

To the Sustainability Working Group and the Williams Strategic Planning Effort,

We, Sophia Sonnenfeldt '22 and Sang Hwan Lee '19, have undertaken a group project that deals with sustainability on campus for an Environmental Studies class, "Our Planet's Plastic Plight (ENVI 329)." We are proposing ideas that derive from the findings of our group project, and we hope that you find our proposals to be of great utility in your efforts to make this campus more sustainable.

Throughout our project, we observed that student apathy significantly diminishes sustainability efforts of the institution; despite a myriad of posters designed to educate the student body on issues such as recycling, waste reduction, and carbon emissions, these efforts only serve to preach to the choir. This is to say, the bottom-up approach frequently administered by the Zilkha Center and other student-led initiatives have limited efficacy when it comes to implementing change by involving the student body.

In order to combat apathy, then, we must take a top-down approach by changing the very definition of what it means to be a Williams student: we must make it so that being a Williams student means being a staunch proponent of sustainability - not just in name, but in practice as well. To this end, we propose that the Sustainability Working Group partners with the College to institutionalize sustainability as a centerpiece of the College's identity.

We propose institutionalization and centralization of sustainability efforts since the decentralized nature of the College is detrimental to the upholding of any effort to advance sustainability. Currently, although students may be aware of the term sustainability, most students have limited awareness and knowledge of what exactly sustainability entails. This is mainly due to the fact that the Environmental Studies Department's message on sustainability does not permeate the entire student body; the message simply exists in an echochamber of students already involved with environmental studies classes and the Zilkha center. Only when the college takes up the issue of sustainability to be a core pillar of its identity can sustainability – and all that goes with it – be effectively disseminated throughout the main student body.

In addition, unless sustainability is centralized and institutionalized, student efforts to bring sustainability to the forefront will inevitably suffer from the 4 year time restraint. The cycle of students entering college and graduating 4 years later creates transience, and consequently yields a constantly revolving door of new ideas that, in reality, are shadows and re-creations of past ideas. Institutionalizing sustainability allows all efforts to outlast a student's 4 year term, and centralization allows the implementation of a long-term vision that can give rise to more concerted student efforts, rather than a disjointed batch of ideas.

To complement our first proposal of centralizing and institutionalizing sustainability, we propose the following: that (1) sustainability be a central theme during First Days, (2) the Sustainability Working Group work with All Campus Entertainment (ACE) to hold sustainability themed night - such as *Got Trash?* - and (3) collaborate with the Neighborhood Leadership Team (NLT) and Office of Student Life (OSL) to have monthly recycling games. We envision these three proposals, in conjunction with our recommendations to other groups – the Zilkha Center, heads of First Year programming, and future students – will work in tandem to help cement the notion that sustainability is an integral part of the Williams identity.

Implementing sustainability as one of the major themes of First Days is a critical factor. Not only does this set the tone for what the incoming class of first years can expect, it also helps establish an awareness regarding sustainability. Furthermore, First Days holds immense utility since the entire first year student body is present in a limited area, and also eager to absorb information regarding college life. In addition, we envision applying the theme of sustainability to Ephventures such as WOOLF, Where Am I, and Root, will complete the circle of introducing a conceptual thought of sustainability and then acting on it. We have outlined the specifics of how sustainability is to be implemented during Ephventures in another letter addressed to concerned parties. It should suffice to say, however, that stressing sustainability during First Days, in conjunction with further activities during and after Ephventures, will be paramount in changing the culture of apathy into a culture of sincere engagement surrounding sustainability.

Furthermore, we have proposed that the college continuously hold monthly regular events on the theme of sustainability because it will continue to serve as a reminder that sustainability is a central pillar of the college's identity, and also because it places sustainability on the horizon of students who would otherwise not take a single environmental studies class during their Williams career.

There are many more moving pieces to our entire proposal that have not been included in this letter. However, we believe the Sustainability Working Group should primarily focus on redefining what it means to be a Williams student, and placing sustainability as one of the core tenets of the college's beliefs; without an overarching framework that creates fertile ground for sustainability to thrive, our other proposals, which are conceived to operate within this framework, will not be able to perform to their full potentials.

We hope that our proposal aids you in creating a campus atmosphere that centers around sustainability. We look forward to hearing back from you, and we hope we can work with you to further develop and implement our ideas.

Sincerely,
Sophia Sonnenfeldt '22
Sang Hwan Lee '19