

EnviroAlums at Three Years

In May 2002, the Alumni Council approved the charter of a new alumni affiliate group, EnviroAlums. The purpose of EnviroAlums as stated in the charter:

Oberlin is noted for being a community where unconventional ideas are tolerated and mainstream conventions are questioned. The wisdom of Oberlin maybe in its capacity for enabling unconventional ideas to find expression in actions and deeds. We believe Oberlin is in a unique position to focus higher education on the central question of the twenty-first century: How shall we create durable patterns of habitation in our global culture?

Over the past three decades Oberlin has nurtured an environmental education agenda that under the leadership of first David Egloff [followed by Harlen Wilson] and then David Orr has gained prominence on campus and beyond. The Adam Joseph Lewis Center for Environmental Studies and its associated programs embody an unconventional idea: "All education is environmental education." We believe the Oberlin community has a unique opportunity to set a standard for environmental education, as well as a responsibility to seize this opportunity.

Each September during the Alumni Council weekend, the EnviroAlums' Steering Committee meets in Oberlin to elect officers and plan the coming year's activities. Many of the outreach activities are accomplished by individual members—sponsor January term internships, meet with alumni clubs and graduates, give talks and write articles, send letters to Trustees and administrators, and just advocate for Oberlin to be an environmentally responsible institution.

In June 2003 EnviroAlums and the Alumni Association co-sponsored a three day summer school titled "Climate Justice: What is Oberlin College's Role in Climate Change?" Amory Lovins, CEO of Rocky Mountain Institute and world renown energy expert, gave an inspirational opening address exploring Oberlin's challenge to be climate neutral. He argued with data and examples that efficiency is cheaper than fuel (see www.rmi.org). Talks by faculty, students, administrators, and alumni were followed by break-out and whole group discussions considering Oberlin's role in climate change. The participants agreed Oberlin should adopt an aggressive plan to achieve climate neutrality as soon as possible and many participants wrote letters to President Dye and Trustees advocating this agenda.

At its March 2004 meeting, the Oberlin Board of Trustees approved the most comprehensive and visionary environmental policy adopted by any college or university in the United States including the goal of climate neutrality. Oberlin College Environmental Policy (EP) (<http://www.oberlin.edu/president/environment.html>) was developed over the past several years by the Environmental Policy Advisory Panel (appointed by President Nancy Dye). Although the Trustees unanimously approved EP, they made no financial provisions for its implementation.

At its September 2004 meeting, the EnviroAlums' Steering Committee strongly endorsed the implementation of EP. A resolution to President Dye and Trustees—approved by EnviroAlums' Steering Committee and signed by 146 alums—presented the case for implementation of EP and "respectfully request[ed] that President Nancy Dye advocate, as a priority, for funds to implement EP and that the Trustees at their December 2004 meeting approve an aggressive fund raising campaign for implementation of EP." Independent of EnviroAlums, environmentally concerned students gathered over a thousand student signatures on a similar resolution in Fall 2004 that they presented to President Dye and Trustees. These and myriad efforts by numerous members of the Oberlin Community have resulted in Oberlin beginning to raise funds for a sustainability coordinator whose charge will be to implement EP.

EnviroAlums is making an effort to have alums be aware of Oberlin's EP and the importance of implementation. Various EnviroAlums are working with regional alumni representatives to have alumni club programs on Oberlin's environmental programs and EP.

At reunion weekend on Saturday, May 28, 2005, EnviroAlums organized with two cluster classes (54, 55, 56 and 64, 65, 66) a symposium, "Social Justice and the Environment: Oberlin & Beyond." and a follow-up discussion, "Strategy Meeting to Maximize Oberlin's Commitment to Its Trustee Adopted Environmental Policy." The symposium features Terri Swearingen, winner of the Goldman Environmental Prize for environmental activism in recognition of her leadership in challenging and changing how the United States manages toxic waste, and John Petersen, class of 1988, systems ecologist, and Environmental Studies faculty. The symposium will be facilitated by Carl McDaniel '64 and the follow-up discussion by Belden Paulson '50.

"All education is environmental education." We will only satisfactorily resolve the numerous challenges before us, if we work together. Consider joining EnviroAlums and help Oberlin seize the opportunity to help lead the world in the quest to create durable patterns of habitation.

Carl N. McDaniel, 64
Chair, EnviroAlums