

As it was mentioned I was graduated from Notre Dame last year in the school of architecture and I thought I'd speak a little about a few initiatives that I was part of while I was a student. And reflect a little on their meaning in the greater mission of the catholic university.

I first became really interested in sustainability in highschool through architecture. I was amazed at the inventiveness and ingenuity architects were displaying in the field of green design. I was desperate to get my hands on books and magazines featuring all the latest designs. I did not have much of any understanding of architecture at the time, but luckily for me, even the staunchest academic architecture journals are always at least half pictures. As I worked my way through architecture school I was always seeking more on this topic and was sometimes disappointed with the lack of topics on sustainability in my regular course load.

This lead me to get together with a fellow classmate and we did one of the most effective techniques in my experience in environmental student activism. We wrote a letter...to our Dean. In this letter, we outlined strengths and weaknesses of our education in terms of sustainable design, and made a few specific and very feasible requests as to how our education might be enhanced in the area of sustainability. This letter was very well received by dean who made large strides in the following years supporting sustainable design at the school. For our part we, along with another upperclassman, founded Green Arkies ND, a student group to that would assist in sustainable initiatives we posited, particularly concerning LEED education.

Looking back on this experience, I think there are two valuable lessons I learned from it.

The first, being nice to the administration is often worthwhile. The support and assistance from our dean and staff was invaluable in furthering many future causes in the school.

Now that is not to say that I think one should not be provocative. I think that is one true beauty of student activism. In the letter we wrote, we *may* have mentioned the fact that our architectural program was in danger of fading into insignificance.... There is a certain freedom one enjoys when they are not on tenure track. But being provocative does not mean being disrespectful. The respect we showed the dean and the administration was paid back to us tenfold through the course of my time at the architecture school.

The second noteworthy item concerning this experience, was that I believe it was the first time I really made concrete efforts to take ownership of my education. Beyond my selection of classes it was the first time I actively contemplated what I wanted to get out of my educational experience at the university, and took action to make it a reality.

The following year, feeling the inexplicable need to once again be a part of an organization with the word "*green*" in the title, I teamed up with an engineering student to enter a business plan competition run out of the business school here. We called our company "Green Counts." The basis of our business plan was to give environmental clubs at highschools the tools to run very simple energy audits in their homes. They

would then plug the data into our website, which would produce a report detailing financial and environmental savings via various retrofits such as energy efficient light bulbs. There would then of course be an option to buy these products from us with a percent of the proceeds going to the club as a fundrasing.

We did well in the competition and even considered actually starting the business up, but then my partner Erin got an offer from NASA, and suddenly selling lightbulbs out of a garage in South Bend lost it's glamour.

However, something very useful did come out of the project. As part of putting the business plan together we ran a trial run audit on a dormitory on campus. After crunching the numbers we found that even with the ultra cheap electric rates at Notre Dame, it would be financially beneficial to the university to literally give away free efficient light bulbs to the residents of the dorms. The payback time was so short that the univserity would see thousands in savings within the first academic year.

The report from this case study was distributed around campus to various entities including the then new office of sustainability. The following semester the office of sustainability sponsored just such a bulb give away program.

Later I would like to get to what I believe should be the core motivations for sustainable initiatives at a Catholic university, but I think it is worth noting that though there may be a lot of reasons for being sustainable, saving *large* amounts of money is not the worst of

them and should not be ignored. It is an excellent tool in promoting sustainable initiatives. There are a lot of low hanging fruits out there that are a great way to get the ball rolling especially at a university.

The last initiative I would like to talk about occurred in my final year at Notre Dame. I became involved with a group of architecture students who had teamed up with a non-profit called Building Tomorrow. Building Tomorrow helps college students fundraise money for the construction of primary schools in rural Uganda. Our group of architecture students not only fundraised but also were able to design the school ourselves.

In this way we got a crash course in sustainable design. Ventilation, “air conditioning,” water collection, etc. all had to be done without the benefit of electricity. And the entire structure necessarily had to be constructed solely from locally available materials.

From this experience, I certainly learned a lot about ultra efficient sustainable design, *as well as* how to run a cost estimate in metric units with Ugandan Shillings. But more importantly I learned a little about what I want to do as a professional architect.

These examples demonstrate three key reasons why I believe environmental student action is important.

It is a means for students to take ownership of and shape their own education.

It is a means for students to develop the skills necessary to shape the institutions of which they are a part.

It is a means for students to inform their futures and necessarily all of our future.

However, as important as I believe these are, they could probably be said about many types of student activism. Why then is *environmental* student action, so important especially at a catholic institution? I believe Catholic Social Thought can give a framework to begin answering this question.

Among the principles of the Catholic Social Tradition there is the idea of Common Good. This basically being the idea that we are all uniquely intertwined as children of God, and there exists a common and unified good towards which we should all strive. Sustainability is a quintessential manifestation of this ideal.

Sustainability is not survivalism. It is a recognition of unity of purpose for the good of all.

I once heard a homily after the gospel of the loaves and fish, that posited that it was not in fact a miracle narrative. Rather it was a story expressing a simple truth; that as Jesus divided the loaves and fish among the crowd, the true act of divinity was changing the hearts of the crowd into sharing what little food they had all brought, that it was a paradigm shift from individual concern to an embrace of the common good.

I think this take on the gospel story illustrates an important point about what we are all here discussing this weekend.

For I believe environmental activism should have at its core the mission of spreading amongst the crowd not loaves, fish or even solar panels, but rather the underlying truth that we are all in this together and that sustainability is a true and common good worth striving for.

Thank you.