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Sustainability White Paper

Macalester College Sustainability Office

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**Macalester College Sustainability Office
Sustainability Whitepaper Version 1.
October 9, 2008**

Purpose of this Whitepaper

This whitepaper is intended to help foster reflection and dialogue on the issues of sustainability for Macalester College. Macalester believes that education is a fundamentally transformative experience. In the spirit of academic inquiry, the Sustainability Office offers this paper to continue, and to focus our campus community's reflections on how sustainability advances Macalester's core mission.

What is Sustainability?

The Webster's Dictionary defines "sustainability" as: 1: capable of being sustained (keep up, prolong, confirm). 2 a: of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged <*sustainable techniques*> <*sustainable agriculture*> b: of or relating to a lifestyle involving the use of sustainable methods <*sustainable society*>. The term evolved from "sustainable development", most often described as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"¹

Here is a starting definition of sustainability for Macalester College: "Sustainability is the continuous effort to integrate environmental, social, and economic goals to meet our current needs without compromising future generations to meet their own needs."

What Does Sustainability Mean for a College?

All higher education institutions have impacts on the local environment. Rainfall lands on the campus and runs off into the local streams and lakes as storm water. This storm water takes pollutants from parking lots and campus lawns to a local stream or lake. Students, staff and faculty travel to the campus and campus buildings are heated and cooled using fossil fuels, which add greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere by burning fossil fuels. Food is purchased and consumed on campuses. Every item purchased, used and discarded also has a social impact.

Higher education institutions have a unique role in sustainable development. The primary mission of higher education institutions is to education future leaders. These leaders will be tasked with coming up with solutions for environmental and sustainability issues. In addition, higher education is an economic engine. In 1999, approximately 4,096 higher education

¹ Bruntland, G. (ed.), (1987), "Our common future: The World Commission on Environment and Development", Oxford, Oxford University Press.



institutions educated 14.8 million students². The annual expenditures of those institutions are \$277 billion, which is greater than the GDP of all but 25 countries in the world³

The first campus environmental audit was performed by a group of graduate students at UCLA in 1988⁴. Since that time, students, staff and faculty at higher education institutions have begun to understand the link between the environment and college campuses and have begun to institute campus sustainability projects on campuses. Comprehensive campus environmental audits and sustainability plans, as well as "green building" design for new campus buildings are becoming commonplace at higher education institutions.

Two major multi-school policy initiatives have attracted a significant number of signatories. The Talloires Declaration (http://www.ulsf.org/programs_talloires.html), first signed in 1990, pledges the importance of sustainability to higher education. Over 350 college and university presidents in over 40 countries have signed the pledge, including Macalester College. Over 500 college and university presidents have signed the American College and University President's Climate Commitment (<http://www.presidentsclimatecommitment.org/>), a document that requires higher education to make a plan to become climate neutral and integrate sustainability into the curriculum. Macalester College is a leadership circle member of this commitment.

History of Sustainability at Macalester College?

Macalester College has taken a leadership role in sustainability for higher education. In 2000, President McPherson signed the Talloires Declaration, the first official statement made by university administrators of a commitment to environmental sustainability in higher education. In 2007, President Rosenberg signed the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment, which commits us to make a plan to become climate neutral (i.e. no net greenhouse gas emissions). Currently we are analyzing our greenhouse gas emissions and will be developing a greenhouse gas emissions reduction plan during 2008-2009.

Macalester College has further shown our commitment to sustainability through initiatives such as building the EcoHouse student residence, starting a Zero Waste committee, developing sustainability procurement initiatives, and starting the Clean Energy Revolving Fund (a source of funding for energy-efficiency projects). Our food service, Bon Appétit, actively promotes local and organic food and is developing the "Low Carbon Diet", an analysis of the connections between food and climate change. In the spring of 2008, we broke ground for the Institute for Global Citizenship building, which will be designed as a US Green Building Council Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) platinum building, the highest standard available.

From: 2001 Digest of Education Statistics, US Dept. of Education

From: 2001 CIA World Factbook and Dowling, Mike, "Interactive Table of World Nations," available from <http://www.mikedowling.com/NOOnations.html>

⁴ Creighton, S.H. (1998). *Greening the Ivory Tower: Improving the Environmental Track Record of Universities, Colleges and Other Institutions*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.