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Thank You

Lehigh University's Environmental Initiative (EI) is a broad interdisciplinary program of research, education, and outreach. EI activities address the full spectrum of environmental problems facing society, integrating science, ethics, engineering, public policy, communication, history, anthropology and more.

The EI directs an undergraduate major and minor in Environmental Studies and a graduate certificate program in Environmental Law and Policy.



EI Position Paper Broughal School: Historic Preservation as an Issue in Environmental Politics

by Al Wurth

Associate Professor of Political Science

The timing of the Bethlehem Area School District Board's vote to refuse even to investigate possible ways to save and reuse the historic Broughal School building could hardly be more telling. In the aftermath of the successful opening of the restored jewel on the Lehigh campus, Linderman Library, and of the new casino operators' announcement of their plan to demolish 12 buildings on the old steel site, the school board cast its vote for demolition over preservation, rejecting any effort to seek proposals for rehabilitation and reuse of the Broughal structure. Of course, like all political decisions, this one has a life

that will depend partly on upcoming elections, and partly on public reaction to the demolition plan over the next two years.

Meanwhile, Lehigh has embarked on an Environmental Initiative and commissioned a new green building to house the EI-affiliated departments, while its president announced, in her inaugural address, a new commitment to environmental issues and research, marked by the creation of a community garden in the only public park in the vicinity of the school site.

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ones currently in use, represent resources spent and services provided that, while possibly economically depreciated, continue to provide a stream of value that would be environmentally costly to reproduce. Destruction of those assets, the squandering of the remaining resources represents an environmental cost in terms of the resource cost of the replacement of the building (materials, energy, labor, and attendant pollution). In addition, the demolition itself creates both risks from the destruction process and from waste materials, some toxic, that are released into the environment. Other aesthetic concerns with the beauty of an older structure, the nearly irreplaceable character of some of the craftsmanship and materials in the 90-year-old building, and its place in its urban environment, the streetscape, (as well as the impact of an athletic field cut out of the hillside adjacent to the campus) also make a kind of environmental case for preservation. On balance, the environmental and historical contexts both provide strong arguments for preservation.

The economic context dispenses with or, at best, assigns a dollar value to the historical and environmental values, and balances those costs against the benefits of demolition. Often modern construction techniques offer dollar economies that are difficult to match in the more complex world of rehabilitation, a fact that is recognized by federal tax credits of 20% for buildings eligible for the National Register. These credits are designed to help offset the advantages of industrial techniques for new construction.

The Broughal decision is both simplified and complicated in economic terms by the fact that the old and new structures are not competing for the same space. The design of the new school will increase the spatial footprint of the buildings on the school property and, even with the demolition, significantly reduce the already limited field area in the existing space. Economically, this means that the building's demolition should not be compared to its replacement but rather to the cost of an alternative athletic space of the same size and proximity. The budgeted \$1.3 million demolition cost is, in economic terms, a price for a very expensive half of a football field.

Broughal School: Continued from page 1

The close juxtaposition of environmental concern and historic preservation with neglect of the same highlights the need for a consistent approach in the face of political (Continued from Page 1) and "economic" pressures that left on their current paths, will waste valuable historical, environmental and community resources.

The issue of historic preservation and rehabilitation of buildings necessarily takes place in several contexts. The most obvious is historical; buildings are preserved as witnesses to past events and manifestations of the accomplishments of our forebears. Other easily identifiable contexts include environmental and economic as well as social, in the community sense, in particular the parts not represented in the conventional political sense of competing interests and political or governmental decision makers. The issue of the fate of the Broughal School building, adjacent to the campus, should be understood as both an example of and an outcome influenced by all those contexts

In historical terms, despite the demise of too many old buildings, there is some consideration in the US to preserve buildings of historical significance. Bethlehem and Lehigh are two places where extraordinary preservation efforts have been made. The Broughal building represents an obvious case for historical preservation, even in historic Bethlehem, due to its age, history, architectural significance and status as a public building. The National Trust has determined that it is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places..

The environmental context like the historical one tends to point toward preservation. Standing buildings, especially

Economics, however, tends to have less impact on issues with significant political context. In this decision, the political context is complicated. The school board, if it were to sell its building would not only avoid the demolition cost, and realize any sale price (somewhere between \$0 (giveaway) and the replacement cost (\$40+million cost of planned new school), but would also then itself benefit from a property tax stream from the sold building.

The social context is also critical in terms of the relationship between the school, the campus, and the southside with its distinctive social history and economic status as an immigrant community and working class economy. Nevertheless, the relationship between the community and the school district is dominated and managed by the representatives elected from the other side of town. The social history of the relationship to the other schools in the district system is marked by a legacy of perceived neglect and unequal treatment. Similarly the view of Lehigh as another elite institution indifferent to the community population is widespread.

The geographic/geologic context is even somewhat involved in this decision because the location of the school site, adjacent to Lehigh, in a pre-auto-era development area with high density of structures and population as well as a relatively steep-sloped hillside area makes it costly both in spatial and topographical terms to develop as recreation space.

The combination of the social image of a neglected southside with the difficulties in locating large open spaces for athletic facilities in a developed area has created a political rationale for the costly demolition to create the needed recreation space. This approach obscures the economic and environmental advantages of utilizing nearby open space on less sloped and undeveloped land. In effect, the current plan provides the least athletic space at the highest cost. Areas less than a mile from the school site include city-owned greenways and parking areas and other undeveloped spaces larger than the footprint of the Broughal building and more appropriate and accessible for recreational development, more space for less.

Also part of the context is the conventional political image of school boards. Traditionally one of the “big businesses” in town, despite their public interest charge (education), they

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—Professor Al Wurth

are typically viewed as endless sources of taxpayer-funded contracts for local business and industry, a role quite different from pursuing economic efficiency or value for taxpayers.

All these additional contexts complicate the relatively straightforward historical, environmental and economic arguments for preservation. Much like the familiar tragedy of the commons, the “social traps” as Robert Costanza and others refer to them create impediments to achieving what might be obvious social benefits. There are a number of possible ways around some of these traps, toward “win-win” solutions. These should be explored and involve basic political changes, creative economic alternatives involving property exchanges, options involving Lehigh, and the context of the school within the Southside Community.



Reflections on Religion and Ecology: A Student's Perspective

by Sarah Morgan

Can science save the world? This question has become more and more frequent in discussions regarding the current environmental crisis. Common thought has held that our existing problems can and will be solved by new technology, but as time goes on and our relationship with the natural environment condition continues to worsen, it seems that more will be necessary than simply making additional science and technology available to humanity. As peoples' ability to disrupt the planet grows, science and human values need to become realigned. On March 12th and 13th this issue came to the fore on Lehigh's campus with the visit of Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grimm, the founders of the Forum on Religion and Ecology (see www.environment.harvard.edu/religion/main.html). They are calling for a major change in the way the environmental movement views the contribution that religious traditions have to make. During their two days on campus they posed many challenging and thought provoking questions about whether science and technology will be enough to solve the environmental crisis.

The forum that they founded has sponsored international conferences that have resulted in a ten-book series (with more to come) that highlight how Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, Shinto, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Indigenous Traditions deal with humanity's relationship to the Earth. On the website there are also many resources on the 'intersecting disciplines' of science, economics, ethics, public policy, and gender. A concept that is stressed on the website and by Grimm and Tucker in their lectures is that religions are only one factor that will contribute to new patterns

of human-Earth relations. No one discipline will be sufficient; all will have to work together to come up with a feasible solution.

During their lecture at Lehigh Tucker and Grimm challenged religions and believers all over the world to both rediscover and reinvent their identities in light of our new scientific understandings. Mary Evelyn Tucker said, "If science gives us an understanding of the origins and unfolding of the universe, the story of cosmology gives us a sense of our place in the universe. And if we are so radically affecting the Earth by extinguishing other life forms and destroying our own nest, what does this imply about our religious sensibilities or our sense of the sacred?" If we allow science and religion to become incompatible we will be doing a disservice to both disciplines. Instead, all disciplines should draw from one another to form a more complete human understanding of our one and only home.

Most of what was discussed about the current world religions painted a fairly rosy picture of their involvement in our new ecological understanding but Tucker and Grimm reminded us it is important not to forget the darkside of religious traditions. All of the energy that is poured into religious involvement can be released in either a violent or compassionate way. By reexamining current religions in an environmental context we can open up pathways for that energy. All religions have texts in their history that deal with our responsibilities to our fellow beings. Our job is to identify those resources for deeper ecological awakening and revive old rituals and symbols that will allow us to connect to the Earth in meaningful ways.

The world's religions are an essential part of the discourse on future human-Earth relations but it is important that don't let ourselves fall into the trap of thinking of them as a fix-all. Just as science alone will not be enough to solve our current situation, religion will have to be combined with the intersecting disciplines of ethics, public policy, economics, and science to build a foundation for our new 'environmentally friendly' worldview.

Lehigh Students Meet with an Environmental Planner

by Laura Deutsch

Cory Zahm, a 2001 Lehigh University graduate, recently visited his alma mater in order to talk to students about his career in environmental planning. Currently, Cory works for Ecology and Environment, Inc., which is a full service environmental consulting and engineering firm. In addition, the company specializes in writing Environmental Impact Statements. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is a document required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970. It documents the social and environmental impacts of government projects, and thus provides a way to integrate important information about environmental impacts into the decision-making process. For instance, if the government plans to construct a highway that runs through the critical habitat of an endangered species, the government would have to identify this environmental impact in its EIS. In providing this information, the EIS can operate as a planning tool that helps the government (and companies the government employs) to avoid certain negative impacts on the environment and society. For example, the EIS must illustrate the environmental impacts that may occur, and it must identify alternative actions that will be taken if the impact is too harmful to the environment.

Hearing about Zahm's current work was exciting in part because it demonstrates the career possibilities for students that are prepared to work in a multi-disciplinary professional setting. Zahm's B.A. degree is in political science, but on a recent project, he worked with scientists, biologists, ecologists, and many other specialists to compile an EIS on the United States Navy's effort to homebase a new fleet of aircrafts and to

construct an Outlying Landing Field in Washington County, North Carolina. In addition to working with colleagues from various disciplines, Zahm also has the opportunity to interact with the public when he incorporates and responds to their criticisms of the EISs that his company produces.

Overall, the students who attended Zahm's talk seemed highly interested in his field of work. Although the branch of Ecology and the Environment, Inc. that Zahm works at is based in Buffalo, New York (on 300 acres of open-space land that includes walking trails), the company has other offices around the country and the world. From a professional perspective, Ecology and the Environment, Inc. seems to offer many benefits, like bonuses for engaging in certain kinds of environmentally friendly behavior, and an opportunity to develop new skills that would be useful in a variety of environmental fields. Zahm was passionate about his work and generous in offering to be a resource for Lehigh students interested in careers in environmental planning.

THANK YOU

The Environmental Initiative thanks our work–study students for their assistance during the 2006–2007 academic year. They are:

Kevin Cho, Senior (Bio-Engineering)
Victoria Danta, Senior (Political Science)
Josh Fluegal, Junior (Math/Physics)
SueNee Tan, Junior (EES/CEE)
Matt Fluegal, Sophomore (Math/Astrophysics)
Amy McDonald, Sophomore (EES)
Nick Cowan, Freshman (CEE)

The skills and efforts these students brought to the EI was essential in achieving our program goals, but the contribution of their lively spirit is what makes the EI a special place to work. We also congratulate our graduating seniors, Victoria Danta and Kevin Cho, and wish them every success in future endeavors.

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