

2012

Putting Principles into Practice: An Interview with Kenneth Foster about Concordia's Sustainability Council

Kenneth Foster

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections>

Augustana Digital Commons Citation

Foster, Kenneth (2012) "Putting Principles into Practice: An Interview with Kenneth Foster about Concordia's Sustainability Council," *Intersections*: Vol. 2012: No. 36, Article 8.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections/vol2012/iss36/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Intersections* by an authorized administrator of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.

Putting Principles into Practice: An Interview with Kenneth Foster about Concordia's Sustainability Council

Why was the President's Sustainability Council at Concordia created?

Shortly after arriving at Concordia in 2011, President William Craft formed this council to replace an existing Sustainability Task Force and appointed administrators, faculty members, and students to serve on it. This was an important move to re-energize those who had become frustrated with an apparent lack of movement towards putting into practice sustainability principles. The council's creation was a direct response to the need for high-level leadership and coordination as the college sought to embrace its responsibility to be a good steward of natural resources and to protect the earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty.

How does the Sustainability Council work with more "grass-roots" initiatives?

The twin problems faced by colleges in pursuing sustainability are: first, while there are many possible initiatives that could be pursued, an effective overall plan and strategy are needed to decide which make the most sense. Second, while it is easy enough to draw up an attractive plan, implementation of it often proves to be much more difficult. Keeping these two issues in mind, the President's Sustainability Council has worked on strategic planning while also seeking to encourage and facilitate the continuing bottom-up sustainability-related efforts of students, faculty, and staff. This back-and-forth between high-level planning and on-the-ground action hopefully will help us to develop an ambitious plan that can be implemented successfully.

How do faculty, staff, and students engage one another?

Pursuing sustainability on a campus provides a rare opportunity for all parts of the community to work together. Facilities staff members are immediately recognized as essential teachers and mentors, opening the way for innovative faculty-student-staff collaborations. Staff members now routinely work with faculty and students to work toward sustainability.

The students have proved to be the most active leaders in sustainability work at Concordia. They have pushed for the creation of an EcoHouse, of a Green Revolving Fund, and so



on. Yet even when students are not the initiators of something, we make a point of trying to involve students in whatever we do. We are an educational institution, so we want to make our sustainability work promote student learning.

Would you tell us more about the EcoHouse?

Some years ago, some students got together and started pushing for the creation of an ecohouse, a college-owned residential property where students could model sustainable living. They faced the inevitable discouraging roadblocks, but their persistence and skillful actions eventually paid off. Productive conversations among students, faculty, and staff resulted in a proposal that gained quick approval from the President's Cabinet. The EcoHouse opened this fall as a living-learning laboratory. The college made a conscious decision not to put in eco-friendly upgrades at the outset. Instead, the residents will collaborate with others to make improvements in a step-by-step fashion—as homeowners have to do in real life. The EcoHouse project continues to be a model for how sustainability creates synergies among diverse parts of the college community.

Does the Lutheran identity of Concordia matter for these efforts?

The Lutheran identity of the college does matter. It rightly and appropriately calls us to ground our work in a conviction that the earth is not ours but is rather God's creation. The earth is sacred, and we have a responsibility to take care of it. Yet as a Lutheran college we are also centrally concerned with social justice—with the well-being of all people. So we can easily pursue sustainability in its fullest sense, which means that we seek to preserve the ecological integrity of the earth, to enable all people to live in dignity, and to facilitate the creation of just societies. In our Concordia College Vision for Sustainability, we wrote: "We have a moral responsibility to preserve the integrity of the ecological systems on which life depends. This responsibility arises from love for people, love for all creation, and love for God. This responsibility is especially salient for a college of the ELCA."

KENNETH FOSTER is an Associate Professor of Political Science and chair of the President's Sustainability Council at Concordia College, Morehead, Minnesota.