3-1-2010

Lake Forest College: Red, Black, and Green?

Shabana Yusufishaq

Lake Forest College

Follow this and additional works at: https://publications.lakeforest.edu/eukaryon

Disclaimer:
Eukaryon is published by students at Lake Forest College, who are solely responsible for its content. The views expressed in Eukaryon do not necessarily reflect those of the College. Articles published within Eukaryon should not be cited in bibliographies. Material contained herein should be treated as personal communication and should be cited as such only with the consent of the author.
Lake Forest College: Red, Black, and Green?

Shabana Yusufisqhaq
Department of Biology
Lake Forest College
Lake Forest, Illinois 60045

LEAP and Circle K members volunteering at Lake Forest Open Lands as part of their restoration work days.

Long before Al Gore’s Inconvenient Truth, Lake Forest College brought awareness to the campus community about protecting our environment. It all began in the 1970s when the environmental studies department was created. Nearly a half a century later, the department has welcomed Glenn Adelson as the first chair of the department to have a background in environmental studies. Dr. Adelson has a PhD in biology from Harvard University, where he taught for 20 years before deciding to come join the environmental studies department at LFC. LEAP, the League of Environmental Awareness and Protection, stands true to their name as they bring awareness and take initiatives to make the campus and its community more environmentally sustainable. There is also the Environmental Issues and Concerns Committee (EICAC) which partakes in environmentally friendly action by taking suggestions made by the campus community and proposing these ideas to different departments on campus, including President Schutt.

Dr. Adelson, LEAP, and the Environmental Issues and Concerns Committee asks the college community to really look at our surroundings in order to allow us to understand what they are, why they are here, and why it is important we care for them. Dr. Adelson’s first class at Lake Forest College, Lake Forestry challenges students to do just that. He says, “My class has yet to go into a real classroom” because he feels there is no better way of learning about our environment than looking at it firsthand. He also believes that the courses in the environmental studies department will have an even greater assortment of classes, which will not only allow students to explore their environment, but also to better understand themselves. He believes that the classroom should teach students to be aware and analyze their preconceived notions. If students remain in their comfort zones and see things from the same perspective, they are only limiting themselves from the many possibilities of understanding. Further, the information the students learn in classes can be applied to current and potential environmental problems. Students who have majored in environmental studies have already found the many different opportunities offered by the environmental studies major. They have found themselves in various disciplines, in both graduate school and in the workplace. The environmental studies department, too, reflects this diversity because it is comprised of classes from various departments, including religion, economics, and politics.

Erika Rodriguez ’12, the president of LEAP, and Robin Graber ’12, the vice president, also shared their thoughts about bringing awareness when they said, “People must think of the future implications of their actions and not just the immediate consequences. They have to think forwardly.” Rodriguez and Graber believe that the campus is off to a good start. In reference to helping our environment, they stated that it is “helpful to know people [do] think in the same way [because] environmental people are not jointed… everyone can make a positive impact.” In other words, there are no specific qualities required for an individual to help out his/her surroundings.

Lori Del Negro, the chair of the Environmental Issues and Concerns Committee and professor of chemistry, also sees the importance of everyone working together when she said, “Green isn’t [just] for tree huggers [anymore].” She pointed out that individuals will not be able to find a job in the future if they do not embrace the importance of taking care of the world. Already, businesses and corporations are taking this idea to heart as they start to better understand the implications of producing their products in certain ways, she added. To elaborate, companies are learning ways in which they can benefit through improving consumer satisfaction and lowering financial obligations associated with energy use.

There are also a number of ways in which Dr. Adelson, Dr. Del Negro, Rodriguiez, and Graber bring awareness to the campus community through their environmentally friendly actions. For instance, Dr. Adelson and his staff are working to create classes which teach students the realities of our actions and how these actions impact our environment. One of the courses they plan on offering traces the life of paper. On a larger scale, they are making plans to create an organic farm at Lake Forest College for academic and recreational purposes.

For Homecoming this year, LEAP had blue and black bags for students to collect their trash and recyclable items, respectively. This provided students with the tools to easily contribute to the efforts of helping the environment. The event also provided evidence for the little effort needed to make a difference. The Environmental Issues and Concerns Committee provides students with other opportunities to make a difference too. For example, students interested in implementing a particular green initiative can submit a proposal for a Lake Forest College Sustainable Campus Implementation Grant, which is administered by the EICAC. After the proposal is reviewed, students may possibly receive a grant to put their proposal into action. Recently, LEAP proposed to eliminate paper waste and was granted a sum which allowed them to purchase a printer for the 24/7 lab in the school library to allow for double-sided printing. The library staff was so impressed with the results and responses from printer users that they purchased an additional printer to allow for double-sided printing.

There are various other ways in which LEAP is helping out both the campus and nearby communities. One of these ways includes their frequent visits to the Lake Forest Open Lands where they spend some hours
maintaining and growing the habitats that once existed. Some of their past activities include raffles to raise money for rainforest conservation and annual campus Earth Day events, which have included speakers and video showings. Currently they are working on a project where they plan on removing the use of pesticides known to harm wildlife. As of now, they have already received permission from the President and the Board of Trustees to begin further planning. In the meantime, LEAP also plans to set-up a give and take box where students will be able to place their used or unwanted clothing into the box and take something that they may like. All in all, they are working on educating the campus about the importance of their plans, and they encourage LFC to join them in their efforts by participating in the mentioned projects.

The Environmental Issues and Concerns Committee is working hand in hand with LEAP to restore parts of the campus. Those areas would include places that are not used frequently. Furthermore, they want to enhance the rest of the turf on campus, which will allow it to be better maintained. They also started another project last year which involves taking inventory of the greenhouse gases emitted on campus and implementing initiatives to reduce these emissions wherever possible. Professor Del Negro shared a few other clever ideas. One was using solar powered light poles for the soon to be renovated Sports Center parking lot. This would not only reduce the use of energy, but it would also save the school some money when it comes time to replace the bulbs of the light fixtures. Another small but easily doable idea she spoke of was increasing the number of bike racks around campus, giving more individuals reason to ride their bikes.

It might be an inconvenient truth for those who consider the earth’s current state to be a hassle, trouble, or even an annoyance, but for Dr. Adelson they are simply opportunities. He has a good point because our environmental “opportunities” provide us with a chance to build a stronger community; these opportunities will bring us closer together and give us a reason to better understand our surroundings. As Graber points out, we need to understand something as small as “where does my plastic water bottle go?” It is with these small initiatives that we can begin to contribute to helping the environment. We need to “take immediate action” Rodriguez voices. Dr. Adelson agrees because changes in the climate not only cause geopolitical chaos, but also deplete our biodiversity.

To echo everyone’s words, one day, if our style of living does not change, “species [will be forced] into extinction, inaugurate plagues and disease, inundate parts of some nations, drown populated islands whole, render coasts uninhabitable, intensify hurricanes, typhoons, and tornadoes into record breaking storms…,” wrote authors Thomas Karl and Kevin Trenberth in the book Environment (also co-authored by Dr. Adelson). This may seem far away, but the idea that it will come one day should give everyone reason enough to want to prevent this from occurring. Therefore, it is important we take advantage of the opportunities our campus readily provides us to make a difference, whether that is done through taking a class in the environmental studies department, volunteering some time to restore plants, or proposing your own initiative to help the environment. Small or big, you are still contributing, and if we all start now, our environmental initiatives can become the standard, the norm, as Professor Del Negro nicely put it.

Note: Eukaryon is published by students at Lake Forest College, who are solely responsible for its content. The views expressed in Eukaryon do not necessarily reflect those of the College. Articles published within Eukaryon should not be cited in bibliographies. Material contained herein should be treated as personal communication and should be cited as such only with the consent of the author.