

THE INSTITUTIONAL PLAN AND SUSTAINABILITY

Ithaca College is rapidly emerging as a nationally recognized leader of sustainability in higher education. The achievements of the campus community regarding sustainability are numerous and impressive, strengthening the College's reputation and facilitating the success of its Institutional Plan. In 2004, President Peggy R. Williams explained the College's commitment to sustainability as follows:

It is our goal to become one of the nation's leading proponents of sustainability, to practice what we preach, and to produce leaders in many fields who will find solutions for meeting the needs of their generation without shortchanging future generations. Enlightened corporations realize that if they hope to remain competitive they must use natural resources wisely, be responsive to the concerns of the public, and serve as good stewards of the environment.

By acknowledging the importance of building a sustainable world, Ithaca College has made an ethical and moral decision to not only make a positive difference but also to teach our students the important link between sustainability and responsible citizenship. The College took another step forward as a leader in sustainability on February 28, 2006, when President Williams signed the Talloires Declaration, an international action plan for incorporating sustainability and environmental literacy in teaching, research, operations, and outreach at colleges and universities. (See the appendix for a brief report on Ithaca College's current progress on the Declaration's ten points).

In January 2005, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, announcing that

There can be few more pressing and critical goals for the future of humankind than to ensure steady improvement in the quality of life for this and future generations, in a way that respects our common heritage – the planet we live on. To do this we must learn constantly – about ourselves, our potential, our limitations, our relationships, our society, our environment, our world. Education for sustainable development is a life-wide and lifelong endeavor which challenges individuals, institutions and societies to view tomorrow as a day that belongs to all of us, or it will not belong to anyone.

According to UNESCO, education for sustainable development should promote “the values, behavior and lifestyles required for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation.”

At the time of the adoption of the Ithaca College Institutional Plan in spring 2001, the language of sustainability was not widely employed in higher education. While not explicitly established as an Institutional Plan goal, sustainability practice and thinking is woven throughout all of the Institutional Plan's priorities, which include academic program development, diversity,

enrollment, experiential and performed-based learning, facilities, quality of student life, quality of work life, resource development, and technology.

What follows are illustrative examples of how sustainability is an integral component of the Institutional Plan.

- **Academic Program Development:** *Strengthen the College's academic offerings, including interdisciplinary programs, shared academic experiences, and graduate programs.*

The study of sustainability is interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary. Over 100 courses at Ithaca College, many of them newly developed, have been identified as meeting the UNESCO criteria for education for sustainable development. The College's course offerings have also been expanded through interdisciplinary degrees in Environmental Science and Environmental Studies. The College has also offered First Year Seminars on sustainability. The establishment of the Division of Interdisciplinary and International Studies demonstrates the College's commitment to scholarship that crosses many disciplines and to examining new approaches to the study of interdisciplinary topics such as sustainability.

- **Diversity:** *Enhance the diversity of students, faculty, and staff and create a supportive environment and programs for the entire College community.*

Sustainability insists that building community in ways that embrace diversity and foster mutual respect is the key to continued growth and development. The B.A. in Culture and Communication, from this perspective, reflects the philosophy of sustainability. The establishment of the Center for the Study of Culture, Race, and Ethnicity, and the Center for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Education, Outreach and Services (LGBT) supports greater understanding of diverse populations and reflects the goals of a sustainable society. Opportunities exist to develop courses that explore the links between sustainability and diversity. The establishment of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholars Program continues to bring a diverse group of talented, engaged, and intelligent students to the College. The study-abroad opportunities offered through the Office of International Programs promote global perspectives and openness to ideas such as sustainability in a manner that helps to attract diverse student, faculty, and staff to the College.

- **Enrollment:** *Optimize enrollment in all programs while continuing to build a strong academic life.*

The College's effort to limit growth to cost effective academic programs, while investing in its "quality endowment," is an outstanding example of sustainability thinking. Another good example is the effort to improve retention. The First Year Experience Coordinating Committee is examining numerous programs and policies designed to increase the retention of first year students. Recent efforts to create more strategic approaches to admissions communication have resulted in the largest number of applicants in the

college's history for the 2006-2007 academic year, and reflects one of the most diverse group of applicants in recent years. These approaches will continue to allow IC to develop and strengthen its competitive edge in preparation for the projected demographic downturn later this decade. New marketing programs could also capitalize on the growing interest in sustainability among high school students.

- **Experiential and Performance-Based Learning:** *Develop curricular and co curricular programs that encourage or incorporate field-based, experiential, and performance-based learning; collaborative research; and partnerships with educational, professional, and service organizations.*

Sustainability lends itself to innovative, experiential and performance-based learning. The interdisciplinary freshman seminars organized around sustainability, the intergenerational programs reflected in the Center for Life Skills at Longview, student research on sustainability presented at the Whalen Symposium, and outreach efforts with EcoVillage, regional wineries, and the Finger Lakes Environmental Film Festival all illustrate cutting-edge examples of how experiential and performance-based learning has and will continue to be met through a commitment to sustainability.

- **Facilities:** *Maintain and enhance the College's academic, residential, recreational, athletic, and administrative facilities and grounds.*

Sustainable design has become an increasingly important factor in campus planning at Ithaca College. The new business building, designed to achieve platinum-level LEED certification, is the first step. A similar commitment has been made to "green" the design of the future Athletic and Event Center. Plans to engage in permaculture landscaping south of the Center for Natural Sciences as a collaborative student-faculty project provide the College another significant opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to sustainability. The College also has a Natural Lands Committee that evaluates the use of undeveloped lands that are in their natural state throughout the campus.

- **Quality of Student Life:** *Enhance our students' educational experience and help ensure their success through the development of comprehensive residential, co curricular, and campus life programs and support systems.*

Sustainability contributes to the quality of student life through environmentally healthy residences, culturally sensitive support systems, and attractive co-curricular opportunities. The establishment of the Sustainably Conscious Living Community in one of the campus residence halls is an important step toward integrating sustainability into the learning/living environment. Dining Services has taken significant steps to offer more organic and locally-grown food products, and is collaborating with faculty from the School of Health Sciences and Human Performance to support coursework encouraging healthy eating and wellness. In addition, Ithaca College's nationally recognized composting facility handles all of the campus food waste.

- **Quality of Work Life:** *Ensure that Ithaca College is seen as a first-choice employer.*

Employee development, recognition, and wellness programs are all important aspects of sustainability. Key examples in this area include the four-day flexible work week pilot program, the staff leadership development program, as well as the college-wide Day of Learning. In addition, the College supports and recognizes faculty and staff work in the area of sustainability. A faculty grant program, for example, supports curriculum development in sustainability. Staff have also been honored for initiatives in campus sustainability through existing recognition programs, such as the IC Choice Awards.

- **Resource Development:** *Enable the College to become less tuition-dependent and reliant on debt by increasing financial resources from public, private, and entrepreneurial sources.*

Sustainability generates unique opportunities to cultivate new donors and propose new grant programs. Recent gifts and grants to the College for the design and construction of the new Business School building makes this clear. Sustainability can also open up new entrepreneurial revenue streams, and new mechanisms for reducing operating costs, all enhancing the overall position of the institution.

- **Technology:** *Ensure that Ithaca College is a recognized innovator of blending contemporary technology with educational techniques and administrative support practices.*

Sustainability provides significant opportunities to demonstrate technological expertise. Proper utilization of technology to support campus administrative activities has already resulted in major reductions in the use of paper and in significant energy conservation measures. The new Business School facility, with its emphasis on sustainable technology to enhance productivity and reduce operating and maintenance costs, will reinforce the College's efforts to position itself as a technological leader. The Information Technology Task Force continually seeks ways in which technology can create a more sustainable campus.

Sustainability, less a product than a process, significantly enhances the Institutional Plan by providing a framework for continuous quality improvement. By constantly striving to make decisions that are environmentally, fiscally, and socially sound, sustainability challenges the College, in the words of its Vision Statement, to fulfill “the responsibilities of citizenship and service in the global community.”