

## **Extending sustainability beyond Lewis & Clark's borders while on campus**

*Nathaniel Stoll (ENVS class of 2012), spring semester 2010*

Sustainability is most commonly thought of in terms of sustaining environmental resources. For example, at Lewis & Clark it is not uncommon for discussions concerning sustainability to center around sustainable energy, sustainable agriculture, sustainable architecture, or even sustainable art. However, how are such practices effective in creating a sustainable global environment when we just put them into practice at Lewis & Clark? The reality is that they are rather ineffective. The current world order is unsustainable. Sustainability on such a small scale at Lewis & Clark can have the adverse effect of making people believe they are creating significant change in the established world order when in fact much greater efforts are needed. If participants of sustainability on a microcosmic scale lose sight of the macrocosm around them, this can blind them into a false sense of ecological security that prevents larger-scale action.

Our small contributions to sustainable energy, sustainable agriculture, sustainable architecture, and sustainable art at Lewis & Clark have made little impact on sustaining the global environment as a whole.

We should stop thinking about sustainability at Lewis & Clark on such a small scale and start looking at the bigger picture. We are getting caught up with concerns over creating one sustainable building on campus and making all energy sources on campus renewable, issues that have rather infinitesimal impacts on the global picture. It seems impossible to be sustainable at Lewis & Clark if we look only within our own borders because we are then ignoring the rest of the world that is so unsustainable. Of course, it will take much longer to achieve sustainability by looking beyond our own borders, but sustainability that focuses on small scales has no chance of continuing far into the future. It takes a large amount of resources to keep Lewis & Clark running, and many of these resources are out of the college's power to control. For instance, all the energy usage it takes to transport students from across the United States to Portland every year is completely out of the college's hands. Lewis & Clark's water supply is provided by the City of Portland. If we fail to take the time to look at institutions outside of Lewis & Clark sooner or later it is likely that such local efforts of sustainability within Lewis & Clark's borders won't be able to continue.

In order for Lewis & Clark to become more sustainable we must pursue options that make a larger impact in sustaining the environment outside of Lewis & Clark. To this end, it is essential that Lewis & Clark puts as much energy as possible into sustaining a high standard of liberal arts education and analytical interdisciplinary thinking. Students can then apply this thinking outside of Lewis & Clark. This will have a much greater impact on the global issue of sustainability, and it is something that can be done within the confines of Lewis & Clark's campus. This education could be put towards hundreds of different uses in sustaining the world's environment like promoting and implementing education elsewhere, promoting peace to halt costly wars and weapons build-ups, promoting ecosystem health

through proper environmental management, and raising awareness over the world's overfished oceans. Furthermore, sustainable endeavors like sustainable energy and sustainable agriculture work within the world's current framework: the status quo of capitalism and consumption. A Lewis & Clark education should increase the intellectual capacity of students on campus to think beyond such status quo solutions by either greatly improving upon them or doing away with them altogether.

This argument could be construed as condemning sustainable energy, sustainable agriculture, sustainable architecture, and sustainable art on the Lewis & Clark campus. However, it condemns them only in the sense that they should be not be used as a means in and of themselves. For example, in the case of sustainable energy it would be wrong to create opportunities for sustainable energy on campus just for the sake of creating sustainable energy. Rather, things like sustainable energy are a vehicle through which students can learn about the importance of issues like the negative environmental impacts of energy resource overexploitation. We should not have delusions that these endeavors *in themselves* are making a big impact in sustaining the environment. Instead, their implementation should be used to raise awareness about significant issues. Students can then carry this awareness into the rest of their lives. The conservation of resources that comes from implementing sustainable energy on the Lewis & Clark campus is not as important as the possibility of education that comes with it.

Certainly, there are many who would argue in favor of pursuing things like sustainable energy on the Lewis & Clark campus for their own sake. Such an argument would emphasize the importance of the local scale. Proponents of such an argument would most likely adhere to that over-used adage, "Think globally, act locally." That is, the best and most feasible way to promote sustainability around the globe is to implement sustainability locally (i.e. for its own sake at Lewis & Clark). However, such a viewpoint does not think globally even though it claims that it does. The global picture is lost in the assumption that acting locally will eventually trickle up spatial scales and occur on a global scale. This has often not been the historical case. For example, the 1970's movement that saw the creation of intentional living communes across the U.S. has created local sustainability within these communal living spaces, but this sustainability is often highly isolated from the rest of society. The actions we take towards sustainability locally at Lewis & Clark should help reinforce the global sustainability movement by supplying the world with new ideas and solutions.

The way of the future for sustainability at Lewis & Clark is through maintaining a high level of education that can be used by students outside of the college to reinforce the global sustainability movement. There are so many complex problems in the world that connect to issues of sustainability (i.e. war, poverty, famine, greed, consumerism, discrimination, drought, imperialism, etc.) that it seems rather naïve to think that we can make a noticeable difference by shutting out the rest of the globe and focusing in on sustainability solely within Lewis &

Clark's borders. We have to work on applying our knowledge outside of Lewis & Clark, and take our insights, ideas, and solutions with us wherever we go in the world. Going on a Lewis & Clark abroad program to Beijing and experiencing all the pollution in the air and the water supply there can help students realize that the majority of the developing world does not have the access to clean environmental resources that we have here at Lewis & Clark. Issues like these might warrant more attention than issues exclusive to Lewis & Clark. Pursuing common ideas of sustainability like sustainable energy are not inherently bad by any means, but their usefulness comes more from their ability to be used as vehicles for education and awareness rather than the actual amount of sustainability they produce. Taking such a stance on sustainability locally at Lewis & Clark, and hopefully at many other colleges, will pave the way for global sustainability.