first Year for the Environment, as is appropriate for an institution dedicated to learning. We kicked off the project with the Summer Reading Program, introducing incoming students to Elizabeth Kolbert's *Field Notes from a Catastrophe* during a summer kick-off event and Orientation. Discussion of *Field Notes* continued with Campus Conversation, which elicited contributions from faculty, staff, students, and members of the community. We offered environmental courses Fall and Spring, and those courses will count toward a new Certificate in Environmental Studies. Two new concentrations, Sustainable Business and Sustainable Leadership, emerged from the MBA Program. Two efforts materialized largely as a result of student responses to Years for the Environment and environmentally-themed courses: the Community Garden, where students can learn about the earth in a hands-on way, and a new student environmental organization focused on raising awareness about the levels of CO₂ in the atmosphere: the 350 Club (working to reduce CO₂ to 350 ppm in the atmosphere)

Environmentally Themed Events were spread evenly throughout the academic calendar. One of the finest was the Global Studies Faith and Reason Symposium: *What is Sufficiency: Food*, which drew on the expertise of our own faculty members to highlight the world food shortage and its connection to the environment. In October, Tony Massaro lectured on the environment and the elections, and in addition to discussing human rights, Dimon Liu hosted a round-table on China and the environment during her visit. Environmental community service was offered to the community both Fall and Spring. The very popular Lunch with the Landscapers featured sustainable themes Fall and Spring. One of the biggest successes may have been Sustainable Saturday, in March, which took over 180,000 pounds of electronics out of the landfills, as well as a huge array of other materials. In April, the reading project culminated in a lecture by Elizabeth Kolbert, along with student poster presentations, dinner, and a panel of experts discussing Chicago-land Ecology. The year closed with "Leave Your Stuff," a collaboration between students, faculty, and staff to keep student possessions out of the dumpsters as dorm rooms emptied and students packed up.

Operations was also instrumental in reducing Benedictine's carbon footprint. This year, Sodexo instituted trayless dining, offered reusable mugs in the Coal Ben, and switched over to compostable disposables. Recently, campus services installed efficient paper towel dispensers and coreless toilet paper. IT established a new charge for student printing to reduce overuse of paper. And Benedictine successfully applied for and received funding for an IEPA intern, one of its own PhD students in Organizational Development.

Advertising was also an important factor in raising BU's green profile. Some of the events that called attention to Benedictine's emphasis on stewardship included hosting the 2008 Illinois Sustainable Cities Symposium, signing the Illinois Sustainable Universities Compact, participating in and advertising at the Wheaton Franciscan Earth Summit, and hosting the 2009 DuPage Environmental Summit, as we've done for the past four years.

The steering committee is still busy generating ideas for 2009-2010, with some new events and some continued from last year. One date that is already scheduled is 350: 24 October 2009: International Day of Climate Action. The student-led Club 350 is taking the lead in organizing this event, which is set to raise consciousness for the renegotiation of the Kyoto protocol at Copenhagen in January of 2010. The Global Studies department plans a second installment of the Faith and Reason Symposium: *What is Sufficiency: Water*. Also actively in the planning stage is the new Summer Reading/Campus Conversation with Michael Pollan's *Omnivore's Dilemma* at center stage. Because service learning was so successful, though small-scale, this year, we expect to offer service opportunities on a larger scale in 2009-2010. The Ben Bike Project is also gaining traction, with a small fleet of bikes and more concrete ideas for organization. Sodexo has been looking at food waste composting, and campus services expects to complete a campus-wide green audit.

Although there has been complete support from the administration, bottom-up momentum has also been one of the strengths of the effort so far, as students, faculty, staff, and administrators have seized opportunities to make changes large and small, on campus and in their own lives. We hope to continue the conversation about environmental issues and encourage the community to build a detailed vision of what our green university will look like by 2015.