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## Greening of the Campus IX: Building Pedagogy, Day 1

University of Dayton

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Monday, March 19, 2012

# Greening of the Campus IX: Building Pedagogy, Day 1

Andrew

This is the first in a series of three blogs recording my experience at the Ball State University conference on sustainability and higher education, The Greening of the Campus IX: Building Pedagogy.

I arrived in Muncie, IN at 2:00am on Monday morning and after a restless attempt for sleep, I began my journey into the world of sustainability and higher education with a 7:00am walk to the Student Center. After registering and appropriately being given the paperless conference proceedings on a USB flash drive, I found myself in the Cardinal Room, full of about one hundred and fifty unfamiliar faces; needless to say, I was a little overwhelmed. I inconspicuously settled in the back of the room, and after a quick breakfast, the day's events began. A welcome by Terry King, the university's provost, was followed by an introduction by the conference chair, Robert Koester, of the morning's keynote speaker, the great sustainability innovator and leader David Orr. I had read about Orr's efforts, especially his leadership and vision key to the Lewis Center at Oberlin College, in his article for Bartlett and Chase's 2004 book, *Sustainability on Campus*. Orr and Oberlin College are both at the forefront of utilizing the college campus as an engine of change for sustainability and have embraced the importance of higher educational institutions as the drivers of sustainability in society through a systems-based, collaborative, and locally and regionally inclusive model.

Orr's presentation was entitled *The Thin White Line: Denial in an Age of Consequences*. The underlying call to action instilled within the talk was the idea that the community of sustainability organizers does not have a climate problem, but rather a political problem. An underlying aspect of the movement is that it is very deliberately apolitical. We should not only break down the academic silos on our campuses, but also those we have constructed within the political arena stated Orr. The current situation overall displays an increase in the operational sustainability of colleges and universities but it is not reflected within the curriculum. Orr went on to explain how the movement for sustainability lacked the feeling of a crisis, similar to the natural response to a perceived threat like the Soviet Union during the Cold War or the fear of being involved in a car accident.

So why have we not acted when the imminent consequence of this situation is the end of society and our way of life? We are not wired to react to these situations. We are wired to react to perceived threats and crises like airplane crashes and bear attacks, rather than systemic dilemmas that are displayed in a language of data, pixels, parts per million, parts per billion and so forth... Orr continued to explore the history of US environmental politics, including the Republican-Democratic consensus that occurred from 1969 to 1976 and was marked by a series of comprehensive environmental legislation. However, in 1971 with the Lewis-Powell Memo and the later appointment of Lewis F. Powell to the Supreme Court, corporate power shifted the political spectrum far towards the right with the 'left' now being represented by moderate, as described in Hacker and Pierson's 2006 book, *Off Center*.

Orr later describes his Oberlin Project, an inclusive community project by the College to engage the town of Oberlin through a systems-based sustainable plan "to revitalize the local economy, eliminate carbon emissions, restore local agriculture, food supply and forestry, and create a new, sustainable base for economic and community development." I was struck by how similar the Oberlin Project model was to the Fitz Center's approach to community asset-based development, but through the deliberate philosophy of sustainability integrated into the functions and forms of the project. This insight was furthered by one of Orr's closing remarks, addressing one of the main challenges of the sustainability movement; making sustainability a human issue, broadened to everyone. Trying to use the rational thinking approach and taking it down to the average American down at Wal-Mart is not the means for change. It must be based upon human feeling and the data, though extensive and undeniable, is not enough.

Orr ended by citing the need to secede our allegiance to the corporation, reclaim our primary identity as citizens, engage ourselves in politics, media and agribusiness (areas that are dominated by corporate control), support private ownership, and acknowledge that a bottom-up approach will only work to provide the solutions to our issues of the environment, economy, and communities. "We can either keep the party going a little longer and fry the planet, or we can take the economic hit, recover, readjust, generate innovative solutions, and continue on."

Invigorated by David's vision, I eagerly went off to my first panel discussion, led by Chrissy Cooley of Pacific Lutheran University; the panel was entitled *Bottled Water Bans on Campus: No Excuses*. I had been awaiting this panel since I saw it in the program over a month ago. This panel would provide great examples and benchmarks for our senior project, as well as provide networking opportunities with other colleges and universities that have successfully accomplished our intended goal of some form of a ban on institutional sales of bottled water. I was surprised how interactive the panel was. It began with a presentation of PLU's narrative of their bottled water ban.

Their success lay within their approach and focus for the reasoning communicated among students why the issue of bottled water was so important. They took a social justice approach to the issue, combining the student dichotomy of environmentally focused activism with social justice focused activism. By bridging the effort between the two groups, the initiative was able to build a student consensus. Even though it was labeled as a 'ban' it did not have the negative connotations we perceived a 'ban' would have. As in most examples of kicking bottled water off of campus, dining services was a vital partner in the conversation and implementation.

The ban took the form of a student government resolution ceasing the sale of bottled water by dining services. Like our senior project, the availability of hydration stations and reusable water bottles were imperative aspects for the success of the ban. PLU institutes a student green fee, a tuition fee approved by students to specifically be applied to sustainable projects under the discretion of the campus' sustainability office. The sustainability office used the fee to purchase reusable BPA-free water bottles through a local Seattle company and sold them to students at a subsidized price of \$1. The water bottles featured PLU's Take Back the Tap logo, and if I do say so myself, were very well designed. The green fee was also used to retrofit drinking fountains into hydration stations, using gooseneck faucets and the more high-tech sensor filling stations, like the one in the basement of KU by the main staircase.

After comparing the PLU story with the University of Ottawa's and Washington University in St. Louis', we were asked to share our own experiences and current situation. There was a broad range of students, staff, and faculty, from institutions that had already successfully implemented bans to others who had not even thought of bottled water as a real issue. I shared the background of the River Steward program, our Senior Project, as well as acting as an ambassador for the Great Miami Watershed, informing my fellow panel members about the unique water resources of the Dayton region, as well as the internationally renown Miami Conservancy District. I was also able to pass around print materials provided by Felicia Graham of the City of Dayton Water Department as an example of collaboration extending beyond campus and into the community.

The students from Atlanta were very interested in using the information and connecting with their own city's water initiatives. I even jokingly mentioned that if their water situation gets too desperate, they can come up to Dayton and bring NCR back with them. (They can leave Coca-Cola behind though). After benchmarking our project with other institutions it is easy to say we have a lot of work ahead of us, but that it is possible, and that we are going about our 'ban' via a positive and collaborative approach to consensus building.

Well, its just before lunch and there is much more to the day. I hope to recap the rest of today in greater detail after the conference is over, as well as expand upon the bottled water ban panel discussion. Also, tomorrow's post will include highlights of the day so that I can encapsulate the entire day's events within the post.

I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience. - Martin Luther King Jr.