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Illinois Wesleyan Is All About Being 'Green'

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – As late summer rains turn the Illinois Wesleyan campus literally green with thriving foliage, a contingent of students, faculty and staff are hatching plans to turn the campus still more green in the environmentally friendly sense.

Sixteen representatives of the University attended the biennial Greening of the Campus conference at Ball State University in early September, quite possibly the largest delegation of any of the 173 participating institutions. IWU representatives included members of the Sierra Student Coalition, students and staff from the Office of Residential Life (ORL), and a group of faculty and staff who delivered a presentation, "Integrating Sustainability Into Higher Education at Illinois Wesleyan University," based on a 2006 campus workshop and its outgrowth in curriculum development and sustainability efforts among participants. "Sustainability," which reaches beyond environmentalism to social justice and economic concerns, is the concept of meeting the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

While at the conference, IWU representatives agreed to join the Focus the Nation project that will culminate on Jan. 31 with symposia held at universities and other venues throughout the country, centered on collaborative discussion about "Global Warming Solutions for America." For more information, visit www.focusthenation.org.

Among the sustainability initiatives that followed IWU's 2006 Sustainability Workshop, which were highlighted in the group's conference presentation:

- the Talloires Declaration, an action plan for incorporating environmental sustainability into higher education, was signed by President Richard F. Wilson following a petition drive by students;
- the University agreed to construct its next building, the Minor Myers Welcome Center, with green architecture standards to meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification and with an energy-efficient geothermal heating and cooling system;
- the Office of Residential Life created student worker positions to function as Sustainability Educators in each residence hall;
- the Admissions Office purchased "green tags," supporting alternative energy to offset the carbon emissions from vehicle miles traveled by counselors in the student recruiting process;
- sustainability themes were incorporated into interdisciplinary courses, including a mathematics course taught by Professor Zahia Drici, where students design mathematical models based on real-life problems, and a psychology course on statistics taught by Associate Professor Linda Kunce. Kunce also led a 2007 May Term travel course to Vancouver Island that incorporated ecotourism into the exploration of "a meaningful life," and examined how psychological science can be applied to efforts to sustain not only the self, but also society and the environment.

"We are hopeful that these changes and future educational efforts will yield further steps toward a truly sustainable university campus that teaches sustainability not only through the curriculum, but through its every action," said Associate Professor Abigail Jahiel, director of the Environmental Studies Program.

Following the presentation, group members fielded many interested questions from other conference participants who were inspired by the work being done at Illinois Wesleyan. Jahiel noted that people were particularly intrigued by the commitment to sustainability expressed in the University's Mission Statement.

Susan Abraham '08, an environmental studies major who attended the conference, said she came back filled with ideas and energy from being surrounded by like-minded enthusiasts, and realized it may be fitting that the conference is conducted every other year, so there is time to implement the plans it inspires.

Director of Residential Life Matt Damschroder said students on the ORL staff have a part in role modeling, educating, creating programs and translating the ethos of sustainability to their peers.

"Because students who live on campus have a significantly greater impact on the institution's environmental footprint, we feel very strongly that environmental education targeted to changing attitudes and behaviors of residential students is a critical component of the mission of the Office of Residential Life," he said.

Students attending along with Abraham were Leslie Morrison '08, Sierra Student Coalition president; Abby Mohaupt '08, Residential Community Advisor in Pfeiffer Hall; Thomas Jung '10, First-Year Resident Advisor in Dolan Hall; Josh Clouse '08, First-Year Resident Advisor in Ferguson Hall and manager of PreShrunk, the IWU Thrift Store project (which supports sustainability goals); and Margaret Kane '09, First-Year Resident Advisor in Munsell Hall. In addition to Drici, Kunce, Jahiel and Damschroder, faculty and staff attending the conference included Biology Professor and Chair Given Harper, Assistant Professor of Chemistry and Environmental Studies Stephen Hoffman, Assistant Director of Admissions Chris Kawakita, Admissions Counselor Van Miller, Gulick Residence Hall Director Jacob Meltzer and Assistant Director for New Media Ann Aubry.

