

Environmental Policy class proposes recycling options

By Amy Hillier

The Environmental Policy Formation class, new this year, recently completed a fifty-page proposal recommending a campus-wide recycling plan. The report provides the College with a series of options to reduce the amount of trash, focusing primarily on the financial benefits of a recycling system.

The nine students in the class began work on the project in September. The proposal, composed of three chapters and a conclusion, begins with background on the current problem with solid waste disposal in Vermont as well as in the country and world.

Assistant Professor of Biology Steve Trombulak, creator and teacher of the course, chose the recycling issue as the focus for this year's class because of its timeliness and special relevance to Vermont communities. Act 78 will result in the closing of landfills that lack heavy plastic liners in 1991, explained senior Kurt Broderson, a student in the class. The cost of disposing of garbage will increase as a result, he said, adding that the amount of garbage produced by the College has been increasing. Therefore, in addition to what he and others see as obvious environmental concerns, the recycling issue involves financial considerations, he said.

The second chapter of the report, consisting of seven steps, outlines the actual proposal. The first step involves suggestions for reducing the number of paper cups used in the dining halls and other simple ideas that require increased awareness rather than an organized plan. The second step focuses on removing cardboard from the waste stream,

partly by providing a shed for boxes from Food Services and the College store.

The third and fourth steps include residential and nonresidential buildings in a structured system for collection of newspapers as well as other paper trash.

"This is where the proposal really starts to kick in," Broderson said. Plastic containers would be put next to garbage cans throughout the buildings. Custodians or student workers would take all of this material to a central building storage area and ultimately to a central campus facility.

A storage building for recyclable materials open to the staff

"Such a wonderful meeting of minds doesn't happen enough."

and the community is outlined in the fifth and sixth steps. One option involves the purchase of a trailer that would create one ton or half ton bundles that the College could then sell to recycling agencies. The final step describes the necessity of ongoing research into the recycling markets to study how the College could make the most money.

The final chapter outlines an educational program involving the residence hall assistants working in conjunction with Buildings and Grounds. "They'd be directing the educational aspects of it primarily," Broderson said, adding that junior

counselors and house directors might also be involved. Educational programs would focus on the next freshman class, possibly including a presentation at Bread Loaf during their Orientation.

Broderson stressed that these different ideas are suggestions and not necessarily dependant on each other. "The whole proposal is basically options for the College," he said.

Trombulak and the students were very pleased with their final product, despite the fact that they needed to work on it through Winter Term in addition to their other classes. "I think it's amazing, considering the number of people and the time frame," senior Julia Morse said.

Carl Peabody, manager of the College store, sees the proposal as a great way to begin what he understands as a huge problem with waste here and throughout the country. "The College has a good plan," he said, calling it "something to get us started."

"I think Steve Trombulak and his students have done an awful lot of work," Peabody said, adding that such a report would have cost the College a lot if done by an outside group.

Peabody said that the store and Food Services both currently break down and recycle boxes. He is very supportive of the students' effort to include other groups on campus in a recycling plan.

Despite the overall strength of the proposal, Trombulak sees two possible weaknesses. Hidden costs that the students had no way of assessing have left some relatively small holes in the proposal, he said.

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The dependence on those implementing the plan could also be a problem. "I think one of the weaknesses with the plan is people putting it into effect," he said.

Concentrating on the financial aspects of their recycling proposal was difficult at first, students said. "I think people were frustrated with it at points," Morse said.

"I really had to revise my writing style," said Broderson who is an English major with a focus on creative writing.

Morse understood the need for such a focus, however, and said that people working with policies need to use economic language since money is the primary concern of those making the final decision. "It's pretty much real life," she said.

"I kind of expected it to come down to that," said junior Josh Halberg, "because the College thinks that way."

Trombulak added that the College "has a responsibility to make fiscally sound decisions." He said that the students never lost sight of

the environmental and ethical reasons for recycling and were able to argue for a proposal that was "always economically sound."

Despite the fact that the course work stretched out an additional month, the students were excited about the class. "You really felt that you'd accomplished something and done something that matters," Broderson said.

Morse emphasized the importance of the class' focus on doing something constructive and working with people from outside the College community. Such a "wonderful meeting of minds doesn't happen enough," she said.

The students in the class, all juniors and seniors, made a public presentation of their report at an Environment Quality meeting last week. Trombulak originally planned for the students to make a formal presentation before the Treasurer David Ginevan as well as other officials but decided that it would be more effective for him to meet informally with Ginevan and Associate

Provost Maggie O'Brien about actual acceptance of the plan.

Broderson, although originally disappointed by the decision, was pleased with the attendance at the less-formal presentation. "We did it for our personal satisfaction," he said. "We wanted to see it through."

Morse was relieved not to have to present the proposal formally, she said. Because the class made the presentation at an E.Q. meeting, they were able focus more on the environmental aspects without as much emphasis on the financial aspects. "We weren't trying to sell it," she said.

"We really don't understand the high circles of how the College works," she said. She and her classmates trusted Trombulak's discretion, she said. The collective goal of the class, Morse said, is to have the proposal accepted as more important than the presentation.

The proposal will be printed on recycled paper. Anyone interested in receiving a copy can contact Trombulak.