

January 10, 2008

## Fall Reflection spilling into Spring Semester

My experiences with the Bennion Center, nearly spanning my entire academic career at the University of Utah have not only helped teach me about the amazing multi-purpose values of former plastic coffee ground containers alternatively used as mini-storage bins for Curt Larsen's home-compost bin, but have also helped shaped my perspectives on my role in life and instilled within me a culture of service to the community. Through service to the microorganisms devouring added compost materials, building gardens to grow food and share with the community, educating youth and working with university students about environmental and social health issues, I have learned much about the possibilities of instigating positive change through civic engagement, and bringing people together.

When a freshman, Professor Fred Montague's environmental science courses infused with thought-provoking lectures on social justice, and ways to create healthy communities through forging sustainable relationships with our environment initially stirred me to explore and develop an interest in ecology, and environmental education. Upon learning about the pressing social and environmental challenges of ecosystem degradation, overpopulation, over-consumption, air and water pollution, destructive agricultural practices, poverty and community disintegration, I felt helpless and overwhelmed. However, the service-learning component of his courses offers students enriching opportunities to work within our communities to respond to some of these problems. I was introduced to the Lowell Bennion Center, a campus-based community service outreach center that has enabled me and other students to enhance our leadership roles by engaging in and directing service projects that address social and environmental needs in the greater Salt Lake community. Five years later, I have invested myself in a number of challenging and yet meaningful and rewarding projects, empowering me to address and materialize my passion of helping build more sustainable, healthy communities.

My experience as co-director and Service Learning Scholar working with the non-profit Wasatch Community Gardens (WCG) have helped me see gardening as a means of helping bring people together and reconnect with the land, grow and feed themselves nutritious food, enhance urban food security, and build richly bio-diverse and beautiful oasis in the city. I see access to healthy, nutritious and sustainably grown food free of toxic chemicals, dependence on fossil fuels, and industrial agricultural systems that abuse the land and farmers as among important determinants of a healthy society. Through teaching students about sustainable agriculture, working and having fun together in tending two of their four main gardens, donating produce to food pantries and enjoying the harvest ourselves, I have helped spread the word and encourage others to see the value of turning abandoned parcels of land into 'food forests.'

While I enjoyed working in the fairly well-established community gardens and bringing students down for workshops and bed preparation, I desired exploring all the ingredients necessary and the process one must go through in building new organic food gardens on fertile ground and the chance to start with the basic elements. Motivated to extend my passions for sustainable community building, as well as to develop my

leadership skills and help foster a more environmentally literate and active community, two years ago, I and Lindsay Clark directed a student group project called SEED, Sustainable Environments and Ecological Design. One of our projects is helping build community gardens in local schools, and educating youth about stewardship, and healthy eating habits. The past summer we, along with WCG have worked with a number of elementary and junior high schools, helping them jump-start their garden and design lesson plans.

Service-learning and leadership programs through the Lowell Bennion Community Service Center have provided me crucial tools to link academics to campus and community needs. In 2005, to further environmental stewardship and literacy, I co-founded and co-directed a student group project called Sustainable Environments and Ecological Design (SEED). We sought to engage University students to reach out and help build food gardens in interested local elementary schools and educating youth, future leaders of the world, about plants, and healthy eating habits. What seemed a great challenge for time-stretched teachers ultimately became a reality as we built relationships with teachers, offered vital student volunteer support and shared our knowledge and time connecting the garden with the core curriculum.

Another ambitious project of SEED's addresses helping mobilize the campus to become more sustainable through more resource-use and energy efficient practices and operations, research, curriculum and outreach. My experiences with TreeUtah and an internship in Oregon this past summer studying sustainable communities sharpened my desire to work with interested campus members to make sustainability a more visible and central core of the campus. As an institution of higher education, the University can set an example for its students, other institutions and the community at large which it serves by responding to the interconnected social, economic and environmental challenges of poverty, environmental degradation, social injustices and climate change in an interdisciplinary manner. Sustainability requires holistic thinking to these complex problems and thus encompasses a broad range of disciplines. The departments of business, economics, the life sciences, social and political science, history, art and language, can all teach integral skills such as an understanding of ecosystem processes and limits, green economics, wise policy making, appropriate technology, renewable energies, community building and public participation.

Our student group, informed by many others on campus recognized that there needed to be more of a concerted effort by the U in such practices as waste reduction, good stewardship, and energy efficiency. In Fall 2006, we facilitated a series of forums entitled the *Sustainable Campus Initiative* to catalyze a new movement towards the possibility of the U adopting an official blueprint towards campus sustainability. As I had learned from my experiences as a student of courses like Community and Environmental Change and Sustainable Communities, *dialogue*, understanding the *needs* a community expresses; and *education* are critical in any effort to achieve change and holding these forums has enabled me and other students involved to clearly realize this. To coordinate different sustainability initiatives addressing energy and land use, water conservation and curbing carbon emissions, it became clear that the U needed to establish a central office focusing on these goals. One faculty member in attendance convened a task force of students, staff, and faculty to draft an action plan and proposal, and within four months, senior administrators approved it. The new Office of Sustainability was

officially unveiled on October 4, 2007. This achievement demonstrates the power of a united group passionate about instigating positive change.

As a continuing SEED co-director, I had hoped to continue developing the O.S. and a collective mission to “create a culture of sustainability, shared by campus and surrounding communities, that builds upon the University’s mission to facilitate active and responsible citizenship in the realms of human health, environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic progress”. This past fall, SEED actively recruited more students to be engaged in spreading the word about the new OS and with the help of over 15 students, helped kick-off the official unveiling of the OS at a press conference showcasing the U’s ever growing sustainability efforts revolving around expanded Campus food Gardens, and Chartwell’s enhanced green food services ; the successful establishment of the U Bike Collective promoting healthier modes of transit among students; increased recycling programs, energy Retrofits and “green-er” Buildings, and Alternative Transit options.

This press conference was held in tandem with the new ASUU Sustainability’s Board’s Environmental Impact Day, an event to inform students about sundry environmentally-minded non-profits they can be involved with. As an overall well-attended extravaganza, we all had a marvelous time being a part of a rather exciting time in our lives, knowing we had made an impact on our campus...yet every learning more about what we can and need to do.

Despite having co-opted the ever expansive and complex term “sustainability” in our group title and notwithstanding all the hoopla we may have helped generate on campus, I, and many others would agree, have yet to understand what this means. With this in mind, and inspired by the B.C.’s own encouragement that we commit ourselves to a life of learning more about who we are and what the fuzzy we are doing!, continue to learn how to implement sustainability on a community and of course personal scale. We sponsored several students to attend the much-appraised *Bioneers Conference*, which brings together leading social and scientific innovators and everyday people committed to preserving and supporting the future of life on Earth; sharing stories and presenting solutions for our most pressing environmental and social challenges. These conferences are held in cities all over the country, and for the first time this year, Salt Lake held its own at Westminster College. This 3-day long event from October 19-21 2007 titled "Sustainability: Bringing it all Home", offered a web-cast of lecture/sessions from the national center in San Rafael, Cali. Along with this showing, Westminster hosted a rich diversity of local workshops and keynotes, delicious local and organic food, music, art, community bike tours, and plenty of time for conversation and connection.

Over 16 inspirational, 1/2 hour lectures from the national conference and over 20 local sessions opened our eyes to the savory idea of building sustainable communities through *holistic* and *innovative* measures addressing global health, poverty, institutionalized racism, and environmental justice, all of which are indeed interconnected and need to be addressed in that manner. The conference exuded an amazing energy that in a way bound all of the attendees together and comforted all of us who feel at times alone in the world; that we are in fact part of a global movement and need to keep organizing! We saw presentations given by people from various fields including green chemistry, responsible entrepreneurship, marine biology, art activism, and human rights. As one student, Tim DeChristopher acclaimed:

“The speakers at Bioneers were hopeful and holistic in their approach to sustainability. Each speaker was an expert in his or her field, which ranged from physics to civil rights to business. They discussed crucial problems of our time and amazing solutions with positive examples of what can be done.”

Inspired, yet rather ruthlessly exhausted from three all-day lectures and set on sustaining the energy, sharing what we have learned with the U, we joined forces with SpaCE, given our closely tied initiatives for a more politically and engaged populous. Together, we decided to collectively purchase a DVD set of the conference to augment the B.C. movie library and use the DVDs for another ambitious project we have been working on with the O.S. since November.

In partnership with over 1,300 universities, we have recruited the U of U to participate in a national education and civic engagement initiative called **Focus the Nation on Global Warming Solutions**. This project is aimed at uniting millions of US citizens to pro-actively address solutions to one of the greatest challenges of our time related to climate destabilization. With more than 10,000 volunteers building events at schools, with faith and civic organizations and businesses participating, Focus the Nation has become the largest Teach-in in history.

The Office of Sustainability, the U student group S.E.E.D. and a coalition of students, staff, faculty, and community groups have planned a series of events throughout the month of January to engage Utah citizens in the nation-wide discussion. One of the highlights of the January based events, also taken on thousands of other campuses is the Global Warming Teach-In. This past semester, we successfully recruited over 50 faculty from a variety of disciplines to add a **30-50 minute** lesson linking global warming issues to their own course *for at least one day* during the week of January 28, 2008. There will also be panel discussions with faith leaders and state and federal political officials, all of whom SEED/OS personally invited, to will help motivate needed policy change. The intent is to foster a dialogue, and recognize that solutions must come from a holistic understanding of the world, engaging millions of students to apply their knowledge to create a just and healthier world.

I think back on how Lindsay and I two years ago mulled about how we could unify teachers and classes to engage in a collective dialogue about how every one of us despite supposed distinctions in departmental emphasis, are all connected to one another and the environment and must take action, employ our interdisciplinary understandings and restore our relations with each other. It truly was through the grapevine of Vaughn Lovejoy's, a B.C partner and mad tree-planter who first informed me about FTN in early April, at which time I had no idea how this would take shape at the U. Through key collaborations with the O.S., the B.C. and SpaCE., students, U faculty, and high school teachers this critical discussion is finally talking place. I look forward to another exciting year! Below is our email calendar of events:

## **Focusing the Nation on Global Warming Solutions**

The University of Utah is participating in Focus the Nation, a national education and civic engagement initiative aimed at uniting millions of US citizens to address solutions to global warming. With more than 10,000 volunteers building events at

over 1300 schools, with faith and civic organizations and businesses participating, Focus the Nation has become the largest Teach-in in history.

The Office of Sustainability, the U student group S.E.E.D. and a coalition of students, staff, faculty, and community groups have planned a series of events throughout the month of January to engage Utah citizens in the global warming discussion. All events are free and open to public.

Culminating events:

- ◆ January 31<sup>st</sup> - **Policy Solutions to Global Climate Change, Panel Discussion** - featuring Salt Lake County Mayor Peter Corroon, Salt Lake City Mayor Ralph Becker, and the Governor's Energy Advisor Dianne Nielson. Co-Hosted by the Hinckley Institute of Politics  
6:00 pm to 7:30 pm – Utah Museum of Fine Arts Auditorium
- ◆ January 21<sup>st</sup> to February 12<sup>th</sup> - **Choose Your Future: Vote for a Solution** - an opportunity for students and citizens from all over the nation to join together and vote on five priorities for action. The campus and citizen endorsed solutions will be presented to political leaders in Washington D.C., and state capitals across the nation.  
To vote visit [www.focusthenation.org/chooseyourfuture.php](http://www.focusthenation.org/chooseyourfuture.php)

Main Events:

- ◆ January 23<sup>rd</sup> - **Panel Discussion: Interfaith dialogue about Climate Change.** Join lively discussion with diverse S.L.C. faith leaders on stewardship principles within their traditions and how religious and spiritual leaders and their members are responding to the challenge of global warming. 6 30 pm – University of Utah Olpin Union 4<sup>th</sup> floor, Panorama East room
- ◆ Week of January 28<sup>th</sup> - **Teach-in at the U of U** - voluntary faculty participation linking course content to global climate change and initiating class discussion. See who the faculty are and consider signing up your class [www.sustainability.utah.edu/focus.htm](http://www.sustainability.utah.edu/focus.htm)
- ◆ January 30<sup>th</sup> - **Focus the Nation 2% Solution Webcast** - Join Stanford University climate scientist, [Stephen Schneider](#), sustainability expert [Hunter Lovins](#) and green jobs pioneer [Van Jones](#) for a discussion of global warming solutions. Bring your cell phone for text message polling during the webcast!  
6:00pm – University of Utah Olpin Union Theater

Associated Events:

- ◆ January 15<sup>th</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> - **Stegner Symposia: Greenbag series** - *Sustainability in Building and Design & Sustainable Development and Management of Ski Resorts*  
12:15pm – S.J. Quinney College of Law, r m. 106
- ◆ January 17<sup>th</sup> - **Utah Museum of Natural History: The Nature of Things lecture series** - *Snow in the West: Implications for Global Warming and Our Economy*  
7:00pm – The City Library, Main Auditorium
- ◆ January 17<sup>th</sup> – **Film Screening: What a Way to Go: Life at the End of Empire** – Co-Hosted by Post Carbon Salt Lake  
6:30pm – University of Utah Olpin Union Theater
- ◆ January 19<sup>th</sup> - **Workshop on Permaculture principles and practice: Hands-on solutions to Climate Change** – Co-hosted by TreeUtah and the student group S.E.E.D.  
9:30am to 4:00pm – University of Utah Olpin Union Building 4<sup>th</sup> floor, Panorama East room
- ◆ January 28<sup>th</sup> – **Global Warming and the Coming Energy Shortfall: Interconnected Problems, Common Solutions?** – Co-Hosted by Post Carbon Salt Lake  
3:30pm – University of Utah Olpin Union Theater

My enriching experiences in gardens, learning and teaching about environmental issues have provided practical experience and insight into ways of materializing my passions for a sustainable world. This semester I have started to pursue my graduate degree through the Masters in Science and Technology (MST) in Environmental Science and Sustainability at the University. With the MST program having approved a plan enabling students to do their internships in an on-campus setting, I hope to be able to continue working with the Office of Sustainability researching ways to improve the ecological footprint of the University, itself a microcosm of a city that can help offer leadership to the sustainable planning of Salt Lake and the world. I look forward to using the interdisciplinary framework of the Sustainability program and my understanding of science and social issues to work towards positive and healthy change both on and off campus.