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Food, Water, Shelter, & Song

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Educating the Community about Campus-Wide Sustainability

Gettysburg College is home to a few thousand students and faculty. These students and faculty rely on Gettysburg College’s administration to support them and help them grow in knowledge and experience. In a time where we are failing the Earth, our greater home, it is important to receive the proper education and materials to learn how to combat this. By inspecting the ways that other schools in the United States enforce this amongst their campus community, Gettysburg College can properly enhance their green education system.

On November 5, 2018, Colby College received a 20.75/21 rating on AASHE’s STARS Report for Campus Engagement. The students at Colby College are very active in promoting a green campus. There are five main green student groups on campus: EcoReps, the Environmental Coalition (EnviroCo), Colby Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (COFGA), Colby Beekeepers, and Colby Alliance for Renewable Energy (C.A.R.E.). All of these groups focus on different aspects of sustainability and are strongly involved in the campus community. EcoReps are students who choose to be representatives for positive change and sustainable practices. They are responsible for “educat[ing] their peers on sustainable living practices, organiz[ing] and execut[ing] waste diversion efforts local to their dorm, plan[ning] sustainability-related events throughout the year, communicat[ing] and market[ing] campus environmental activities, engag[ing] in campus-related sustainability research, and act[ing] as a sustainable living example for their community,” (Green Colby). A major change that the EcoReps helped organize is Green Graduation. According to an excerpt from Colby’s green campus webpage, the 2014 graduation ceremony was the seventh Green Graduation held at the school. Assumingly, this has continued since then. A Green Graduation is a more environmentally conscious graduation ceremony. During this, a zero-waste goal is made, and often achieved, throughout the graduation commencement weekend and at other ceremonial events. EcoReps do not have a specific sustainability focus, but more so a general, broad covering of all sustainable practices on campus. EnviroCo focuses specifically on educating the Colby College campus community on necessary environmental topics like recycling, water quality, forest management, and maple sugaring. COFGA practices sustainable agriculture on their three-quarter-acre on-campus garden, which provides produce for the campus’ dining halls. C.A.R.E. encourages students and faculty to work together in creating a more sustainable future in energy (Green Colby). Not only are students in sustainability-based clubs educating their campus about sustainability, but the Center for the Arts and Humanities at Colby College hosted events under the 2015-16 school year’s campuswide “Human/Nature” theme. These events consisted of art projects and performances, dances, and films. Colby College additionally is home to a group started in 2001 that has been recognized by the EPA called RESCUE (Recycle Everything, Save Colby’s Usable Excess). RESCUE rescues clothing, household items, furniture, appliances, and other items left behind by departing students or staff. These items are donated to local nonprofit organizations. Not only are students involved in Colby College’s sustainable advances, but faculty too. A Green Office Certification program was created in the fall of 2013 by the Sustainability Office to encourage employees to incorporate green practices in their offices. The Green Office Certification Program requires offices to purchase paper products with recycled content, use energy-saving modes on electronics, recycle printer cartridges, participate in green events and conferences, and request vegetable-based ink for printers. If these requirements are met, the participating offices receive certificates in their lobbies and a selected representative from each office is put in charge of further educating their colleagues about the program and other sustainable practices. The Environmental Studies Department at Colby College puts together (almost) weekly sustainability oriented lunch talks given by people from all over the world, of different professions, and on various topics (AASHE). Gettysburg College has not been reviewed by AASHE since March 7, 2016, and, other than the Painted Turtle Farm and Campus Kitchen, very few sustainability-oriented cubs exist at Gettysburg.

Stanford University received a 20.75/21 rating on AASHE’s STARS Report for Campus Engagement on February 22, 2019. Stanford University requires incoming freshmen to read three books over the summer, one of which is typically sustainability-themed. This gets incoming students involved in the campus’ sustainable practices before they even arrive at the school (AASHE). Gettysburg College requires their incoming first-year students to read one book. For incoming first-year students in 2019, this book was based on social change and only featured black characters. This was an important theme to share with incoming students, however in future years Gettysburg can learn from Stanford and require a book that focuses on climate change and/or sustainable practices. My Cardinal Green is a portal created by the Office of Sustainability at Stanford University available to all students. This year-round offered portal educates and engages students in practicing sustainable lifestyles. There are sections catered to specific sets of students, whether for certain years, departments, or living locations, students can find pages just for them. Students can even earn points by pursuing certain actions in the portal, and when certain amounts of points are earned, there are prizes and incentives (AASHE). If Gettysburg had a portal such as this for students, especially for first years, similar to the already existing required courses on sexual misconduct and alcohol education, more students would have the education on sustainability that they are missing. Along with Stanford’s My Cardinal Green portal, seasonal campaigns directed at students are held that encourage students to take pledges towards becoming more sustainable. Stanford University gets their staff involved in sustainable practices during their full-day faculty orientation. At this orientation, a time slot is dedicated to educating the faculty about important sustainable practices like carpooling, purchasing environmentally conscious products, saving electricity, and more (AASHE).

Dickinson College was given a rating of 20.75/21 for Campus Engagement on AASHE’s STARS Report on March 1, 2018. At Dickinson College, sustainability has a unique definition; “How do we improve the human condition equitably in this and future generations, while conserving environmental systems necessary to support healthy and vibrant societies?” EcoReps, one of more than ten sustainability-oriented clubs at Dickinson, have co-hosted a variety of sustainability based events and projects with the Center for Sustainability Education since 2011. These include rebuilt green bikes for students to check out for the semester, an information table about sustainability at Dickinson, a sustainability-related gift for all first-year students, and a “green move-in”, which are all-day stations during the move-in period each semester that assists students with separating waste and recyclables (AASHE). Since 2013, graduating Dickinson students participate in the Sustainability Graduation Pledge, which states, “I PLEDGE TO APPLY SUSTAINABILITY LEARNING AND VALUES FROM MY DICKINSON EXPERIENCE AS I EXPLORE AND IMPROVE THE SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF ANY ORGANIZATIONS FOR WHICH I WORK AND THE COMMUNITIES IN WHICH I LIVE,” (AASHE). According to studies, when an individual says a goal aloud, she or he is more likely to commit to said goal. By having graduating students say this pledge, Dickinson College is further promoting and enforcing their sustainable practices beyond the campus. Faculty are also informed about sustainability at Dickinson College. In sessions provided a minimum of five times per year, the Center of Sustainability Education provides faculty with a facilitator that educates employees on sustainable practices non-specific and specific to Dickinson College. These include the college’s commitment to carbon neutrality and its climate action plan (AASHE).

Dickinson College and Gettysburg College have very similar bases. On top of being located less than an hour from each other, both schools are well-regarded liberal arts schools with a similar campus population. This being said, there is mild competition between the two. Dickinson is currently ahead of Gettysburg in the race towards a sustainable campus, but if administration explores the practices at other schools, like the ones presented above, this race may soon have a new winner.

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