

# **Lewis and Clark College: A Brief Review of Sustainability Prospects**

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**Third Draft: April 27, 2018**

## **Introduction**

I am greatly appreciative of the opportunity to serve Lewis and Clark College, an outstanding liberal arts institution with two highly regarded graduate campuses, the Law School and the Graduate School of Education and Counseling. All three campuses support excellent faculty, highly motivated students, an emphasis on high quality teaching and research, and a superior track record in both environmental academics and sustainability operations. Lewis and Clark's support of student research, interdisciplinary approaches, and collaborative decision-making reflects a spirit of aspiration, deliberation, and excellence.

The purpose of this report is to assist the college in considering the potential of its sustainability-related programs, projects, and curriculum with respect to campus-wide strategic orientations, community engagement, and environmental academics, in order to maximize the leverage and impact of those initiatives. In preparation for my visit I reviewed the Lewis and Clark Sustainability Council's Academic Subcommittee Report, the Lewis and Clark College STARS Report, the Lewis and Clark website, and various reports from the Environmental Studies Department and the Law School. In addition, to gain a better understanding of recruitment, retention, and the whole campus outlook, I studied the available data provided by Institutional Research. I also had numerous preparatory conversations with Katja Altpeter-Jones. The two-day visit provided access to a wide range of sustainability-related stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, and senior administrators.

To assess the meaning and impact of sustainability at Lewis and Clark, I attempt to better understand the most important stakeholders, including the environmental studies department, the office of community engagement, the role of the

Sustainability Council, as well as the current state of the college, both in terms of readiness for academic change, and the new administrative regime.

This report briefly reviews Lewis and Clark's considerable sustainability assets, identifies institutional challenges and explores a portfolio of emergent opportunities for advancing sustainability curriculum at the college. In making recommendations, I recognize that my knowledge and understanding of Lewis and Clark's priorities, strengths, constraints and culture is limited and that members of the Lewis and Clark community will necessarily bring their deeper understanding of the institution to determine which recommendations are appropriate and how best to move forward. My emphasis is to suggest possibilities for change that promote the substantial social and intellectual capital of the college, build on its institutional strengths, and respect various financial and governance protocols and constraints.

My experience suggests that campus sustainability operations and environmental academics (the environmental field) may engage different campus constituencies. However, they inform each other, share best practices, and strive to find curricular orientations that engage the whole campus. Increasingly and appropriately, the environmental field strives to expand its stakeholders to include both communities of color and traditionally conservative communities. Similarly, how we think about human/nature relationships inevitably includes discussions of equity, diversity, and inclusion. I am convinced that a new generation of potential students intuitively grasps this orientation and will be attracted to programs and initiatives accordingly. An additional challenge is how to integrate these complex factors without diffusing the effectiveness of both sustainability initiatives and the coherence of environmental academics.

I encourage readers of this report to consider ways that Lewis and Clark College can embrace these challenges, using its considerable assets to develop creative and pertinent curricular approaches that simultaneously enhance sustainability operations and environmental academics throughout all three campuses. The college should mobilize its social and intellectual capital to explore and implement innovative opportunities to maximize its impact, both on campus and in the community. I surmise there's a confident restlessness on campus, a pride in its excellence, but an understanding that it's most creative environmental and sustainability initiatives have not yet reached their full potential. An exciting and engaging planning process should emphasize this potential as the innovative

edge that will propel these efforts, not only to enhance the capacity of Lewis and Clark College, but because it's a moral necessity for higher education.

## Assets

(1) Lewis and Clark enjoys an exceptionally attractive campus with extraordinary natural capital.

Location, location, location! Portland has a reputation as a green, progressive city with a vibrant youth culture. It's proximity to diverse ecological and geological habitats is appealing, with many bioregions within a short drive. The campus is an interesting and abundant natural history site, with plush forests, and diverse green spaces.

(2) Strong reputation for sustainability initiatives.

Lewis and Clark has an outstanding reputation for its sustainability initiatives, scoring numerous high rankings in prestigious national green ranking systems. It was an early adopter of both the ACUPCC climate action approach and the STARS system.

(3) Campus-wide support for environmental values and sustainability initiatives.

The green, progressive values of Portland reinforce the "sustainability spirit" of Lewis and Clark. The presence of both the sustainability office and environmental academics, as embodied in the environmental studies department, the environmental law program, the Graduate School of Education and Counseling, and among faculty throughout the college, serves as a reminder and conscience to take those values seriously.

(4) Signature environmental studies department.

The environmental studies program is rigorous, challenging, and innovative. The dedicated faculty bring a unique interdisciplinary mix to their classes and research. Their emphasis on field-based learning, place-based community listening, multiple modes of engagement, integration of the digital humanities, and critical

reflection and immersion with the latest trends in the field is exemplary. Moreover, there are affiliated faculty throughout the three campuses who teach environmental and sustainability-oriented courses.

(5) Signature environmental law program.

The environmental law program is a nationally and regionally sturded program, distinguished by its clinical orientation, community engagement, and impressive track record of consultative reports on issues ranging from renewal energy to wildlife conservation. It has a robust regional outreach network and high visibility.

(6) Practitioner-Oriented Graduate School of Education and Counseling

The graduate school serves adult learners who are actively engaged with organizations, non-profits, and schools throughout the region. Their emphasis on professional practice, leadership development, social justice, and progressive education supports environmental academics and sustainability operations. There ecopsychology certificate is a unique and pertinent approach with potential for further growth and expansion.

(7) Experienced, outgoing, and skilled sustainability coordinator.

The sustainability office is highly respected, accessible, and connected both internally and externally, serving an important leadership role for Lewis and Clark, the greater Portland community, and the Pacific Northwest. Its well aware of the co-curricular potential of its initiatives and ready to cultivate deeper learning community partnerships both on campus through its service to all three campuses, and in the Portland community.

(8) New and Innovative Bates Center for Entrepreneurship and Leadership.

The emphasis on entrepreneurship and leadership is a growing nationally on liberal arts campuses, providing venues for action-oriented, skills-based learning that is often undervalued. At Lewis and Clark this includes a robust Winter term and course portfolio covering design, innovation, marketing, messaging, sustainability, screenwriting, and curation.

(9) Highly motivated students with an activist orientation.

Student activism, especially in regard to environment and sustainability is an important campus value among most campus stakeholders. Students, staff, and faculty alike encourage participation, action, and community engagement.

(10) Outstanding faculty who are committed to high quality teaching, student research, and rigorous inquiry.

Lewis and Clark faculty set high standards for teaching and research excellence. They are deeply committed to student research, faculty publication, and community service. They take their stewardship of the curriculum seriously and challenge each other to maintain high academic standards.

(11) Talented, personable, and experienced senior team.

The senior team is accessible, convivial, and committed to understanding “best practices” in higher education. They exude enthusiasm and support for Lewis and Clark, and understand how their professional identities are inextricable from the success of the college. Similarly, they are well aware of the challenges facing higher education, especially regarding revenue generation and scholarship support, striving to balance these challenges while upholding the high standards of an elite college. There is a wonderful enthusiasm regarding the new president who has brought a refreshing optimism, encouragement, and vision to the campus.

## Challenges

(1) Lack of coordination between sustainability, community engagement co-curricular activities and traditional academic curriculum.

Lewis and Clark is striving to further coordinate the academic “place” for sustainability. The new, still emergent, part-time faculty coordinator position has an ambitious portfolio, limited by disciplinary boundaries throughout campus. Additionally, there is some academic controversy as to the suitability of “sustainability” as a sufficiently integrative academic container. While its possible to create a catalog of courses that relate to sustainability (broadly considered), such a

project only reiterates the possibilities for students, without developing a distinctive curricular voice. There are many opportunities throughout campus for co-curricular engagements, but it's not clear how those are integrated with formal, academic, credit yielding processes. The faculty approval process presents further complications as departments are protective of their conceptual boundaries.

(2) The environmental studies department curricular model may not accommodate all of the students who are interested in environmental academics.

The environmental studies department is intentionally rigorous and robust, maintaining ambitious credit requirements. This approach, both demanding of its students and faculty, may limit both the number of students who commit to the major, and the number of students who can be effectively served. Some students migrate to other majors that afford them what they perceive as more flexibility and choices. Are there other opportunities for these students — alternative curricular pathways — that can serve these students without impinging on the “signature” environmental studies path for those who declare the major? Might such alternative paths enhance the opportunities for undergraduate environmental academics?

(3) Insufficient coordination and communication (regarding sustainability initiatives) between the three campuses.

The physical separation of the campuses and their relatively autonomous budget and policy-making functions leads to some fragmentation regarding sustainability communication. Students at the law school are not fully aware of the sustainability initiatives at the undergraduate campus, and the reverse is undoubtedly true. The graduate school's adult learner student body limits their awareness of whole campus activities. Although the Sustainability Council strives to coordinate campus-based activities, there are structural limitations that impede coherent and convergent efforts.

(4) Campus complacency regarding sustainability initiatives.

The impressions conveyed to me suggest that although there are positive sustainability values among almost all campus constituencies, promoting sustainability initiatives is highly valued, but not necessarily a campus priority. Perhaps the perceived strength of the sustainability office and the various high national

rankings generates an unintentional complacency regarding these efforts, or an attitude that sustainability initiatives are best delegated to the sustainability office.

(5) Lack of sustainability signage and interpretation.

An informal tour of campus grounds yields very little information about campus sustainability initiatives. There is insufficient signage, education, or notification about the various sustainability activities. Visitors to campus may not understand how sustainability initiatives are incorporated into the life of the campus. And campus citizens may need more reminders as to why sustainability is an important campus initiative.

(6) Competitive higher education environment.

Lewis and Clark is searching to determine how it can further distinguish itself in an increasingly competitive higher education environment. For the purposes of this report, one challenge is how to utilize campus sustainability assets for both undergraduate recruitment and retention. That requires all campus stakeholders (not just sustainability advocates and the environmental studies department) to consider what distinguishes its educational model, employment outcomes, and community engagement processes in support of environmental learning and sustainability operations. How can Lewis and Clark promote its assets and frame an innovative edge?

## **Suggestions**

My impression is that despite the various higher education challenges that Lewis and Clark encounters, and the somewhat lackluster recruitment and retention numbers, the college is stable, prosperous, and confident. Nevertheless, the campus understands that complacency will lead to inaction, and some changes are necessary to further distinguish Lewis and Clark's messaging and reputation. Hence, in my brief stay, I perceive that the college will be hesitant to embrace bold, transformative change, but is open to modest and incremental shifts, best implemented through strategic coherence and a more integrated, convergent academic vision to meet the needs of a new generation of students and faculty.

Please view the following suggestions as a portfolio of possibilities, informed by the strategic vision of the new administration, and curated by faculty decision-making regarding curriculum. These suggestions are limited to the “charge” of my report, to assess the prospects for enhancing sustainability programs, although they may be relevant to a variety of institutional objectives. I am also aware that some of these efforts may already exist, or have been tried previously. Please excuse any presumption on my part.

Also note that these suggestions consider both sustainability and environmental possibilities. I am aware that the use of these words sparks some academic controversy. I am using them somewhat interchangeably with the intention of promoting enhanced sustainability operations and enhanced campus-wide ecological and natural history awareness.

The final suggestion (10) emphasizes an integrated vision for studying environment and sustainability at Lewis and Clark.

### (1) Promote Sustainability Learning that Supports Community Engagement

There is great interest throughout campus, especially in the sustainability office, the community engagement office, and environmental studies, in continuing to engage students with the Greater Portland community. This has the virtue of enhancing diversity, providing students with real-world skills, and promoting the Lewis and Clark presence throughout the region. Here are some possible approaches.

#### (A) Sustainability Engagement Course Sequence

Please consider a two-fold sequence of courses to stimulate campus-wide and community oriented sustainability engagement. Although a semester model would be ideal, this can conceivably be accomplished in a “winterim” or summer term delivery model, depending on availability of instructors and student interest.

The first course could focus on campus-wide sustainability engagement initiatives, including signage and campus education (see below), climate action planning, resilience planning, food production, and the mobilization of students. This

should be taught by the sustainability coordinator, thus enhancing her stature as a co-curricular teacher and allowing her to develop an adaptive labor force as necessary.

The second course could focus on community projects in Greater Portland, including field trips to prominent sites, and guest seminars from community members. These projects could become the source for internships, jobs, and student research projects.

### (B) Graduate Studies in Sustainability Leadership and Communities of Color

My survey of non-campus, community-based sustainability projects (Pacific Northwest Changemakers) suggests that the vanguard of sustainability-related action is a grassroots, highly diverse, social justice oriented movement. Consider a graduate program or certificate that serves this new generation of sustainability leadership, providing networking and mentoring opportunities. As a first stage, I recommend that a graduate school faculty member, or perhaps Dean Scott Fletcher (we discussed this) teach a course in which his students survey the organizational and educational needs of movement leaders. As a second step, Lewis and Clark could support a one week (summer) campus residency for these leaders. This will have philanthropic appeal, especially among foundations (Meyer Memorial Trust, Surdna, Kresge, Bullitt, Northwest Area Foundation) that are helping to support many of these exemplary projects.

### (2) Insure the Continuity of the Faculty Sustainability Adviser Position

This relatively new position has an ambitious portfolio, beyond the capacity of one individual. I recommend that the Sustainability Advisory Council provide more direction for the position, perhaps by emphasizing some of the initiatives cited in this section. Insuring longer-term stability for the position, even in a part-time capacity, will enhance continuity and allow for strategic sequencing of projects. It's important that the position is filled by someone for whom there is convergent academic and/or personal interest. Consider how to further empower this position so that it engages strategic discussions about both sustainability operations and environmental academics, as relevant for all three campuses.

### (3) Develop a Sustainability Advisors Board of Advisers

Please consider forming a community-oriented sustainability board of advisors, consisting of prominent Portland-based practitioners. This group could also include active alums, other qualified (sustainability wise) friends of the college, and possibly a program officer at a relevant foundation. The group could meet quarterly, with an agenda set by the Sustainability Council. This would also provide the sustainability coordinator and council members with the possibility of informal advisory sessions as helpful and appropriate. The virtue of this is that it builds stakeholder support for Lewis and Clark, creates opportunities beyond campus, and expands the thinking of the Sustainability Council.

#### (4) Build Campus Awareness of Sustainability Initiatives Through Signage, Interpretation, and Public Art

Please conceive of the entire campus as a sustainability education landscape. Consider that people who visit the campus—vendors, donors, parents, and community members—can be enriched by their experiences. What are the ways that the campus can promote sustainability and ecological awareness through better interpretive signage? This might include exhibitions of public environmental art that are commissioned for educational purposes, interpretive kiosks strategically placed on campus, a campus sustainability map, as well as more natural history interpretation opportunities. Some of these options can be initiated by students, especially through classes, possibly through the “winterim” prospects described above. Consider making this a strategic objective for the Sustainability Council and use it as a means for co-curricular engagement to integrate the three campuses. This is an ideal way to work with students in the environmental studies department. It is also an ideal way to further enhance the use of the digital humanities on campus.

For more information on these possibilities, please see my chapter “Interpretation” in [The Nine Elements of a Sustainable Campus](#).

#### (5) Strategic Partnership with the Bates Center for Entrepreneurship and Leadership

In the short term, consider sustainability-related coursework that includes the skills that may be offered by the Bates Center—marketing and messaging, information graphic design, impact investing, social entrepreneurship, web curation, social media strategy, and game design. There are many qualified practi-

tioners in the Portland area who have skills in these areas and would be interested in working with Lewis and Clark to promote sustainability objectives on campus and in the community. Dan Rohlf's forthcoming class is an excellent pilot for this approach.

In the long term, consider the Bates Center as a prototype for a fundraising initiative to either expand the center or create a new one that becomes a hub for sustainability innovation.

#### (6) Enhanced Integration of the Three Campuses

The Sustainability Council is in a unique position to further integrate the many assets of the three campuses. Surely there are course-related opportunities that you've already considered. Perhaps the most expeditious way to further this integration is with signage and interpretation (see above) — a joint project to develop a virtual or visceral campus map highlighting environmental and sustainability features of campus, or a networking map (or other snazzy graphic) that depicts the many community-based environmental or sustainability connections of the three campuses. Find attractive ways to make the implicit assets explicit for all campus stakeholders.

#### (7) Board Immersion

As a way to further stimulate board interest in the Lewis and Clark environmental and sustainability agenda, consider a board immersion day, when board members shadow environmental studies students, or engage in a campus-wide sustainability treasure hunt, or participate in a campus sustainability planning charrette. Of course the board has important business to transact, but such a change of pace might stimulate the "heart" affiliation that leads to further sustainability support among board members.

#### (8) Women and Science

Lewis and Clark has an outstanding array of women scientists, STEM-oriented students, and female sustainability advocates. Consider ways to place more attention on these assets in terms of courses, seminars, panels, publicity, and college branding, especially, but not exclusively in the realm of environmental studies and sustainability.

## (9) Learn More About Environmental Studies and Sustainability Prospects Through Student Focus Groups

I appreciate the signature efforts of the excellent environmental studies department, and the high quality they demand from their students. Possibly there is a broader constituency for environmental studies than just the students who enroll in the major. Are there other ways to package environmental studies and sustainability that are not currently available at Lewis and Clark? It may be too difficult (and time consuming) to engage in a broader curriculum conversation.

However, it might be very interesting to ask students what they are most interested in studying, what kinds of careers they envision, how Lewis and Clark can take better advantage of the resources of Greater Portland, and what skills they would like to enhance while at the college. Consider organizing some focus groups of current students (especially those in the first year), and possibly students who have applied to Lewis and Clark, but have not yet selected their college. They may have insights that you won't get in any other way.

## (10) Promote Lewis and Clark as a World-Class Destination for Sustainability and Environmental Academics.

If you consider all of the excellent sustainability initiatives at Lewis and Clark, the outstanding Environmental Law program, the groundbreaking environmental studies department, the potential of strong value attachment to environmental awareness, and the spectacular setting of campus, Lewis and Clark could be a world class destination for studying and experiencing operational sustainability, academic environmental studies, and all of the issues, challenges, and opportunities that are pertinent to contemporary students. With a new president who has substantial experience and commitment to these values, the time is ideal to integrate these assets into a cohesive, strategic, persuasive vision.

