

THE ONEONTA ENVIRONMENT:

Studying AND Sustaining





The Oneonta campus community has long shared an interest in our environment, as would be expected from a college located in one of the most scenic and natural regions of New York State. Our Biological Field Station has worked for many years to protect Otsego Lake and its watershed, and alumni of our Environmental Sciences program and other majors have gone on to leadership positions in businesses and agencies committed to preserving our environment.

Recently, however, SUNY Oneonta's commitment to studying and sustaining our environment has grown well beyond the traditional bounds of particular academic disciplines. Leading the campus-wide effort to preserve and protect our environment is Oneonta's Sustainability Task Force, often referred to as the "Green Team," which includes faculty, students, staff, and administrators.



The task force is led by Tom Rathbone, Associate Vice President for Facilities, who coordinates the campus-wide initiatives aimed at making the College's facilities and infrastructure more efficient and effective. From the "green" design standards used in the construction of Higgins Hall and the renovation of Science Building 1 to the use of compact fluorescent bulbs in all lamps in the residence halls, Tom has provided leadership befitting the College's most recent recipient of the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Professional Service.

Overall, the College's use of water has decreased 34% since 2003, and the use of heating fuel has decreased 3% in the same timeframe. In the past year, the campus-wide consumption of electricity has dropped 1% despite increased use of lighting and technology.

To conserve electricity, campus lighting now relies heavily on fluorescent bulbs. A new energy management system has been implemented, which includes the use of occupancy sensors in appropriate facilities. In the computer labs, computers are now programmed to switch automatically to energy-conservation mode when not in use.

To conserve fuel, most campus buildings have been retrofitted to minimize heat loss in the winter and heat gain in the summer. The College is engaged in a long-term program of replacing roofs and windows, and the College's fleet now includes five hybrid autos. Oneonta has reduced its consumption of fuel per square foot of building space by 5.4 % since 1990.

The College has also made a concerted effort to replace its old medium-temperature water lines. The new lines are conserving both heating fuel and water because, as Tom is fond of pointing out, "We no longer have the geysers on campus that alumni from the 1980s and 1990s undoubtedly remember."

In the academic area, another member of the "Green Team," Associate Professor Thomas Horvath (shown conducting research in the cover photo of this issue), provides leadership as Director of the College's Environmental Sciences program. The interdisciplinary program, which the College has offered since 1993, is designed to prepare students as scientists and planners who understand the complex connections



“Project Kaleidoscope will be another of the many ways in which the College’s environmental focus in the curriculum goes beyond the Environmental Sciences program and even beyond the Oneonta campus.”

between the natural world and the human communities that exist within it. The College recently began offering minors in Environmental Biology and Environmental Planning in addition to the major programs in Environmental Sciences with concentrations in Biology, Earth Sciences, and Planning.

With Dr. Horvath coordinating the initiative, the College is moving towards making environmental studies even more interdisciplinary. The College’s Environmental Sciences program was recently selected as one of only 32 programs at colleges and universities nationwide to participate in Project Kaleidoscope, a joint effort of the National Science Foundation and the W. M. Keck Foundation to emphasize interdisciplinary learning in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics within the undergraduate learning environment.

Through Project Kaleidoscope, Dr. Horvath is among a group of Oneonta faculty from the sciences, social sciences, liberal arts, and humanities working together to develop multi-disciplinary environment-based cases that will be used concurrently in courses in many areas of the curriculum. For example, one case under development focuses on the dredging of the upper Hudson River to remedy PCB contamination. The case will form the basis of lessons on public policy in a Political Science class as well as lessons on chemical contaminants in a Chemistry class. Another case will focus on campus energy sustainability and be used in classes in Philosophy and Biology. Students will develop an understanding and appreciation of the issues that they study by seeing them from the perspectives of multiple disciplines.

Project Kaleidoscope will be another of the many ways in which the College’s environmental focus in the curriculum goes beyond the Environmental Sciences program and even beyond the Oneonta campus. The Biological Field Station in Cooperstown is directed by SUNY Distinguished Service Professor Bill Harman, who holds the Rufus J. Thayer Chair for Otsego Lake Research. Dr. Harman and other faculty at the field station are heavily involved in environmental research on the lake and in the Susquehanna River Basin. Their research has enabled local legislators to develop and implement a Lake and Watershed Management Plan that positively impacts the quality of life in Otsego County and the Upper Susquehanna Watershed.

Other research at Oneonta is also dedicated to sustaining the environment, notably studies that involve both faculty and students through the College’s Student-Faculty Grant Program for Research and Creative Activity. At the 2008 Student Research Day, students from disciplines across the curriculum presented their original research on environmental topics such as developing a database of invasive plants, assessing the water quality of local creeks, developing lake management plans, and paying for carbon offsets through a campus parking fee.

After all their hard work in the classroom, Oneonta students have to eat, of course. However, their commitment to sustainability carries over into the dining halls, where Oneonta Auxiliary Services (OAS) has implemented its “Big Red Goes Green” campaign for which even our mascot has become “green.” Courtesy of OAS and Sodexo, each resident student has been presented with a drinking mug, made from recycled material, to use instead of paper cups in the dining halls. Trays are no longer available in the halls, which has cut down on water use and food waste. Used vegetable oil now serves as the primary heating fuel at the College Camp lodge, and some of it goes to a local farmer, who provides locally grown organic vegetables for the dining halls in return for the oil, which he turns into bio-diesel.



OAS sustainability initiatives extend well beyond dining and encompass every aspect of their services. All paper used within the organization and within the College itself is now 100% recycled, and recycling containers are available in every building on campus. OAS office paper is shredded and distributed to a local farmer for animal bedding. The Red Dragon Bookstore sells paper products made from recycled paper, uses biodegradable bags, and offers some electronic textbooks. Styrofoam packing peanuts are recycled through the Shipping Room in the Hunt Union. Energy-efficient appliances have become the norm in the laundry facilities and in the residence halls.

The College Camp, a joint effort of the College, the Student Association, and OAS, is one more spot where the sustainability efforts of the entire campus community are evident. During the 2008 Into the Streets day of community service, student volunteers planted 100 trees at the camp. Plans are being developed right now for the Pollinator Garden Research Project at the camp this spring. Faculty, staff, students, and OAS are working together to install a native plant garden at College Camp, which will add to its natural beauty and lessen the negative environmental impacts of lawn mowing. As a research project, faculty and students will study the garden to determine if it can increase local bee populations.

From the classroom to the camp, the entire SUNY Oneonta community is contributing to the College’s initiatives in sustainability. Though we’ll always be Red Dragons at heart, even our College mascot has come to understand that it’s good to be green.

“The College Camp, a joint effort of the College, the Student Association, and OAS, is one more spot where the sustainability efforts of the entire campus community are evident.”

