If Time gave out a "Word of the Year" award like it does "Person of the Year," our money would be on "sustainability." But what does the term really mean? We often seem to use it casually, lumping it in with that other thing called global warming and inserting it as a glossy catch-all when we want to sound informed.

It makes sense, then, that a group of 64 students, faculty, and staff would collaborate to define and clarify what sustainability is and how we can apply it to life at Boston College. The insight generated from this discussion provided an excellent framework in which to imbue BC with a sustainable attitude.

At its most fundamental levels, sustainability applies to "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." As the ends of the earth grow closer and more connected than they ever have before, so too have issues of sustainability become increasingly prominent in today's society. The need for conserving resources, maintaining key ecological functions, and encouraging corporate responsibility all lie at the heart of the concept of sustainability. Whether on the micro or macro level, sustainable efforts are those that ultimately stimulate a consciousness of how our behavior affects society and the natural world.

As students coming of age in this globalizing world, we bear a special responsibility to develop a sustainable mindset that will parlay into our actions; and as our University, BC should work to get us there. Especially at a university committed to the Jesuit ideals of social justice and interconnectedness, prudence demands that we explore this new frontier. Already many inroads have been forged to help BC incorporate sustainability in its educational mission: the creation of SustainBC, the appointment of Deirdre Manning as the director of sustainability and energy management, and even the "blank slate" of the Institutional Master Plan. But what would a sustainable BC look like?

Unlike a concrete subject like history or chemistry, sustainability cannot be "taught." It is, however, an abstract concept that can be infused into any subject, a secondary lens through which to view principles of economics or sociology or marketing. It is liberating in the sheer extent of its applicability to disciplines. We should count on faculty in every department to train themselves in sustainable concepts and develop a passion for it so they will naturally incorporate these ideas into their teaching.

Though its indefiniteness may concern those who fear setting out into academically uncharted waters, sustainability presents ample room for growth and innovation. There is no wrong way to teach it - we should grasp this opportunity for creative learning and look for ways to integrate it into every aspect of our education. From our living to our learning to our activities, the study of sustainability can be pervasive and personal.

We need to remember that sustainability is a question, not an answer, and that it is only through critical discussion that we can forge ahead toward creative solutions. We should support transformative experiences for students to trigger an awareness of sustainability within them. We need sustainability discussed in classes beyond the traditional environmental sciences to
appeal to and reach all students. We need to start students early to make sure that BC graduates not only know key issues pertaining to sustainability, but that they live those out in their every action. We need to ask for a novel and innovative facility infrastructure as the Master Plan construction gets underway, and we must look for ways to make green design a reality for students who have never been exposed to it.

Being a part of the college community creates a connectedness unlike anything many students have ever experienced before. The more we impress upon students that this connectedness extends to the entire world, the better off we'll be toward forming conscious, responsible citizens. As arts, science, nursing, education, and business students of BC, we are stewards of our campus - and as the future politicians, lawyers, doctors, teachers, caregivers, and CEOs, we will become stewards of the earth. Being schooled in sustainability can ensure we fulfill this duty in the fullest sense. © Copyright 2008 The Heights