

Environmental Studies

newsletter



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Featured speaker

Author and Sustainability Coordinator at Dartmouth speaks to GMC Community

Jim Merkel—author, homesteader, and sustainability coordinator at Dartmouth College—spoke to a capacity audience on November 30th. He drew a diverse audience, bringing new faces to the campus.

Merkel trained as a military engineer before becoming an avid homesteader who comfortably lived off \$5,000 for 14 years. He is the author of *Radical Simplicity* and founder of the Global Living Project. *Radical Simplicity* embraces the necessity for each person to accept responsibility for the ecological impact of her or his actions. After years of living and teaching others about individual sustainability, Merkel has taken on the challenge and opportunity of institutional sustainability with his new position at Dartmouth.

During his visit to GMC, Merkel also was a guest in several classes, including Ecology and Environmental Ethics. This provided an opportunity to explore sustainability in an interdisciplinary context.

Student Responses Students left the presentation inspired, uplifted, and pensive about their ecological footprint. It was reassuring to see the steps that people and institutions are taking to reduce their environmental impact. Some approaches Merkel mentioned were: biking, carpooling, eating local and lower on the food chain, using alternative energy, and developing an “allergic” reaction to trash. He also discussed sustainably designed structures, from straw bale

houses to composting toilets and solar cookers.

I’m also aware of the challenges of institutionalizing and mainstreaming sustainability. How does reducing a college’s ecological footprint fit within its bottom line? How can students practice individual sustainability while residing at a college where they don’t control the energy source? How do small colleges and the everyday person shift towards sustainability without the resources for the often high initial cost of sustainable initiatives, for example, installing solar energy?

All of this begs the question, “What is GMC doing in terms of sustainability?” Last year, Jesse Pyles was hired as the college’s first Sustainability Coordinator and the Student Campus Greening Fund (SCGF) cut checks to support its first proposals. The college enrolled in a Cow Power program that will supply 50% of its energy. Most recently, the administration is considering the adoption of a Vision Statement and Sustainable Purchasing Guidelines for its dining hall.

During the Q&A that followed Merkel’s presentation a member of the audience said, “I think you’re a dreamer.” Most Americans would agree, but Merkel’s dreams have materialized and resulted in action. The increasing number of sustainability coordinators at universities are evidence that sustainability is no longer an unrealistic hippie concern and passion. Accept responsibility for your ecological footprint and acquire a trash allergy!

—Corinna Lowe

Merkel mentioned a new computer system that allows students to see how much energy their residence hall is using. Students unplug appliances and within seconds see a drop in energy usage. By allowing students to visualize their impact on energy conservation, this system has led to dramatic decreases in waste.

Another program, recently implemented at Dartmouth’s new Sustainable Dining Hall, offers students reusable take-out containers. Merkel pointed out to the food service directors that they lose \$1 per day per student in disposable products. The reusable sets, containing a Tupperware style dish, a cloth napkin, silverware and a mug, costs the food service provider \$20 per student. At first they rejected the plan, stating that \$20 per student was far too

Happy Holidays!

Have a safe and happy holiday season.

big of an investment. Then they realized the program would give them a full return on their investment in a mere 20 days. Even if half of the students never returned the sets, it would still be a 40 day return on investment. The service provider now uses more sustainable practices.

Jim Merkel has led a sustainable life over the past 16 years, and he remains enthusiastic about this lifestyle. His persona is that of a fun, easy going, creative, and very intelligent guy and it was a great pleasure to have him come speak to the GMC community.

—Beth Donovan

Students in action

Christina Liakos, part of a Greenpeace organizing semester, holding a banner at a coal power plant protest in Denver, Colorado.



ES service learning

Intro to Environmental Education The EDU 1000 Intro. To Environmental Education class has been conducting a service learning project with the fourth graders at Poultney Elementary School this semester. The GMC students have planned and conducted environmental education programs on deer, owls, and rotting logs. This unique opportunity has allowed the GMC students to practice and refine their environmental education skills and to share their enthusiasm for the environment with local children.

Ecoleague exchange

Kira Berglund I've been having a good time here at GMC, so much that I've decided to transfer. I've enjoyed my classes, extracurriculars like ultimate frisbee and farm crew, and meeting the students and faculty. The campus has a welcoming atmosphere, and the professors are willing to help students make the best of their education. Northland is very similar as far as size and programs offered and both have many on campus events, like shows by outside musicians to keep people entertained.

Campus Greening

Student Campus Greening Fund—VOTES ARE IN! Six student proposals have been awarded full funding by the Student Campus Greening Fund (SCGF). The proposals were researched and written by students seeking to increase environmental awareness and decrease the institution's ecological footprint. This semester, 174 students voted on the nine proposals online through the Student Senate website and in hardcopy at the library, the coffeehouse, and in the Student Life Office. Several proposals were written based on the successes of last year's proposals.

Funded Proposal	Submitted By	Amount Awarded
Local Food Program	Irene Holak	\$5,000
Withey Solar Panels	Amelia Agnew and Environmental Science class	\$3,500
Indoor Recycling Bins	Irene Holak	\$3,000
Withey Double-sided Printer	Nicole Ainsworth and Environmental Science class	\$2,500
Farm Produce Drying and Storage Space	Jessyloo Rodrigues & Irene Holak	\$445
Farm Hoop House Extension	Pearl Wetherall & Irene Holak	\$978
TOTAL		\$15,423

Students responsible for the awarded projects will establish timelines for the implementation of their proposals, and your Greening Fund money will be used to make them happen right away. Most implementation of funded projects will take place throughout next semester, and the next grant round will take place in the fall of 2007.

Congratulations to all the grant recipients, and a sincere thanks to all students involved with the fund this semester, especially SCGF Director, Corinna Lowe. Keep an eye out for opportunities to be involved with the Fund next semester.

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