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IWU Goes Green Illinois Wesleyan Strives to Be Environmentally Friendly

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--After the unanimous passage of a resolution by the Illinois Wesleyan University Student Senate--and unanimous approval by the IWU Faculty--Illinois Wesleyan University has set up a "Green Task Force" to study how to lighten the university's footprint on the environment.

Students were the catalyst for the Green Task Force idea, and many of them are studying under the Environmental Studies Program, offered at IWU since the Spring of 1998.

During the university's May Term 2000--a month-long program where students study a single course intensively on campus, take travel courses or work on internships--the "Greening the Campus" class focused on environmental concerns at IWU, and developed a guide that the Green Task Force will use as a planning tool.

The Green Task Force is made up of eight sub-committees that report to a central steering committee. The eight subcommittees will focus on issues such as recycling, energy and water conservation, grounds management, toxics, environmental education, dining services and school purchases and contracts with outside vendors. According to Assistant Professor of Environmental and International Studies Abigail Jahiel and Associate Professor of Biology Given Harper, co-chairpersons of the Green Task Force, the task force's final report will go to IWU Vice President for Business and Finance Ken Browning, Provost and Dean of the Faculty Janet McNew, and IWU President Minor Myers, jr.

Each subcommittee is chaired by a member of the central steering committee, which is composed of faculty members, administrators, staff members and students. Each subcommittee is made up of other faculty and staff, as well as students. Committees range in size from three to 12 members. After the eight subcommittees have exhausted all areas of research and have made recommendations, the steering committee will review their recommendations and compile a final report.

Harper said the final report will be delivered within two years. "But the greening is a long-term project," he said. "At the end of the two years, we will suggest a standing committee that will continue to deal with environmental concerns at IWU."

Browning, whose office will deal with the majority of the task force's recommendations, said, "I hope the task force will look at a blend of areas, and make recommendations that can improve how IWU affects the environment." He added that he looks forward to reviewing the task force's report, observing, "Being environmentally friendly is good public policy and sometimes it is good economically as well."

Precisely how the final report will be evaluated and implemented is yet to be determined.

According to Browning, Illinois Wesleyan established a recycling program just over 10 years ago. He pointed out that the program is successful because it was integrated within the established university routine. He realizes that not all of the task force's suggestions will be easy to initiate, but said, "It's easy to say we should do this or do that, but you have to really figure out how to do it effectively, that is the secret to creating a working plan."

Jahiel said, "The staff will play a key role. They understand how the university works in a physical sense, and staff members are best equipped to implement and critique environmental changes."

It is hoped that the effect of the Green Task Force will be felt permanently on campus. Jo Porter, IWU associate director of development and a member of the task force's purchasing and contractual committee, said, "I hope that environmental concerns become a campus consciousness. There is a whole education process that needs to happen and this is just the start of it."

Illinois Wesleyan already has an awareness of environmental concerns, that can be shown in recent design features to campus buildings. For example, the university's \$25 million Center for Natural Sciences, which opened in 1995, has motion-detectors, which automatically turn off lights if there is no movement in a room or hallway.

Harper added, "When you become aware of the extent of the environmental problems the world is facing, it suddenly becomes evident that we need to take steps to address those problems." Jahiel also commented that, "We're hoping our final report will serve as a model for other universities to follow, and act as a source of inspiration on how to be environmentally friendly."

Paul Kehle, assistant professor of educational studies, who also chairs the Energy Conservation Subcommittee, points out that not only is the task force something that will help the environment, but it will help IWU as well. He notes that his committee is responsible for finding ways to cut down on energy use, which will help minimize costs.

Kehle said, "The world has to make a transition from fossil fuels to other sources of energy because we're burning up the world's coal, oil and natural gas." Kehle suspects that within the next decade the world will face an energy crisis, which unlike the energy scare of the 1970s, will be more severe.

"The question now is," Kehle said, "do we want to make this transition carefully, or be caught off-guard 10 years from now?"

Environmental concerns are not unique to IWU. Many universities have taken similar measures to ensure that their campuses are more respectful of the environment. Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., instituted a Greening the Crimson (GTC) committee last spring that focuses on establishment of an interest-free loan program for environmentally-friendly renovations to school facilities as well as concerns for future university planning.

Ohio State University in Columbus, recently has studied various campus conservation efforts that led to several changes to university buildings. For example, 9,000 exit signs were replaced with new exit signs that use 80 percent less energy and last 25 times longer. Newer windows replaced older ones, and the grounds will be watered with well water instead of tap water.

The University of California-Los Angeles has taken similar steps to be environmentally friendly, including using grant money for the purchase of recycling bins to launch a recycling program. In addition, water consumption was reduced by 19 percent with the use of water restrictors and a computerized irrigation system.

Ohio's Oberlin College has taken on a unique project that IWU's Green Task Force also will explore. Oberlin recently built a "green" building. Home to the school's environmental-studies center, the building is made of organic materials--wood from certified sustainable forests, compostible fabrics and non-toxic paints and varnishes--and is completely self-sufficient. It has photovoltaic cells on the roof, which convert sunlight to electricity, recycled materials in the steel framing, light and heat sensors that switch off the lights and adjust the temperature when rooms are empty, and data displays on the first floor that show how many kilowatts the building is burning, the state of the air quality, and dozens of other measures.

In anticipation of IWU moving the campus library from the current Sheean Library location, to the new \$26 million Ames Library in the summer of 2001, the Green Task Force is putting a proposal together to "recycle" Sheean and take into consideration similar ideas such as the "green" building at Oberlin.

About Illinois Wesleyan University

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls more than 2000 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a \$25 million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts and a \$1.65 million baseball stadium. Construction is underway on a \$26 million library and a \$6 million student center.

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