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Fearless: Heather Ipsen

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Fearless: Heather Ipsen

Abstract
In celebration of Sustainability Week on campus, we proudly feature Heather Ipsen ’16 who has fearlessly raised awareness for the environmental issues about which she's passionate and started a group on campus to better facilitate dialogue between sustainability groups. [excerpt]

Keywords
Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, environmental justice, sustainability

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Comments
Surge is a student blog at Gettysburg College where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

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In celebration of Sustainability Week on campus, we proudly feature Heather Ipsen ‘16 who has fearlessly raised awareness for the environmental issues about which she’s passionate and started a group on campus to better facilitate dialogue between sustainability groups.

Now an Environmental Science major, Heather found her drive to promote sustainability and awareness of environmental issues by taking an introductory Environmental Science class her first year at Gettysburg College. She had come to college planning on becoming a Health Science major, but soon realized that would have to change. “I found that I was a lot more passionate about studying environmental issues than I was about learning biology. I get more excited about it. I think it’s a really important issue that people aren’t as focused on as they should be.”

She developed her new-found interest in sustainability during the spring of last year while working as the Recycling intern for the Facilities Department on campus. An enriching experience, Heather worked to develop a program to introduce first-year students to the recycling program on campus, ensure that every residence hall and building had both trashcans and recycling bins, and conducted a lot of research about other colleges’ sustainability initiatives so as to implement similar programs here.

“It’s always really interesting to see the attitudes of different people when you tell them about what they can recycle,” says Heather. “You can recycle basically everything now. People say things like, ‘Oh, you can’t recycle that away because it had food on it and it’s contaminated,’ but really you can. There’s a lot of leeway. It’s common knowledge to me now, and so I want to raise awareness about it.”
While doing research as the Recycling intern, Heather also discovered that, in previous years, there had been a group called G.R.A.S.S. (Gettysburg Research and Action by Students for Sustainability), a collective of the different sustainability groups on campus, that had fizzled out after faculty members had separated from it.
“So I restarted it,” says Heather. “G.R.A.S.S. is now a combination of all the sustainability groups on campus like GECO (Gettysburg Environmental Concerns Organization), Farmhouse, the Food intern, a representative from the Sustainability Committee, etc.” Restarting G.R.A.S.S. has created an avenue through which each of the different sustainability-focused groups on campus can communicate, share ideas, and organize events together.

“There used to be a real lack of unity between the groups. We were doing events, but they weren’t united,” says Heather. “Now we’re all working better and smarter because we’re working toward the same goals.” The leaders and organizers of all the different environmental groups on campus meet once a month as part of G.R.A.S.S. to gain support and brainstorm how to spread awareness on campus.

And the group has already seen a lot of success. Communication between the groups has improved, ideas are spreading and organized, and Sustainability Week has been well thought-out and running smoothly. Heather’s excited about what it means for getting people more interested in sustainability on campus. “I think people should be willing to give sustainability and enviro-friendly things a chance. I guess some people have the opinion that being environmentally aware and sustainable is being a tree-hugger, or that you’ll get a bad reputation or something; but if it’s good for the environment, then it’s good for you.”

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