To New Heights:
Boston College and the Jesuit Mission of Sustainability

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“Telling our stories is a time-bound activity. A particular version suits a historical moment and its issues. Our experience unfolds and develops, however, so we are always refining the plot of the story and emphasizing new themes.”
- Boston College University Mission

As the 21st century unfolds, society has indeed entered a new epoch, a new historical moment with distinct issues unlike ever before in the history of humanity. Society has entered, what some scholars have termed, the Anthropocene, or “the Age of Man“ (Kolbert, 2011). It is a period of anthropogenic climate change and environmental degradation, of social breakdown, and global poverty. As this new experience unfolds and develops, the Jesuit mission continually seeks to refine its trajectory and emphasize new themes. Today, society calls for renewed themes of humility, ethics, moderation, and stability—themes that not only align with our Jesuit ideals here at Boston College, but that also underpin our pressing need for global sustainability.

Just as BC Jesuits seek “to stimulate a conversation about the themes that can define the mission of Boston College and engage our idealism as Jesuits” (BC Mission) we must also seek to engage every facet of the BC community in a new critical conversation about our changing world that begs, now more than ever, for ethical consideration and multilateral cooperation on a global scale. Our university is committed “to the uncompromising and unrestricted pursuit of the truth and excellence” (BC Mission). This pursuit of truth and excellence is simply not possible without the health and stability of the natural world upon which civilization continues its existence. Jesuit brethren founded Boston College in 1863, “to give the sons of immigrants an intellectual formation that would provide a Catholic moral and religious framework for their lives and prepare them to be citizens of the growing American republic” (BC Mission). The moral framework upon which BC was founded must be called into action in order to truly reach the just and sustainable world we seek to set aflame.

In 1994 Jesuits working at Boston College came together to write a paper that elaborated on the university’s Jesuit mission, as well as to discuss how the Jesuit mission statement addresses the contemporary challenges of the modern world. Below you will find an excerpt from that text:
“Oppressive violence, the absence of the minimal conditions for well-being, are the ordinary lot of vast numbers of people across the globe. The prosperity of the few coexists with the suffering of the many. Paradoxically, as the world grows more interconnected by communications and trade its citizens feel more oppressed by its complexity and more divided from one another by chasms of history, religion, and ethnic loyalties. We lack a common vision of what it means to be human and distrust the very political and social institutions that could address our problems.” (BC Mission)

Twenty years later, these social injustices still exist, but with added complexity as environmental injustices only widen the deep social divides. It is critical to amend this dialogue to include the oppression, violence, and degradation imposed on the physical earth, which only exacerbates the social, political, and economic situations of impoverished populations around the world. We not only lack the common vision of what it means to be human, but it appears we lack the perception of what it means to be human on a living, breathing planet with finite natural resources.

The paper on BC’s mission refers to this idea of ‘Ignatian spirituality’ that is essential to the Jesuit education, and sets Boston College apart from other institutions. As stated in our mission, “Ignatian spirituality sees the world of nature in and around us as graced at its core by God’s self-giving, therefore worth our work and our study” (BC Mission). By understanding both the social and natural world as “graced at its core by God’s self-giving,” Jesuits accordingly see protecting the earth as guided by moral imperative. The university is a place that “is so clearly suited to bringing critical intelligence to bear on the longings and struggles of men and women to achieve a world that befits their dignity” (BC Mission). It is also a place where men and women must learn to achieve the dignity of the earth with all of its living organisms and ecosystems. Otherwise, it is impossible to achieve truth and excellence without the ethical consideration of all God’s divine gifts to man. Globally only 6.7 percent of people graduated from higher education in 2010 (Wilson, 2010). As part of this elite group of graduates, it is our duty to use our Jesuit education, our skills, and unique experiences to improve the environments that have shaped us as students and as citizens of this world.
Moreover, our mission states, “in the view of the world that animates Ignatian spirituality, therefore, a university can express a profound humanism, constituted by the desire to understand the world and the direction of our lives, to educate others in this understanding, and to use our wisdom to achieve justice” (BC Mission). In order to spread Ignatian spirituality Boston College students must understand the world that they inhabit and take part in everyday. This consists of a multifaceted understanding of a world that is equally complex, dynamic, and ever changing. Just as BC aims to educate its students, and prepare them for the social, political, spiritual, and economic challenges of tomorrow, so too, must the university educate students how to understand and face the ecological challenges of the future. Without such understanding, the Jesuit education simply is not complete.

As a Jesuit university in the Catholic tradition, Boston College stands to gain tremendously from the guidance and mission of the current papacy. Pope Francis began his papacy on March 13, 2013 as the first Jesuit pope in history. He demonstrates his Jesuit commitment both through his humility and generosity towards the poor, and has taken a more progressive stance on several issues, including environmental sustainability (Binelli, 2014). Pope Francis has spoken at numerous events and forums on topics ranging from food waste, biodiversity, and water scarcity.

In June 2013, Pope Francis addressed the 38th Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and acknowledged the challenges to global food security in a period of climate change. He stated that “the situation worldwide is particularly difficult, not only because of the economic crisis but also due to problems associated with security, the great number of continuing conflicts, climate change and the preservation of biological diversity” (‘Address of His Holiness,’ June 2013). In his address, Pope Francis emphasizes the inextricable nature of food security and social justice, which also incorporates the question of sustainable food production. The pope points out that it is not lack of food that is the problem, “It is a well-known fact that current levels of production are sufficient, yet millions of people are still suffering and dying of starvation. This, dear friends is truly scandalous. A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth…” (‘Address of His Holiness,’ June 2013). This is where students of Boston College play an integral role; as Jesuit
scholars, we bring our compassion and dedication for social justice to the forefront of the
fight against poverty. But as Pope Francis conveys, future generations must also be
equipped with the skills and knowledge to create innovative solutions that will feed the
global poor, while preserving the land with all of its biological diversity.

Pope Francis addressed the FAO again on October 16th for the occasion of World
Food Day. Commenting on the FAO’s decision to emphasize ‘Sustainable Food Systems
for Food Security and Nutrition,’ Pope Francis wrote, “I think I read in it an invitation to
rethink and renew our food systems from a perspective of solidarity, overcoming the
logic of unbridled exploitation of creation and orienting better our commitment to
cultivate and look after the environment and its resources, to guarantee food security and
progress towards sufficient and healthy food for all” (Zenit, Oct. 2013). While the Pope is
undoubtedly committed to alleviating hunger and poverty through food security, this idea
of cultivation goes far beyond fostering sustainable food systems; it refers to a much
more profound relationship between humans and nature, and a greater need to encourage
sustainable stewardship.

On the UN World Environment Day last summer, Pope Francis elaborated further
on the idea of stewardship and cultivation. He opened his catechesis by emphasizing our
role as stewards of the earth, as indicated in the Book of Genesis, “which states that God
placed man and woman on earth to cultivate and care for it” (McCarthy, June 2013).
Pope Francis goes on to question whether we indeed care for and cultivate the earth or if
today we are exploiting and neglecting God’s precious gift. His speech critically
analyzes the “culture of waste,” fueled by the insatiable consumerism that overwhelms
society. This profit-driven greed only results in moral and environmental degradation as
the “culture of waste has made us insensitive even to the waste and disposal of food,
which is even more despicable when all over the world, unfortunately, many individuals
and families are suffering from hunger and malnutrition” (McCarthy, June 2013).
Moreover, the contemporary crisis, manifested in both human and environmental
dangers, serves to prove how closely human ecology is linked to environmental ecology.

The Pope asserts that the current capitalist economic system, devoid of ethical
consideration for people and the planet, leads to desensitization and wastefulness.
Through this ‘culture of waste,’ we become accustomed to waste and exploitation of
resources and human lives. Pope Francis repeatedly refers to the ‘culture of waste’ in his clerical speeches, letters and international addresses, and sees this trend as a serious impediment to the Catholic mission. This past January the Pope addressed the Diplomatic Corps, elaborating on the contemporary challenges to global peace. Among the obstacles mentioned was the issue of environmental degradation:

“Finally, I wish to mention another threat to peace, which arises from the greedy exploitation of environmental resources. Even if ‘nature is at our disposition,’ all too often we do not ‘respect it or consider it a gracious gift which we must care for and set at the service of our brothers and sisters, including future generations.’ Here too what is crucial is responsibility on the part of all in pursuing, in a spirit of fraternity, policies respectful of this earth which is our common home” (‘Address of His Holiness,’ January 2014).

The pope’s words once again underpin the critical connection between social and environmental justice; one simply cannot be achieved without the other. In order to realize our Jesuit ideals of serving others in the Ignatian Spirit of Boston College, we must simultaneously address the environmental challenges that threaten the sustainability of our planet. As students and faculty of this Jesuit institution, we must inquire whether or not the administration’s policies at Boston College reflect the respectful spirit of fraternity, which the Pope urges everyone to pursue in protecting the earth, “our common home” (‘Address of His Holiness, January 2014). As Pope Francis eloquently expresses, “Cultivating and caring for creation is God’s indication given to each one of us not only at the beginning of history; it is part of His project; it means nurturing the world with responsibility and transforming it into a garden, a habitable place for everyone” (McCarthy, June 2013). If we neglect our responsibilities as stewards to the earth, we are not living in God’s footsteps; we are not fulfilling His project.

The question we need to ask ourselves now is whether or not Boston College remains faithful to the Catholic catechesis on sustainability, as well as its Jesuit ideals of humility and generosity. We must also ask ourselves in what ways Boston College needs to reevaluate its own mission in order to address the urgent ecological and human crises of today. More importantly, do our actions reflect our mission? These introspective
meditations can help us become more conscious students, better teachers for others, and more humble human beings who continue to understand and discover the dynamic world around us.

While Pope Francis and his catechesis may be considered liberal in nature, he is certainly not the only Catholic who believes in the ecological fundamentals of Christian theology. In fact, many scholars and theologians speak to the innate connections between ecology and faith, including Reverend Dr. Denis Edwards, an international authority on the dialogue between science and spirituality. In his book, *Jesus and the Cosmos*, Dr. Edwards echoes Pope Francis’ words when he describes the ‘integrity of creation:’

“If we are profoundly related to all of creation, forming one world with all living things, and with the whole material universe, if we are related as ‘companions’ to other creatures, if we are responsible before God of creation for our interaction with these creatures, if we are called to love the world as God loves the world, if this whole material is to be taken up into the consummation and share in the resurrection, and if Jesus Christ is at the heart of the whole evolving world, then we are committed to attend to the ecological whole when we act in any one area of the planet” (Edwards, 113).

Dr. Edwards’ book is not only an influential contribution to the broader dialogue on ecological theology, but it is also important to the Jesuit education here at Boston College, as his text is used in one of the university’s core theology courses, ‘Introduction to Christian Theology’ (TH 01711). As part of the Jesuit education, Boston College requires all students to take two semesters of theology, in addition to several other core curriculum classes. Although this one particular theology class uses Dr. Edward’s text and introduces the idea of ecological theology, not all theology classes at BC engage students in a dialogue about the relationship between faith and ecology. The failure to bridge the gaps between our Jesuit education and the ecological imperatives of our time is an indication that the university’s academics do not adequately reflect the Ignatian spirit, an area that this paper will analyze in more depth. Instead of allowing those gaps to widen, this is the time to reevaluate and revitalize our actions to make a serious and wholesome commitment to a sustainable future that benefits both people and the planet.
Boston College has the potential to play a critical role as a leading Jesuit institution to pave the way for sustainability. It is with great urgency that we must employ our Jesuit tradition as men and women for others, including other ecological organisms without which we cannot sustain life on earth. Theologians around the world have already recognized the tremendous opportunity that the Jesuit tradition offers to mobilize environmental consciousness and ecological preservation. One such international effort was initiated by Jesuits and other lay experts of the Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat at the General Curia of the Society of Jesus in Rome. In 2011 the Secretariat published the comprehensive special report on ecology, ‘Healing a Broken World: Task Force on Ecology,’ which details the Task Force’s attempts to protect the environment and promote sustainable development through strong personal and communal commitments. The Jesuit Task Force on Ecology is made up of two secretariats, the Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat along with the Higher Education Secretariat. Together, they have released a sixty page document detailing what needs to be done in order to reconcile the Jesuit faith with environmental sustainability. We will draw heavily from this document as it provides insight into the responsibility of the Jesuit faith as a whole, as well as institutions of higher learning, like Boston College.

To live a truly, wholly Jesuit life is to live a life dedicated to sustainability and caring for the environment. To live as a dedicated Jesuit and a dedicated environmentalist are not two tracks that run in parallel, nor are they two tracks that meet in some places while diverging in others. Rather, to live out a Jesuit life, one must be fully committed to healing the earth. In 2008, the Jesuit General Congregation incorporated sustainability directly into the broader Jesuit mission. Reconciliation with creation has been added to reconciliation with God and others as a key piece of the Mission. As the Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat explains, there are two essential arguments for why this change was needed. First, if we are to believe that God created our earth and granted us the responsibility to be its steward, then we are absolutely required to do so. When we damage our environment, we are immediately damaging God’s creation. We damage the entire world, “the one God put in the hands of humankind to keep and preserve, which is in real danger of destruction” (Alvarez, 19). This simple yet profound statement condemns those who do not live as true stewards of the environment. Second, an integral
part of the Jesuit mission is to protect and assist the poor. In the case of environmental degradation and climate change, it is most often the poor who find themselves threatened by consequences such as flooding, drought, and food and water insecurity. Because these poorer people in developing nations lack the socio-economic ability to protect and defend themselves against these changing conditions, they are destined to more intensely suffer the consequences of climate change. Put simply: “the linkage between environment and poverty is unavoidable, and that is the real challenge for all of us” (Alvarez, 20).

The decisions we make at Boston College are a direct reflection on our commitment to the Jesuit Mission. The Task Force (TF) provides a breakdown of environmental issues by region, in order to put into focus the global repercussions of seemingly localized action. For example, in Africa, where agriculture is responsible for 70% of the continent’s employment, climate change poses a terribly drastic threat. A changing climate can “affect food production and dramatically limit Africa’s economic capacity to reduce poverty” (Alvarez, 21). In South Asia, extreme climate change-caused weather events such as foods, cyclones, and drought are leading to poor populations being subjected to scarcity in energy and water, ultimately putting their livelihoods at risk. (Alvarez, 22) As “too many human beings continue to dominate and rape nature in advance towards ‘progress’”, while “too few reckon with the consequences” (Alvarez, 15), our thoughtless actions at home are in large part responsible for catastrophe abroad. In a call to action, the TF suggests that we “challenge intellectual and spiritual commitment and contemporary formation” (Alvarez, 16). On our own Jesuit campus, we are called to openly question our own unsustainable energy consumption instead of turning a blind eye. What are the real effects of the energy we use? How can we reconcile our Jesuit mission with the environmental degradation we inevitably cause through our use of fossil fuels? These are the kinds of hard questions that our Jesuit mission compels us to discuss.

While environmental problems exist globally, it is useful to zoom in on North America’s specific issues in the context of Boston College and the Jesuit Mission. The TF states that in North America, the three most pressing issues are our reliance on fossil fuels, our industrialized agricultural system, and overconsumption. In order to fight environmental issues in the global North, the TF states that mitigation is the most
necessary approach. This is dependent on reducing reliance on fossil fuels and finding alternatives that are less ecologically damaging. Further, we need to manage our forests, watersheds, agriculture, and fisheries in a way that is sustainable. We need to lower our pollution and waste, while investing in micro-finance, social security, and disaster response programs.

As a Jesuit institution of higher learning, how specifically is Boston College called to action? First and foremost, we are required to make a deep and sincere commitment to sustainability on campus, through the University’s own actions, promotion of environmental initiatives worldwide, and education. Sustainability cannot be an initiative on the periphery; it must be one of the school’s primary goals. We are called to collaborate with other Jesuit institutions of higher learning, to share strategies and work with one another to achieve greater reconciliation with the environment. In the words of the Task Force, we are to “discern the management of our own institutions and exchange and develop practices for more ecologically sustainable lifestyles in our communities” (Alvarez, 44). Boston College must explicitly and formally state its dedication to sustainability, acknowledging that by doing so the school is more deeply engaging in its mission.

The connection between a Jesuit belief system and environmental stewardship is inextricable and indivisible. You cannot be fully immersed in the former without the latter: a Jesuit livelihood that disregards sustainability is false in nature. Boston College must consider this, and we strongly urge the school to take steps towards reconciling faith and ecology. We should not look to other schools for benchmarks. We should not use other schools as excuses for not taking immediate action. We must take immediate action and use our Jesuit tradition and ideals as a guide along the way. We have the opportunity, as a wonderfully vibrant school and community, to emerge as a leader. Our faith calls us to seize that opportunity with vigor.
Methods

With the relationship between Boston College, the Jesuit Mission, and environmental sustainability firmly established, we set about analyzing how successfully BC represents its stated mission, and whether or not our actions on campus and the administration’s decisions truly reflect the Ignatian Spirit. In order to gain a thorough understanding of the role sustainability plays on campus, our team took a holistic approach in our analysis by targeting several branches within the institution. The scope of our analysis consisted of the university's curriculum, student service and global justice initiatives, registered student organizations (RSOs), and facilities and management, including dining services, waste and water management, and energy use. Our methods for collecting and analyzing information included face-to-face interviews with key influencers within the Boston College environmental community, including Robert Pion and Noah Snyder; email correspondence with student groups, service group leaders, and administrative directors; informal interviews with peers involved with various aspects of the BC community; extensive research and analysis of Catholic and Jesuit documents, including papal catechesis, as well as internal BC-specific research. We also conducted an informal online survey, which was distributed to current Boston College students through various list-serves and social media outlets. The six-question survey was preceded by a IRB-modeled consent form explaining the research project, the purpose of the survey, the confidentiality of the participant, and that there were no risks/ benefits associated with participation.

Moreover, as active members in the community, and upcoming graduates of Boston College, we also relied on our internal exposure to and engagement with different facets of the university over the course of our undergraduate experience to evaluate our Jesuit education and the institution's commitment to sustainability. Members in our team have served as presidents, directors, and leaders of various sustainability initiatives, including Real Food, UGBC Sustainability, BC Fossil Free, and the Sierra Club. Each of these unique experiences has given us first-hand knowledge of the university's varying degrees of commitment and support for sustainability on campus.
After compiling information from these various facets of campus life, we were able to identify concrete weaknesses in our commitment to sustainability. While our research was highly qualitative and analytical in nature, the conversations conducted and the research performed met our goals of forming an all-inclusive sustainability profile of Boston College. We see the weaknesses in our profile as unique opportunities for improvement and chances to excel in the future as a leading sustainable Jesuit institution. Our recommendations will reflect the areas where we see the greatest potential for improving sustainability on campus by tying it to our Jesuit mission of cultivating God’s creation and promoting a renewed spirit of reconciliation with the environment.

**Results and Discussion: Academics**

Education is essential to raising awareness of environmental issues and teaching methods not only for reducing our impact on the world, but to also solve the problems we currently face. There are many reasons why we need to engage in an environmentally conscious education, including: honoring our religious values, recognizing the inevitable limits to growth, and preparing students for the reality of living in a different and degraded world. To adequately educate students on environmental issues and their impacts, a “fundamental re-thinking of what we teach and how we teach” is necessary (Smythe). Our schools need to teach the value of the environment and use a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach that allows students to understand the many facets of a complicated situation so that they may use their diverse knowledge and set of skills to take action.

From a religious perspective, Jesuit universities need to emphasize the value of the environment in keeping with their tenet that God can be found in all things (Smythe). In recognizing the importance of the environment as a creation of God and a means to find or see God here on Earth, we need to feature it in our academic curriculum. Our education is responsible for spreading the message that environmental consciousness is required in order to “be in the right relation with God, others and Creation,” as the environment intimately links these as it is one of God’s creations on which we and other
species depend (Smythe). Environmental education will help people appreciate and understand the value of God’s creations so that they may act accordingly.

Jesuit beliefs reinforce other reasons to teach environmental sustainability including the need to understand the limits to growth and acknowledge the reality of our current situation (Smythe). We are currently a society that is focused on growth despite how it causes us to abuse our natural resources through overuse and pollution. This has detrimental effects on our environment and vulnerable populations, whether it be other species or our fellow man. With this knowledge, we are responsible, as a Jesuit university, to work to conserve our resources and teach others to do the same. From a humanitarian approach, also central to the Jesuit mission, we must work to protect vulnerable populations of people from developing nations or depressed areas so that they may have proper access to these essential resources. To do this, we can educate students so that they are aware of the impact of their use of resources on the environment and on others that also depends on them. From this awareness, students can limit their personal use of resources, encourage others to do the same, and participate in aid programs designed to serve populations in need. Our education system needs to acknowledge the reality of the current situation and adequately prepare students to face the challenges already present and those that are imminent. The extent of environmental issues and their impacts to people around the world warrants an in depth education on the merit of and skills needed to help the environment and the many systems and species dependent on it.

The Environmental Studies Department of Boston College seeks to educate students in accordance with the Jesuit mission about the human impact on the environment so that they may be aware and act responsibly. Recognizing the scope and complexity of our environmental issues today and those anticipated in the future, the Environmental Studies Program uses an interdisciplinary approach to prepare students (BC Environmental Studies Program). Students from different backgrounds and interests are brought together to understand the problems with our current practices and environment and work on solutions towards a sustainable future.

The Environmental Studies minor has been offered through Boston College’s College of Arts and Sciences since the 1990’s with growth observed in the number of students enrolled since this time (Snyder, 3). Students of any major and school are
encouraged to declare this minor. Reflecting the interdisciplinary approach of the program, the minor consists of courses from varying schools and departments of the university taught by faculty with different specialties, including environmental law, Earth surface processes and environmental economics. With the expertise of its faculty, the program works to raise awareness of environmental issues and their many components and possible solutions. This awareness and knowledge will prepare students to pursue further study or careers with an environmental perspective (Snyder, 10). As this Jesuit education has taught us, we have a responsibility to the environment and we can fulfill our duties by being aware of the issues, informing others, and taking action in our everyday lives.

Many students have taken the Environmental Studies minor for its interdisciplinary approach but desire a major with the same structure. In response, an Environmental Studies major was developed in large part due to a clear student interest (Snyder, 4). Prior to the development of this environmental major with a social science approach, the only other environmental major offered by Boston College was Environmental Geoscience.

Starting September of 2014, Boston College will offer this interdisciplinary Environmental Studies major to the students of the Class of 2017 and beyond. The coursework of the major aims to provide students with the knowledge of how to live responsibly and act as stewards for the environment despite the many challenges, including societal trends and economic incentives. Students will study and work to develop potential solutions to our environmental issues, including how to face these challenges. Upon completion of the major, students will be prepared to continue their education or obtain a career in this field (Snyder, 2). With the knowledge obtained from these studies, students will be better able to live in line with the Jesuit mission by valuing, supporting and taking care of the environment and those dependent on it during this time of crisis. Interested students must apply for the major, similar to the International Studies major at Boston College, with about fifteen students being accepted each year. With 43 required credits, students will be allowed to study a broad range of environmental topics (Snyder, 4). All students of the major will take an introductory seminar that will study the classical texts in environmental studies followed by foundation courses and a senior
research seminar to culminate their experience as an environmental studies student at Boston College.

An interesting component of the major is the student’s choice of concentration in one of five themes or disciplines. Students will take six courses in their chosen concentration of either the Food and Water Sustainability or Climate Change and Societal Adaptation themes or the History, Political Science, or Sociology disciplines (Snyder, 5). These themes and disciplines will allow students to focus on their main interests and strengths in an interdisciplinary major. In addition, the major is designed in a way that encourages students to study abroad for a semester in order to gain insight into global environmental and sustainability issues. Students of the Environmental Studies major can earn four credits towards the major per semester abroad (Snyder, 8).

In creating the major, the deep connection between the Jesuit mission and sustainability was recognized. As stated in the proposal for the undergraduate major, “As a Jesuit institution, Boston College must train its students with a deep appreciation for creation, for humanity’s role in sustaining the planet as a habitable place, and for the social justice challenges we face,” (Snyder, 1). The major reinforces the Jesuit mission that is integral to an education at Boston College by preparing students to face problems that impact our environment and those dependent on it. As the Jesuit mission constitutes a defining characteristic and strength of Boston College, it was logical to approach the major with this framework.

The creation of an interdisciplinary Environmental Studies major is a significant step for Boston College towards fostering a community that promotes sustainability and prepares its students to address the environmental issues of today. The Environmental Studies major has been in development for several years at Boston College. The extensive process to create a major and get it approved included forming a working group, meeting with the Steering Committee, revising the requirements as needed and submitting it for a series of approvals by officials of the university (Snyder, personal interview). Developing the major was well worth the time and effort, as the university can now better support environmental causes and the students interested in them. It is only unfortunate that it was not created earlier.
Approximately 78 environmental courses are offered for credit towards the Environmental Studies major or minor. These courses are offered from a diverse set of departments from chemistry, to political science and English (Snyder). This broad range of subjects that incorporate environmental themes provides students with the interdisciplinary education needed to understand the many dimensions of a complicated situation and take action. While the courses that fulfill requirements for the major and minor are from varying departments, the overwhelming majority of them are offered through the College of Arts and Sciences. Of the 78 courses, there are only two courses from the Carroll School of Management, two from the Connell School of Nursing and two graduate level courses. The graduate level courses can be taken as electives for either the undergraduate major or minor. There are currently no courses offered through the Lynch School of Education that can be taken towards the Environmental Studies major or minor (Snyder). With the Jesuit mission and sustainability being integral to education throughout the university, all schools should offer a variety of courses with environmental themes, not simply the College of Arts and Sciences.

Students are not the only members of the BC community that are being educated about environmental issues. In email correspondence with Professor Laura Hake, we learned about a program in place to help faculty gain a deeper understanding of environmental sustainability in relation to their specific disciplines. Workshops are offered throughout the year on a broad range of topics including Biology, English, Law, and International Studies (Hake). This effort made by the university to extend education to the staff strengthens the university as it raises awareness of environmental issues thus reinforcing the school’s mission. Faculty can use the knowledge gained in these workshops by incorporating it into their own classes and their personal practices, whether on the job or at home, to strive for sustainability.

In addition to the students and faculty benefiting from this education, the university will gain from the its interdisciplinary academic approach as it will foster conversation across campus from students to faculty of different departments on the topic of environmental issues. This conversation is necessary for people to be aware of the extent of our environmental crisis and to be working towards finding a solution. This conversation is an essential element of a Jesuit education as it brings people together to
discuss and therefore take action towards solving an important worldly issue. Being a complicated problem, environmental sustainability requires people from different backgrounds and fields to develop solutions.

**Recommendations: Academics**

“In order to connect a college or university’s sustainability work to its Catholic mission and identity, the school’s community should clearly understand the causes and consequences of environmental degradation and climate change, as well as the moral framework that will enable it to address adverse consequences from an authentically Catholic perspective” (CCC Toolkit, 8).

Following this recommendation found in the Catholic Climate Covenant Toolkit, Boston College must make a commitment to incorporate a university-wide sustainability curriculum for all students. This can be done through a number of ways. An obvious method for incorporating sustainability into curriculum is an addition the University core, perhaps by requiring a one-credit environmental sustainability seminar for all graduating seniors. However, as adjustments to the university core have proven difficult in the past, we believe the best way to fuse a consistent sustainability curriculum with the Jesuit mission is through the existing university Theology core. Adding a fundamental sustainability component to all Theology core classes will most effectively teach students that environmental stewardship and sustainability is an essential part of the Catholic mission and Jesuit higher learning. Alternatively, the development of an Environmental Theology track within the Environmental Studies program would be a powerful way to tie together environmental sustainability and commitment to creation.

Boston College should develop more environmental courses in schools other than the College of Arts and Sciences. As a fundamental component of a Jesuit education, all schools should seek to incorporate courses with environmental topics. In particular, it is essential for the Lynch School of Education to offer courses with environmental themes. Education is necessary to raising awareness of the environmental crisis and showing people how to take action. If we are not teaching our future educators how to incorporate
environmental education into lessons, then we are not fulfilling our responsibilities as a Jesuit university. Further, with our undergraduate business program ranked number four in the country, it is essential that we demonstrate leadership in preparing our Carroll School of Management students to conduct business with sustainability in mind. Corporate social responsibility is discussed at length in the required semester-long Portico course for freshmen; this is an excellent forum to begin a discussion around the morality of corporate impact on environment. This theme should be developed throughout all concentrations within the business school, preparing students to graduate not just as business leaders, but as business leaders working towards a more sustainable world.

Results and Discussion: Student Groups

We analyzed BC’s online page dedicated to Registered Student Organizations (RSOs) to see how many clubs on campus were either wholly or in part dedicated to enhancing environmental sustainability. We also contacted clubs that were politically and theologically focused to see if they were working at all to incorporate discussion and/or activities centered on sustainability. Based on an analysis of mission statements, we’ve determined that there are five groups on campus whose mission clearly incorporates an aspect of environmental stewardship: Bike BC, EcoPledge, Outdoor Club, Real Food, and BC Fossil Free (this is not an RSO) (BC Student Clubs). While we did not receive responses from many political or theological organizations, the College Democrats did inform us that sustainability is a theme they aim to incorporate in club activities. They have brought in representatives from Sierra Club to inform the club about their Beyond Coal initiatives; after that event, members of the club took action towards supporting the campaign by writing letters to Representative Kennedy. Club President Therese Murphy stated that sustainability is certainly an issue that club members have shown interest in, and they are working to incorporate that theme into activities and discussions.
Recommendations: Student Groups

While the five environmental-focused clubs on campus have active and engaged followings, we found that other Jesuit schools have a wider and more diverse offering of clubs with a sustainability focus. For example, Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, CA offers an academic group named Engineers Without Borders, a club devoted to sustainable engineering and global development. Seattle University offers a similar club that focuses on engineering design and general sciences to promote sustainability. LMU also has two service groups on campus whose mission explicitly states environmental sustainability as a key facet: Esperer and Sursum Corda (LMU). At Loyola Chicago, there are ten clubs on campus related to sustainability, a wide range encompassing a student farming alliance, a corporate sustainability club, and a student-run magazine which focuses in part on environmental issues (Loyola Chicago University). At Georgetown University, the connection to the Jesuit mission is explicitly made in the environmental justice organization called Georgetown Conservation Corps (Georgetown University).

Members of our group have been involved heavily with many of the sustainability initiatives on campus, including Real Food BC, EcoPledge, and BC Fossil Free. From our own experience, we believe that these clubs do a decent job engaging students that join due to a preconceived interest in sustainability. We also think that there is room for significant growth in terms of the breadth of environmentally-focused student organizations. While we recognize that student groups are formed by students themselves, perhaps BC faculty could play a greater role in forming pre-professional, academic, political, service, or religious groups that incorporate sustainability in a meaningful way. For example, a committee of professors from various scientific disciplines could choose freshmen in their classes who display promise and commitment to the environment. Professors could guide these students through brainstorming the club’s mission and objectives, the formal creation process, and could provide counseling as academic advisors.

While it would be ideal to have a more diverse array of clubs on campus that attract a broader range of students, it may be difficult to implement our proposed
recommendation, as it requires buy-in and a lot of effort from faculty. An additional recommendation is the development of a sustainability-themed lecture and discussion series. Students and faculty could work together to brainstorm and plan lectures and subsequent discussion sessions that would follow a particular theme and occur regularly throughout a semester or full academic year. This would provide a greater opportunity for students to learn about environmental sustainability in various capacities and themes (e.g., sustainable food systems, environmental justice, environmental theology, environmental careers), without going through the process of creating registered organizations. For example, Pope Francis has spoken extensively about our global culture of waste and the dire need to reduce personal consumption. Professor Juliet Schor is an incredibly renowned scholar right here on campus that could lead lectures and discussion about this topic. Faculty from theology or philosophy departments could join in a lecture series on the ethical and moral dimensions of overconsumption in waste -- further forging the connection between sustainability and our mission as a Jesuit institution of higher learning. While this is just one example, it illustrates the untapped potential of faculty and students working together to improve overall BC community awareness, education, and action.

**Analysis and Discussion: Service Groups**

Service is an integral part of the Jesuit experience here at Boston College. The mission of the Volunteer and Service Learning Center (VSLC) is to “support the education of our students by promoting conscientious service in the context of Catholic social teaching and contemporary Jesuit education” (‘BC VSLC: About US’). The university offers over twenty international and domestic service/immersion programs where students have the ability to give back to communities in need. BC prides itself in students’ active engagement in and commitment to social justice; hundreds of students sign up to volunteer each year. Some of the most popular programs include Arrupe International Immersion, 4Boston, and Appalachia Volunteers. In fact, in past years the Appalachia program has attracted more than 500 students who dedicate their spring break to building homes in underprivileged areas of the country (Office of Marketing, 2003).
The work that students do through the VSLC is truly tremendous, however our mission here at BC is not quite complete.

Based on our team’s research and analysis, there are some obvious gaps between the Jesuit Mission and what students learn through the service programs; Boston College has yet to tap into the potential that the VSLC has in joining social and environmental justice. The Center’s main webpage has a section on Advocacy describing several social issues that “contribute to inadequate living conditions” for millions of people around the world (‘BC VSLC: Advocacy’). The social issues listed include: homelessness, human trafficking, immigration detention, criminal justice reform, and education reform (‘BC VSLC: Advocacy’). While this list is certainly not complete, a crucial issue is missing from this dialogue on activism and social change. Environmental justice, as this paper has established, is fundamental to “Catholic social teaching and contemporary Jesuit education,” and it must be a priority in order to combat other social injustices that continue to plague society (‘BC VSLC: About US’). A preliminary amendment to bridging the gap between social and environmental justice education here on campus is for the VSLC to create a space for environmental justice activism with accompanying links and resources to external organizations and ways to get involved. We plan to submit our suggestions through the Advocacy page at: social.action@bc.edu. Additionally, we recommend contacting Daniel Ponsetto, Director of the VSLC, with any future environmental sustainability initiatives, ideas, and inquiries.

In order to attain a more thorough understanding of the role that environmental justice and stewardship plays in different service groups, our team conducted an anonymous survey that was distributed online through Boston College list serves and social media outlets. Our goal was to receive a range of student feedback on their experiences with service groups and what role, if any, environmental sustainability played in their program. We received a total of 50 participants. Of the 32 percent of students who stated they have been involved in a BC service group, 83 percent believed that their service program reflected the Jesuit mission of men and women for others, 50 percent stated that their trip had no environmental sustainability aspect, neither action nor dialogue, and another 59 percent revealed that their trip had no discussion on environmental stewardship (Survey). Finally, the survey asked students how important
they believe environmental sustainability is to social justice, and an overwhelming 71 percent responded that it is ‘very important’ (Survey). These results demonstrate that most service programs are not incorporating environmental education or dialogue on stewardship, thus they are not adequately fulfilling Catholic social teaching. Perhaps most important, the survey revealed that the majority of students believe that environmental sustainability is something very important to social justice, and so Boston College must respond to this inconsistency and provide a more cohesive dialogue that integrates service and stewardship.

In an informal interview with one of the Appalachia Volunteers student head coordinators, Jane Barry Lynch ‘14, Barry informed us that, “sustainability is something that [the Appa] program takes very seriously. [They], as a program, have all participants bring mugs, water bottles and utensils so [they] can 1) save money and 2) not be wasteful” (Barry). She also stated, “I know on many of my trips community members have questioned why we don't just buy plastic bottles and kitchenware so we have less dishes and can just throw things out. These conversations have been very rewarding with community members.” Similarly, BC Habitat for Humanity Vice President, Liana Rubinoff A&S ‘14, informed us that, “As an organization, [they] practice environmental sustainability by collaborating with Habitat for Humanity Boston to use environmentally friendly materials for the builds [they] go on with them in the local and Greater Boston area” (Rubinoff). Rubinoff admitted that sustainability is not “necessarily part of [their] dialogue as an organization, but it is something that is important to [their] overall vision as a group.” In an interview with Tatiana Cortes A&S ‘14, a BC senior who has been engaged in campus ministry, Appalachia Volunteers, Arrupe International Immersions, and volunteering with 4Boston, we learned that the above mentioned service programs have never “talked about the issues of sustainability explicitly at all” (Cortes). The one exception, she said, was an Arrupe trip she went on this year, where the “service work was related to sustainability. The in country partner [Arrupe] worked with, Community Links International, believes in working with local communities in Mexico surrounding issues of sustainability” (Cortes). In fact, Cortes admitted, “it wasn't until I was there that I learned about water awareness, how wasteful we are, about eco-farming, and recycling” (Cortes). These conversations are invaluable to our analysis as they reveal
the disconnect between social service and environmental stewardship here at Boston college and in the broader community. Students are simply unaware of the environmental implications that are so closely related to their social justice work on the service trips. As a Jesuit institution we should be committed to both service and stewardship, and so we must amend this gap that exists within our volunteering and service initiatives.

**Recommendations: Service Groups**

While the service groups certainly have sustainability in mind and use eco-friendly materials, students must understand the fundamental reasons behind such eco-friendly choices. As we mentioned before, amending the VSLC website to include environmental justice resources is one step. As stated in the CCC Toolkit and endorsed by Bishop Kicanas of Tucson, it is not just about being sustainable, it is about knowing that environmental stewardship is a central part of the Jesuit identity. “Integrated sustainability initiatives must go beyond just doing sustainability to clearly, consistently and explicitly grounding sustainability work in the institution’s Catholic mission and identity” (CCC Toolkit, 2). Thus, while service groups should continue to use environmentally friendly and reusable materials, the programs must thoroughly integrate environmental stewardship into their missions and dialogues.

While Campus Ministry retreats are outside the scope of Service Trips, we would also like to note this as an area with great potential for incorporating environmental awareness into student life. Leveraging the popularity of campus retreats, Boston College could create a new retreat that allows students to reflect on the importance of environment and spirituality, and how the two are deeply intertwined.

**Results and Discussion: Facilities**

When examining the efforts of colleges to become sustainable the work of facilities and operations pose as a useful benchmark to see how lessons of the classroom and rhetoric of administration translate into tangible action on campus. In every department in Boston College, from Dining Services to Energy to Procurement there are
committed individuals who are trying to ensure that their departments are working towards becoming more sustainable. As a result, an inquiry into sustainability efforts reveals a wide array of projects, many of which are admirable. However, together these initiative reveal a lack of communication and unifying vision, thereby hampering progress to achieve larger more challenging benchmarks that one might hope to see at a university striving to live up to the Jesuit vocation of environmental stewardship.

Since 2006 Boston College has measured its greenhouse gas emissions annually. The largest proportion of emissions comes from purchased electricity (42.11%) and stationary (heating) sources (32.52%), other major sources of emission include study abroad travel (9.4%) and commuting (12.46%), with solid waste, other travel, refrigerants, and the vehicle fleet making up the remaining 3.35% of emissions (Sightlines, 5). Over the past seven years, total emissions have declined 15% to 66,604 MTCDE (Sightlines, 5). Over the same period total energy consumption has fallen by 20% despite a 12% rise in consumed electricity (Sightlines, 8). Emissions from stationary sources have declined by 27% and purchased electricity by 20% (Sightlines, 11-13). The declining emissions in purchased electricity despite an increase in electricity consumed can be accounted for by a 23% decline in utility emissions in Massachusetts (Sightlines, 14). The transition of fuel sources from primarily oil to natural gas is largely responsible for the decline of emissions from stationary sources.

Positive steps have been brought about by efforts of Facilities Management in terms of implementing energy saving technologies such as LED lighting, energy star rated appliances, and motion sensors. And Boston College was recognized for this work last June when it was named a Northeast Business Leader in Energy Efficiency for the 4 million kilowatt hours in energy savings that had been brought about by Facilities Management’s initiatives (Report on Sustainability, 19). On the waste management front BC has made strides currently recycling 38% of it’s waste. Including 100% of the university’s electronic waste (Report on Sustainability, 10-14). And, the university procurement office “require suppliers to utilize environmentally friendly practices when it is deemed financially efficient and effective,” a practice that has contributed to the purchasing of water conserving washing machines across campus as well as hybrid vehicles including the first electric vehicle (Report on Sustainability, 13).
Under the university’s Master Plan, Boston College committed to getting all new construction certified LEED Silver. However, BC’s formal commitments to sustainability end there. All other “green” initiative are administered on a case by case bases by the department in which they are conceived. And, without the formal support of the upper echelons of the administration, such project are subject to the whims of budget cuts regardless of their merits or the ways they enhance our Jesuit mission. Considering the success that has already been achieved, despite the piecemeal nature of endeavor so far, in securing more sustainable procurement practice, reducing energy consumption, and managing waste, we believe that Boston College can only improve efforts to become sustainable by formally adopting ambitious, measurable, and concrete commitments for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. The university should develop a strategy, in conjunction with the master plan, for achieving net zero emissions. It is a fallacy that by avoiding formal pledges Boston College will be able to be more flexible in mitigating its impacts on climate change. Currently the silence on the part of Fr. Leahy and the Board of Directors as to their vision for how BC should be addressing climate change only serves to hinder the positive work of students, faculty, and staff. If Boston College want’s to be a world class university in the Jesuit tradition, it is high time that we formalize a plan to become a beacon for living sustainably. As the Catholic Climate Coalition has written: “A Catholic school cannot just implement a recycling program, but must also explain that it is doing so because of its Catholic commitment to steward and care for God’s good gift of Creation; a Catholic school cannot just reduce its energy consumption, but must also communicate that it is doing so because of its Catholic commitment to protect and defend human life and dignity, especially of the poor and vulnerable who are most impacted by environmental degradation and climate change” (CCC Toolkit, 2).

Conclusion

While the university certainly has pockets of sustainability initiatives with dedicated faculty, staff and students who work tirelessly to make the school greener, Boston College needs to start making concrete, university-wide commitments to sustainability in order to fulfill its Jesuit mission. One starting point is to “become a
Catholic Climate Covenant Partner by formally endorsing The St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor and promoting it as an integrated part of your school’s Catholic mission-based sustainability program” (CCC Toolkit, 2). More than twenty-five Catholic organizations and ten thousand individuals have already made the pledge, including other Catholic universities such as St. Michael’s College, Gonzaga University (Browning), Notre Dame (Novick), and Villanova (World News Network). The pledge reads as follows:

**I/We Pledge to:**

**PRAY** and reflect on the duty to care for God’s Creation and protect the poor and vulnerable.

**LEARN** about and educate others on the causes and moral dimensions of climate change.

**ASSESS** how we-as individuals and in our families, parishes and other affiliations-contribute to climate change by our own energy use, consumption, waste, etc.

**ACT** to change our choices and behaviors to reduce the ways we contribute to climate change.

**ADVOCATE** for Catholic principles and priorities in climate change discussions and decisions, especially as they impact those who are poor and vulnerable.

By making the St. Francis Pledge, Boston College will not only stand in solidarity with all of its fellow Catholics, but it will set an example for other Jesuit schools to also endorse a mission-based commitment to protecting God’s creation and the poorest members of our society who are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Ultimately, BC has a choice. The Board of Trustees and Fr. Leahy has articulate a desire and a plan to make Boston College the premier Catholic, Jesuit University in the country, but in order to get there we will need to take risks and show leadership, not just academic leadership, but moral leadership. Climate change and sustainability is a place where BC can, and should lead. Our tradition calls upon us to lead, and by embracing the recommendations outlined in this report Boston College can live up to our Jesuit mission by serving as an example of what it means to live sustainably as men and women for others.
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