

Small Campus, Big Change

How to use your student voice to make environmental change on campus

By Rebecca Ford

Taking on the woes of the world can be a very overwhelming task. Especially when you are doing well to get papers in on time, trying to have a social life, and updating your Facebook status with 18 highly witty comments a day.

It is true, if everyone does their own part, the environmental issues at hand will begin to lessen. But, the path to a healthier environment can become lonely if you feel you are the only one trying to make a difference. If only there was an outlet where groups of people

could congregate to motivate each other while creating change in their community. This is where your university campus comes in.

Campuses can be looked at as miniature versions of the community they are based within. Issues concerning social equity, environmental health and economic prosperity are important in running a university campus. Due to the small scale of a campus, changes that have to go through many levels of society and government on a community scale, can often be reached quicker at a university level.

The status that comes along with

a university can be used to teach the surrounding community about useful changes that can be made in moving towards a more sustainable future.

In this way, universities can be looked at as a test ground for innovative changes and a teaching tool to show change that may one day be realized on a community wide level.

Now, how can you affect what the university purchases or where it decides to get its energy from, you ask.

At the end of the day it is administration, finance directors and presidents who make the final

decision. However, if it were not for students, these people would have no reason to be making any decisions, as the university would not exist.

So let your voice be heard. If you want to see more local food on the menu in the cafeteria, voice your opinion and let the people who represent you know where you stand. While you are at it, why not start up a student run campaign and recruit all of the other students on campus who wish they could turn their one voice into many.

All of this may sound preachy, who am I to tell you to get out and start up a student movement? Well, fear not, I also have information about actions that have been taken on this very campus, and how you can get involved. Though few people know it, there has been a lot of work done at UPEI towards making the university a "greener" place to receive an education. For example, does the acronym CSAF ring a bell? I can imagine to the overall population it does not. It stands for Campus Sustainability Assessment Framework and UPEI was the second university across Canada to complete it.

Though you may not realize it, the completion of this document is a big accomplishment. It measures everything from the amount of space dedicated to recreation, to the type of paper which is purchased each year. This document can be used as a tool towards understanding where UPEI could make progress and where we are already doing a good job. This is one of many actions that have been taken towards making a greener UPEI.

Unfortunately, since the completion of this document it has done little more than accumulate dust. So, this is the part where I call on you to help progress your university into a 'greener' future. Get involved with the campus environmental society, (yes, we do have an environmental society (upeienvsociety@gmail.com), or take a class in the environmental minor, (it takes on an interdisciplinary approach. So whether you are a chemistry whiz, philosophy fanatic, or think history is way cool there is bound to be a course for you).

You don't have to be a tree hugging, radical activist banner bearing hippie in order to be heard (but if you are, all the more power to you).

Educate yourself, get involved and form relationships with the people upstairs. You may be surprised how quickly things can be achieved if all levels on campus work together.

Do What We Can, When We Can, While We Can

By Kirk Avery

In this day and age it's impossible not to have at least some opinion about our current environmental situation. 'Situation' is the wrong word here, perhaps the term, 'crisis' would be better suited as it reflects the urgency needed. Our generation is arguably the most concerned about this crisis because we are at the stage where we are strongly considering our future. It's not as if we can alter that future to suit our needs perfectly, but we can certainly take the proper precautions and manage our lives in a way that will benefit us as well as others.

I'm sure many of you have seen advertisements for the "Flick Off" campaign, whose logo looks cleverly like "fuck off" to catch people's attention. It has a very simple message. If you're leaving a room, shut off the lights, or if are finished using an electrical appliance, turn that off as well. These measures are taken to help combat climate change, and it's surprising how much of an impact it could make if we all partook. It may seem silly to pump a bunch of money into a campaign such as this for something that should just be common sense, but first off all, it's funded by billionaire Richard Branson, who is doing a lot in his own right to confront our environmental crisis. The campaign's genius lies in its simplicity. Why leave the light on if you don't need it? Why leave your computer running if you're not using it? The latter may be for convenience, but in either case, it saves a considerable amount of energy, and just makes sense.

Currently I'm taking a third-year Philosophy class: Community-Based Ethical Inquiry In Agriculture and Globalization. For

that class we've read a book by Michael Pollan called The Omnivore's Dilemma. Both of these things, which I recommend, have taught me the importance of buying locally, among other things. This doesn't just mean food, but basically any local artisan who is producing crafts or items that we can use should be supported as much as possible. It's true that it may be a little more expensive, and I know money is a big concern for all of us, but when you weigh the price you pay against the pay off in the long run, it's important to go local. Much of the food that is transported to large supermarkets is done so over long distances using up a great deal of fossil fuel, which as you know is expensive and important to conserve. Also, with many processed foods, the amount of energy that is used to produce it is immense. If we cut out those two factors, we are ensuring that our natural resources will last for a longer period of time. Also, we will be supporting a lot of those farmers and artisans who work really hard and earnestly to provide us with their special items. Many of you must know about the Farmer's Market, and it's important to get what you can there, and what necessities aren't provided, to buy elsewhere. As I stated before, it is sufficient to do this when you can, because the convenience and difference in money can tempt us to go for the supermarket, but any effort to support local products helps.

Canada's waste management program is also a simple idea that helps work toward a better environment. When you think about how easy it is to put your waste where it's supposed to go, it's kind of baffling that so many people find it an inconvenience to do so and don't follow the rules more

closely. Recycling is a cornerstone of the fight to preserve our environment, and it can benefit us a great deal if we just respected that fact. This is also something that children can easily be taught to follow. I can remember in elementary school being aware of the three R's the other two being reduce, and re-use of course, both of which we shouldn't disregard.

Finally, though not the last thing we can do to ensure a better environment, is take a minute to think about how we travel. There are many instances where we take a vehicle to the places we need to go, but sometimes those places are close enough that we can walk, or bike if we have that option. Again it goes back to convenience and how we manage our time, but all it takes is just a little bit of thought to really see how things could be better. I guess how you define "better" makes a difference, but doesn't walking, car-pooling, or taking public transit really just make sense when we have that option and can afford to?

There are many different things we can do to make our lives and the lives of our children better, but these are just some places to start, and all I'm really writing this for is to show you the option. We can all do something, at different levels, so if you want to recycle, that helps. If you want to get involved, there are many ways you can do that, such as our Environmental Society. Either way, it shows we're aware and conscious, and moving forward. I could go on and on about this, but I'll leave it here, and maybe it will just give you something to think about.

Oh, but one more thing, If you do plan to walk or bike, but particularly bike, pay attention, because we have some clueless drivers on this Island. A helmet wouldn't hurt, either.