SMART GROWTH — Viable Alternatives to Sprawl?

“SMART GROWTH? Environmental and Social Implications,” the 2011 Elizabeth Babbott Conant Interdisciplinary Conference on the Environment, explored concepts developed from urban planning roots that have come to represent an alternative to sprawl. The conference, held March 4-5, included discussion of mixed-land uses, walkable neighborhoods with housing for varied income levels, preserved open space including farmland, new development concentrated in existing communities, and multiple public transportation options.

A Lambert Environmental Lecture by Frances Moore Lappé kicked off the conference on Thursday evening. Lappé, a author and cofounder of the Small Planet Institute in Cambridge, Mass., captivated her audience with her thought-provoking talk, “From Famine and Froot Loops® to Food Democracy: turning Crisis into Liberating Action.” Highlighting inconsistencies in modern food systems, Lappé is a vocal proponent of revitalizing food sustainability. “More than a third of both the world’s grain and fish catch now go to feed livestock, which return to us only a fraction of the nutrients,” she noted.

Friday morning commenced with the first Lambert Keynote Address, “A Field Guide to Sprawl,” by Yale University Professor Dolores Hayden. Based on her acclaimed book of the same title, Hayden’s talk redefined the vernacular of sprawl with terms like “ball pork,” “boomburb,” “zoomburg,” “car glut,” “clustered world,” “starter castle” and “the logo building.” Accompanied by a visually captivating slide show, Hayden presented a frightening portrait of residential and commercial sprawl invasive to modern-day America.

The Friday afternoon talks complemented Hayden’s lecture. Covering topics relative to the session’s theme, “Defining Environmental and Societal Problems with Current Growth Systems,” speakers examined shopping-center sprawl, supersized houses, city-friendly transportation and other subjects. Each speaker discussed the socioeconomic expectations and repercussions that continue to define land-use practices.

Having studied Smart Growth during their certificate seminar this year, center students had the unique opportunity Friday evening to chat with the guest speakers while enjoying a delightful meal in the Hood Dining Room. After dinner Anthony Flint, fellow and director of public affairs at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, delivered the second Lambert Keynote Address, “Evolving from Sprawl: The Way Forward.” Flint’s talk highlighted the struggles of Jane Jacobs in her battle against urban renewal as conceived by New York City’s master builder, Robert Moses.

The conference’s second day opened with the session “Environmental and Social Impacts of Smart Growth: Is Smart Growth Smart?” Evans Hall reverberated with the real-life conundrum of balancing growth and reform with the economics of land-use markets and the emotional reactions of society.

The conference concluded on an optimistic note with “Promising Environmental Directions for Smarter Growth,” with discussions of sustainable design, the use of “small-d” democracy to encourage stakeholder participation on a local level, and local food in livable communities and farming in a political marketplace. The speakers offered encouraging answers to some of the complex questions surrounding the concept of smart growth. — Keleigh Baretincic

Visit http://goodwin-nieringcenter.conncoll.edu to view all 15 lectures complete with their audiovisual accompaniments.
LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

WHEN FACED WITH A SERIOUS PROBLEM it is fairly common for people to respond with the question, “What can I do?” Depending on the tone and context, this can have two very different connotations. On the one hand, an individual might throw up their arms in frustration and utter these words as the ultimate sign of surrender. Alternatively, someone might pose this question as the first step in a call to arms: a logical query in the formulation of a well-conceived plan of action to solve the problem.

When it comes to environmental problems, it is easy to see how some of the enormous global issues we face will generate this question from people, but with very different meanings. With such colossal problems facing our world, asking “What can I do?” could make all the difference or none at all. Perhaps the challenge seems too large and overwhelming for a single person to really make a difference.

For example, the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a mass of floating marine litter in the North Pacific Ocean, is now estimated to cover somewhere between 250,000 to 5 million square miles. Asking “What can I do?” can preface throwing a plastic water bottle out the car window into a river, or it can be the start of a grassroots recycling program. Global warming, the most politically debated environmental problem in decades, continues to be an issue integral to the very core of our planet’s sustainability despite the overwhelming scientific consensus on the issue. The sheer magnitude of the problem might lead to a sense of hopelessness and inactivity. Conversely, a person might create a recycling program, turn down the thermostat in the winter, consolidate driving errands to the greatest degree possible, or forgo the cinema-sized TV for the slightly more energy-efficient model.

With these thoughts in mind, there are many reasons why I feel very lucky to work in an academic setting. Perhaps foremost is the knowledge that when a student asks the question “What can I do?” it is almost always in the most positive sense. I certainly need this optimism to help balance my own temporary bouts of skepticism brought on by my additional decades of experience. But hearing optimism is not enough — it needs to be encouraged and fostered.

The Goodwin-Niering Center for the Environment was founded with the intention of nurturing awareness of the environment and associated threats to its health. This year’s very successful conference, “Smart Growth? Environmental and Social Implication,” followed in the tradition of academic environmental symposia with an eye toward the future. Similarly, every year we are fortunate to receive a new group of proposals from students applying to the center certificate program, to become part of the process of directly solving environmental problems and educating others. These and other new student-generated ideas are developed from individual study projects that aim to make both the campus and the world more environmentally sustainable. Each small step forward not only helps solve a problem, it also helps to encourage forward thinking toward the next workable solution. Although budgets will always be tight and tradeoffs always painful, the center will continue to work to ensure that the environment and sustainability remain at the forefront of strategic planning to encourage both environmental education, optimism and action.

For the future of the students and perhaps the College itself, context is everything. So the next time you hear about some environmental problem, ask yourself, “What can I do?” Then go out and do it. With any luck, you will meet Connecticut College students, faculty, staff or alumni willing to lend a hand.

Douglas Thompson
Karla Haerich Harrison ’28 Director

Established in 1993, the Goodwin-Niering Center for the Environment is an interdisciplinary program that draws on the expertise and interests of faculty and students in the liberal arts to address contemporary ecological challenges. The Center strives to integrate all areas of learning to deal with the issues of sustainability and the natural environment. Building on a scientific understanding of the natural world, the Center invites the social sciences, the humanities and the arts to help understand and solve difficult environmental issues.

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ON MAY 21, the eve of the Centennial Class of 2011 Commencement, the Goodwin-Niering Center for the Environment honored its 2011 certificate students with a recognition ceremony celebrating their accomplishments and acknowledging their influence as environmentalists on the Connecticut College campus and beyond.

Flowers decorated the windowsills and senior posters lined the walls as Professor Douglas Thompson, Karla Harrison ’28 Director of the Goodwin-Niering Center, welcomed the certificate students and their guests.

“The 2011 certificate class represents a truly remarkable group of individuals who embody the intellectual curiosity and love for the environment at the core of the Goodwin-Niering Center for the Environment,” Thompson said. “We have high hopes that they will all play major leadership roles in the future. We also know that their work with the center and their passion for the environment will continue as they join the ranks of center alumni.”

After a warm introduction by Associate Director Diana Whitelaw, each student spoke briefly about their center experiences, including their summer internships and senior integrative projects as well as their plans for the future.

As Executive Director Glenn Dreyer presented the students with their certificates, each nestled attractively in a folder handcrafted from 100-percent recycled, tree-free hemp paper, a new tradition was born for the Goodwin-Niering Center. For the first time, each certificate student received a bright green honor cord to be worn during Commencement to identify them as Goodwin-Niering scholars (see photo). Guest speaker and former center director Robert Askins, professor of biology, provided a detailed and engaging PowerPoint presentation about the historical development of the College’s environmental programs and their impact on the College and the world at large.

“Although the College’s environmental program is well known for environmental education and basic research, the critically important role of Connecticut College faculty and students in conservation of natural ecosystems in Connecticut and other parts of the world is not sufficiently recognized,” Askins said. Emphasizing key environmental initiatives born directly from center students and faculty alike, Askins celebrated the center’s influence that stretches far beyond the Connecticut College campus.

With the official ceremony concluded, easy conversation punctuated by warm laughter carried throughout the Ernst Common Room as the students and their guests mingled over a beautiful offering of chocolate-covered strawberries, chilled Champagne and other delicious treats. Reminiscing about their accomplishments and looking ahead to futures filled with promise, the Class of 2011 stood poised to set out on new journeys. — Keleigh Barettincic

CEREMONY RECOGNIZES 2011 CERTIFICATE CLASS

CHOATE JUNIOR WINS 2011 SCIENCE FAIR AWARD

WE ARE PLEASED to announce that Joshua S. Kim is the recipient of the 2011 Connecticut Science Fair Goodwin-Niering Center for the Environment Award. A junior at Choate Rosemary Hall in Wallingford, Conn., Kim won numerous awards for his project, “Biodegradation of Polylactide Electrospun Nanoweb for Harmful Algal Bloom Removal.” Kim presented a detailed research project that focused on alternative methods to control a harmful algal bloom while preserving water quality, with qualified data and a well-supported thesis. — Keleigh Barettincic
DOZENS ATTEND D.C. CLIMATE SUMMIT

FIFTY-SEVEN CONNECTICUT COLLEGE STUDENTS traveled to Washington, D.C., to attend Power Shift 2011, the national youth climate summit April 15-18. They joined more than 10,000 others from across the nation at the Washington Convention Center for Friday’s keynote speeches, where former Vice President Al Gore declared, “Political will is a renewable resource. Let’s get to work!” and challenged conference attendees to respond to catastrophic weather events that have occurred in the past year.

Van Jones, executive director of Green for All, the second keynote, spoke about the central role of economics, unemployment and the reduction of the income gap as integral to combating climate change. Defining “power shift” as a shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, a shift of political power from the central government to the grassroots and a shift of economic power from America’s wealthy to the less privileged, Jones noted: “The poor can’t afford solar panels. Shift the power. We can’t afford the poor people not to have solar panels.”

On Saturday afternoon students attended three consecutive, hour-long workshops or panel discussions of their choice. Panelists and workshop leaders from issue-specific, nonprofit organizations offered various perspectives. The nearly 100 workshop topics included gender, class, human rights, religion, campus sustainability, the production of palm oil and, of course, the Gulf of Mexico oil spill.

That evening Lisa Jackson, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, outlined the EPA and Obama administration’s work to combat climate change, while acknowledging that it was not nearly enough. Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org, was considerably more critical of the government, accusing Washington of being polluted by money and issuing a call for the attendees to not just act, but to fight, and to do so without guarantees that they could win.

Tim DeChristopher, a climate change activist known for derailing an illegal public land sale by the Bush administration to private oil and gas developers, called on the Power Shift attendees to take some risks. DeChristopher, who faces up to 10 years in prison for bidding up prices at the oil auction, asked if good grades or career tracks are more important than protesting business as usual.

Attendees from Connecticut College, UConn and Yale as well as other concerned Connecticut residents met on Sunday afternoon to exchange ideas and discuss statewide plans and opportunities. Many Connecticut College students stayed for the day of climate change action on Monday and participated in a sit-in at the Department of the Interior and a march to the Chamber of Commerce.

Inspired and energized by the summit, students returned to New London and shared their enthusiasm during a follow-up Power Shift feedback meeting the next week. Momentum continued two weeks later during a Connecticut climate action meeting in New Haven and at a march in Hartford in May. As McKibben said, “Very few people can ever say that they are in the single most important place they could possibly be, doing the single most important thing they could possibly be doing. That’s you, here, now.” — Kristiane Huber ’11

Ten students, including seven from the Goodwin-Niering Center, thank the center for supporting their attendance at this important event.
CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF 2011

SARAH BERKLEY
Major: History
Senior Integrative Project: “Recognizing Environmental Justice in History: Resistance and Agency in the Cross Bronx Expressway and the Memphis Sanitation Workers’ Strike”
What’s Next: Sarah will continue her environmental studies at the University of Washington, completing her practical teaching requirements at the IslandWood campus. She plans to pursue a master’s degree in education in addition to obtaining her teaching certificate.

NITA CONTRERAS
Major: International relations; Minors: Dance and religious studies
Senior Integrative Project: “Fighting River Pollution through the Understanding of Hindu Goddesses: An Analytical Look at River Myths and Rituals to Understand Pollution Issues and Solutions”

FLORA DRURY
Majors: Biological sciences and environmental studies
Senior Integrative Project: “Barriers to Community Wind Power Development in the U.S.: Looking to Europe for Solutions”
What’s Next: Flora will spend the summer working at the Pacific Whale Foundation in Maui, Hawaii.

JANAN EVANS-WILENT
Major: Environmental studies
Senior Integrative Project: “Vocalizations Associated with Pectoral Fin Contact in Bottlenose Dolphins (Tursiops truncatus)”
What’s Next: Janan will begin taking classes at the University of Washington, furthering her studies in marine bio-acoustics, and plans to attend graduate school in a few years.

CHRISTOPHER HAIGHT
Major: Environmental studies
Senior Integrative Project: “Bisphenol A: Plastic Toxin or Harmless Additive?”

What’s Next: Christopher will spend a third summer of marsh study, this time as a research assistant for the Marine Biological Laboratory, Woods Hole, and hopes to apply to graduate school in the near future.

KRISTIANE HUBER
Majors: Government and environmental studies
Senior Integrative Project: “Standing on Solid Ground: Respecting Cultural Rights in Climate Displacement”
What’s Next: Shortly after graduation Kristiane began working for the Northeast Organic Farming Association as their event, marketing and outreach coordinator.

FIONA JENSEN
Major: Government; Minor: Hispanic studies
Senior Integrative Project: “Wilderness Management: A Comparative Study of the Chilean National Forest Corporation and the United States Forest Service”
What’s Next: Fiona will continue her work with the Appalachian Mountain Club in northern Maine and plans to pursue employment in the environmental field.

CHRISTOPHER KRUPENYE
Major: Biological sciences; Minor: French
Senior Integrative Project: “Reasoning about Communication by Rhesus Macaques”
What’s Next: Christopher, who recently received a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, is heading back to Congo for four months to gather research for his Ph.D. at Duke University with Brian Hare in the Hominoid Psychology Research Group.

ERIC LEFLORE
Major: Environmental studies; Minor: Music
Senior Integrative Project: “Wildlife Conservation in East and Southern Africa: A Historical and Comparative Assessment of the National Park Model”
What’s Next: Eric will be pursuing graduate studies in the UMass Amherst Department of Environmental Conservation.

SCOTT SIEDOR
Majors: Economics and environmental studies
Senior Integrative Project: “Case Study: ‘The Preserve,’ The 5th Amendment, Regulatory Takings and Eminent Domain”
What’s Next: Scott will attend the University of Connecticut School of Law.

SPRING GIVE ‘N’ GO ENJOYS TONS OF SUCCESS

NINE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-EIGHT POUNDS of furniture, rugs and lamps; 5,000 pounds of clothing and bedding; and 729 pounds of “white goods” (mini-fridges and microwaves): This is a sampling of the more than three-and-a-half tons of material discarded by students during the 2011 Spring Give ‘n’ Go.

Managed by Colleen Bunn, an area coordinator for the College’s Office of Residential Education and Living, and with assistance from student volunteers, this end-of-year program was once again a big success.

Spring Give ‘n’ Go benefits the College by diverting tremendous amounts of material from the municipal solid-waste stream while helping community members in need. Usable items were donated to the United Way, which distributes them to local agencies such as the Women’s Center of Southeastern Connecticut, Thames River Community Service and Gemma E. Moran United Way Labor Food Center.

Storage units during Spring Give and Go were generously donated by Northside Self Storage in Hartford, Conn.
DIANA WHITELAW has been “officially” retired for a number of years now. However, ever since leaving the Connecticut Department of Education, where she was state director of the Title I program, she was hard at work at the Goodwin-Niering Center for the Environment as its associate director. Since 1999 she played an integral role in the center’s development, particularly in establishing and administering the Certificate in Environmental Studies and shepherding 12 consecutive certificate classes.

“Diana was always so incredibly professional and willing to put the center and the students’ needs before her own,” said Douglas Thompson, Karla Heurich Harrison ’28 Director of the Goodwin-Niering Center. “The certificate program has thrived because of her constant attention to detail and care for the students. Her work in organizing both the certificate seminar and the center conferences are huge achievements that have helped to build a great reputation for the center.”

Executive Director Glenn Dreyer agreed. “Diana’s most important role has been helping students navigate the many requirements for completing the center’s certificate program,” he said. “Her patience and empathy, coupled with true professionalism, are a big reason that we now have more than 100 successful alumni who hold our certificate.”

Along with the thoughtful attention paid to her certificate students, Whitelaw was responsible for the center’s day-to-day operation, including program promotion, student application and review processes, internship applications and evaluation processes, and communication programs. Under her care, conferences, workshops, lectures and interdisciplinary collaborations, community projects, events, and ceremonies went off without a hitch.

Campus Environmental Coordinator Amy Cabaniss had this to say: “Over the past five years I’ve had the honor and pleasure of working with Diana and sharing an office with her. She is a warm and caring individual and I’ve seen this come through in her interaction and easy rapport with students. Diana is a wonderful friend, and she will be sorely missed in Olin 109.”

Along the way, Whitelaw also co-edited four books based on papers presented at the center’s biennial interdisciplinary environmental conferences on a wide range of topics, including environmental justice, America’s changing coasts, acid in the environment and saving biological diversity.

It must also be mentioned that, true to form, she would prefer that the attention remain on the center, its work and the students at the heart of it all.

“During my 12 years with the center it has been gratifying to see the certificate program grow from a new idea put forth in a grant proposal to the fully fledged program it is today,” Whitelaw said. “Confident that the center will build on this success, I am leaving to pursue new interests. This summer I plan to explore the numerous opportunities for involvement in the conservation and preservation efforts ongoing in a broad spectrum of ecosystems in Costa Rica.”

Taking a moment during the 2011 Recognition Ceremony to thank Whitelaw on behalf of the center, Thompson presented her with a beautiful swing lounger chair made of 100-percent plantation-grown eucalyptus, perfect for relaxing after the many adventures that are sure to be a part of this new chapter in her life.

As her journey unfolds beyond the walls of Olin, we wish Diana the very best in everything as we strive to build upon the lasting foundation of greater environmental understanding that will continue to be the cornerstone of her legacy here. — Keleigh Baretincic

NEW ASSISTANT JOINS THE CENTER

THE GOODWIN-NIERING CENTER for the Environment is pleased to welcome Preston resident Keleigh Baretincic as our new center assistant. Filling the position previously held by Janice Holland, Keleigh joined the center in February, jumping right in with conference and event planning.

Keleigh brings with her a strong professional background as the executive secretary to the first selectman for the town of Griswold and recording secretary for the towns of Griswold and Preston. Coupled with a substantial writing background, freelancing for such news outlets as the Thames River Times and Patch.com, Baretincic made a seamless transition into our little Goodwin-Niering community.

As a former board member of the Preston Avalonia Land Conservancy, Keleigh is committed to environmental conservation in and around her community. With key interests centering on land conservation and green planning within municipalities, she remains active in her local government and sits on the Preston Parks and Recreation Board.

Please stop in and say hello to Keleigh the next time you’re in Olin.
WITH A LONG and strong history of environmental stewardship, Connecticut College is moving into a new era of sustainability in which “we seek to foster systemic environmental, social and economic responsibility through leadership and education that drive decisions, policies and practices.”

Recognizing the need for a broad-based reduction in campus energy consumption, the College hired consultants to perform a campus Energy Conservation Audit (see Fall 2010 Environmental Connections) and a Renewable Energy Assessment. The REA, financed through the Renewable Energy Fund, identified potentially viable options and locations for on-site renewable energy technologies including solar photovoltaics, solar thermal, wind energy and geothermal. The report by consultants Woodard & Curran presents 28 locations at which the technologies could potentially generate electricity to offset our annual electrical purchase of approximately 15,000 MWh.

With the exception of a very large wind turbine, none of the technologies promised to provide significant energy generation. However, if there is a phase-in of renewables over time, the College will rely less on non-renewable energy sources with their associated greenhouse gas emissions. These assessments provide critical information for planning the next steps.

PART OF THE PLAN

With the Renewable Energy Assessment, Energy Conservation Audit and Environmental Sustainability Baseline Assessment in hand, the Sustainability Steering Committee (SSC) is well-poised to draft a Connecticut College Sustainability Strategic Plan for vetting by President Higdon, senior administrators and others in the campus community. Identifying short-, medium- and long-term goals and strategies for campus operations, education and management, the SSC has outlined the plan with the following principles in mind:

Guiding principles for sustainability

- Building the knowledge of sustainability in the campus community;
- Developing the institutional capacity to make decisions that balance environmental stewardship, economic feasibility and social equity;
- Building sustainability into the College’s values and priorities;
- Preparing students to adopt sustainable behaviors that enrich their lives and careers; and
- Modeling sustainability for other academic institutions and the broader community. — Amy Cabaniss, Campus Environmental Coordinator

1 Sustainability Steering Committee, Sustainability Definition — Draft, Dec. 15, 2009
2 Supported by $25 of each student’s comprehensive fee and allocated in accordance with the Renewable Energy Policy with approval by the Student Government Association

A FRESH CONVERSATION ON FOOD

STUDENTS AND FACULTY were treated to an educational and inspiring conversation with food policy expert, activist and author Mark Winne on April 6.

Sponsored by the Holleran Center for Community Action and Public Policy, the Department of Anthropology and the Goodwin-Niering Center for the Environment, Winne’s talk focused on the inadequacy of the U.S. food industry and the tenuous state of our food democracy.

Winne, the author of “Closing the Food Gap,” “Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty” and “Food Rebels, Guerrilla Gardeners and Smart Cookin’ Mamas,” inspired attendees to take action not only by growing their own food, but by forcing action at the governmental level as well.

“Get your hands in the soil, veggies on the chopping block and voices down in city hall,” Winne urged.

Citing food conglomerates such as Con Agra and Monsanto, Winne described a legislative process influenced almost solely by high-powered lobbyists and the companies they represent — effectively eliminating the voice of the private citizen in the political process. Adding to the “food gap” are impediments such as the industrialization of the U.S. food system, the ever-growing presence of genetically modified organisms, and finding a balance between personal freedom and social equality, he said.

While Winne described a food system fraught with hurdles and seemingly insurmountable odds, he also conveyed hopefulness to those in attendance, including center student Nita Contreras ‘11.

“Though I know my personal choice to raise fresh food may not make much of a difference in the large scheme, I am hopeful that I can do my part and maybe someday take the time to be a larger activist,” Contreras said.

By recognizing the necessity of creating a sustainable food system in the United States along with the need to bring locally grown products and fresh ingredients back to our tables, Winne implored citizens to add their voice to the political process: to grow local, get involved, and be a part of a viable solution that will reverse the current dichotomy of food abundance and inefficient nutrition. — Releigh Baretincic
CERTIFICATE CLASS OF 2012 SUMMER INTERNSHIPS

KELSEY COHEN
Major: Architectural studies; Minor: Art
Internship: Project for Public Spaces, New York City

BRYSON COWAN
Majors: Government and environmental studies; Minor: Gender and women's studies
Internship: Small Planet Institute, Cambridge, Mass.
Senior Integrated Project: “Cultivating Hope: Women and Global Food Insecurity”

ZOÉ DIAZ-MARTIN
Major: Environmental studies; Minor: Latin American studies
Internship: Center for Tropical Conservation, Duke University, Cocha Cashu Biological Station, Peru
Senior Integrated Project: “Seed Collection and Forest Regeneration in Western Amazon”

STEPHEN DWORKIN
Major: English
Internship: E-The Environmental Magazine, Norwalk, Conn.
Senior Integrated Project: “Closing the Loop: Connecticut’s Waste Management and its Consequences”

LUCY FRYE
Major: Architectural studies; Minor: Art history
Internship: Carpenter & MacNeill Architects and Builders, Essex, Mass.
Senior Integrated Project: “The Relationship Between Historic Preservation and Sustainable Design”

ELIZABETH NOONAN
Major: Environmental studies; Minor: Theater
Internship: Staples Sustainability Department, Framingham, Mass.
Senior Integrated Project: “Sustainability in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry”

DANIEL SEEHAUSEN
Major: Environmental studies; Minor: Economics
Internship: Intelligent Renewable Energy, Freiburg, Germany

LEAH VARGA
Major: Biological sciences; Minor: Dance
Internship: Aquarium of the Pacific, Long Beach, Calif.
Senior Integrated Project: “Marine Biology and Environmental Education”