**Franklin Environmental Center at Hillcrest**

**14th Annual Environmental Retreat**

**May 28, 2013**

 **Retreat Notes**

**In attendance:**

Sarah Alexander (SA), consultant and retreat facilitator

Jack Byrne (JB), Director of Sustainability Integration

Molly Costanza-Robinson (MCR), ES/Chemistry

Kemi Fuentes-George (KFG), Political Science

Rebecca Gould (RG), ES/Religion

Jon Isham (JI), ES/Economics

Nan Jenks-Jay (NJJ), Dean of Environmental Affairs

Chris Klyza (CK), ES/Political Science

Marc Lapin (ML), ES

Michelle McCauley (MM), Psychology

Avery McNiff (AM), Sustainability Communications and Outreach Coordinator

Kathy Morse (KM), ES/History

Diane Munroe (DM), Coordinator for Community Based ES

Pete Nelson (PN), Geography

Alison Nurok (AN), Biology

Steve Trombulak (ST), ES/Biology

Jacob Tropp (JT), History

Hector Vila (HV), Center for Teaching, Learning, and Research

Janet Wiseman (JW), Assistant Director, Franklin Environmental Center

Rich Wolfson (RW), Physics

**Introduction: Nan Jenks-Jay**

NJJ welcomed participants and introduced retreat facilitator Sarah Alexander ’93, who graduated from Middlebury as an ES major.

NJJ reviewed the “Institutional Structure”, “Pathways of Decision Making” and “Overview of Visioning Process” handouts.

NJJ: The visioning process core committee is comprised of NJJ, JI, ST, KM, MCR and JB. They have been developing these documents since December with the purpose of teasing out the various entities of the Middlebury environmental and sustainability programs – ES Program, Franklin Environmental Center (FECH), School of the Environment, Office of Sustainability Integration – what each does, how they relate to each other, how they work together and separately. It was important to define boundaries, reporting lines and structures, so that we can move forward together with an understanding that each entity has a different role to play in the overall mission of environmental and sustainability education. The entities share guiding values and principles that will lead Middlebury forward in the work we do now and want to do in the future.

Q: Was the Franklin Environmental Center (FECH) proposal approved?

NNJ: No, FECH exists as a building that brings people together, but not as an approved programmatic piece of the College like Rohatyn. We currently do programming through Environmental Affairs, but want to get the FECH proposal approved and clearly articulated as part of a succession plan. We want to formalize FECH so that it is authorized by the College and has a director and programming.

NJJ explained the “2001 Environmental Peak Report and Recommendations: Action Chart” which details recommendation and goals that were created in 2001 and the progress that has been made towards those goals. Some items were completed and others, such as diversity, are still be worked on. The list was based on a collective prioritization and futuring exercise.

NJJ: Today’s retreat and the visioning process in general are about determining how we want to move Middlebury forward as we anticipate the ES Program’s 50th anniversary next year. As we look forward, we want to acknowledge that we are building on great existing work and not lose site of the important existing aspects of all of our programs. It is important to hold on to the critical foundation pieces and build on those as we vision for the future. A strength of Middlebury is that it takes into consideration both forward thinking AND tradition and that is what I want to accomplish with this visioning process.

**Review of objectives for the day: Sarah Stokes Alexander ‘93, The Keystone Center**

SA welcomed the group, asked participants to introduce themselves, and reviewed the retreat agenda.

SA: My understanding of the retreat and what we want to accomplish today is that the Middlebury environmental and sustainability programs are at a juncture in time looking towards the 50th anniversary of the ES Program. We want to spend some time getting your thoughts about what might be next for the environmental programs.

What is the shared purpose, the shared principles between the environmental programs/entities? How do you share information across the entities to keep communications open? As NJJ explained, this visioning process is meant to push thinking forward, not to reinvent the wheel.

**Group Discussion: Identification of shared purpose/principles: As the Middlebury environmental programs grow, what are the important shared values across the programs?**

Currently, there are four environmental/sustainability entities, and there will potentially be more that may fall under this broad umbrella of environmental and sustainability programs.

What are the things that are most important, that no matter what the existing and any new programs should all be accomplishing?

ST: Fundamentally, the key mission is educational.

ML: Creating educational communities.

KFG: Interdisciplinary thinking (silos don’t work in addressing complex environmental issues).

JT: Creative problem solving.

ML: Creative thinking – not always problem solving.

NJJ: Forecasting before the problems come, forward thinking.

RW: Motivate students for action.

ST: There is a tension between global & local. We want our students to come out of the programs aware of the global stage, but to be able to work on the ground in a local, regional way.

RKG: Inclusivity in many different dimensions.

PN: There’s a research and analysis shared goal that is attached the ES faculty scholarship goals.

ML: How to get our students to pay attention – what to pay attention to and teaching them ways to pay attention.

KFG: Self-awareness. This one has come from some of my students. Many ES students are from white, middle- to upper-income backgrounds. Some of the students who are not from that background have noticed that there is a tension in how problems are thought of and what kind of solutions are proper. Awareness of privilege when we think about environmental issues (like conservation, local goods, organic produce) should be acknowledged to some extent – it has been a major problem for some of my students.

JT: Self-reflexivity more broadly, which has to do with awareness of privilege.

JB: All share a concern for the future.

SA asked if there is anything measurable that we want to see in these programs? Things that cut across these programs that are important?

KM: Self-reflection in an evaluative capacity.

ST: Not sure how to measure this, but are we effectively enabling students to be successful in what they choose to do? Is there a metric in which a student can say that I wanted to be effective at this particular action or being a change agent in a particular way and because of x,y and z that I received at Middlebury, I can now do that?

HV: A way to measure the ongoing level of increased frustration/anxiety of students when they realize that as they learn creative problem solving, the problems will keep coming. Once you solve one, there are others. How do we measure where students are emotionally and psychologically and how they feel about what they are trying to do? And how they deal with the daunting nature of the world we live in?

BG: I think it connects more broadly to self-awareness. What kind of emotional, spiritual and psychological impact do some of the classes and the world have on our students? Awareness leads different people to do different things or to not do anything. Just to recognize that the impact is there.

MM: I would say that the shared purpose across these identities is the building of capacity or resilience to deal with creative problem solving. The information students are getting all ties back to social justice. How do they take different classes and bring it all together so that they can use the information that they learn? Being aware that there are consequences to the process (it can be depressing) as a student goes through and trying to make sure there is some kind of support for students as they deal with that. I’m not exactly sure what that looks like.

SA: Terms that MM used were building adaptability and resilience, which are current buzzwords.

ML: Not just measuring frustration and anxiety but providing tools to deal with them, and not pretending that we can do anything to make it go away. We can provide something other than the intellectual process for the students’ education.

SA: It’s really about motivation for action with the ability to engage with issues that they are caring about.

We’re gravitating into the classroom a bit, so a reminder that we are looking at how do you create this base of experiences that goes beyond the curricular program and into FECH and other things that Middlebury is doing writ large. What tenets would any new program have that would make it clear that it is a Middlebury program?

What I’m hearing out of this conversation is equipping students not only with an awareness of the issues, but also with a sense of the role they can play in solving them recognizing that there are limitations and there is a need for constant reevaluation of that as they move through their lives.

ST: Middlebury has many resources and we are uniquely positioned to make a difference. Who are we reaching out to strategically? We are in a position to move beyond the 18 – 22 age typical college group. What other communities could we be engaging with? How can we strategically use the gifts that we have to make more of a difference than just educating a small cross-section of students from a privileged world?

ML: I think our shared purpose has to include broader communication among each other and between these communities.

MM: There is the undergraduate student community and community partners, but each faculty member also has a community of researchers that is engaged beyond Middlebury. Middlebury both benefits from and contributes to those discussions – I would think that this is an important part of the shared purpose for all of these entities.

ST: Alumni who are environmentally involved is another community that we have long identified as important, but have been unsuccessful developing connections with. We have over 50 years of alumni in this group, both ES majors and other majors who now work in the environmental field in some capacity. We don’t bring them into the teaching/engagement community or help them to network with each other, gaining that synergy that comes from ongoing communication.

SA: Under this idea of inclusivity, both capturing the diversity aspect which was the original intention when it was brought up, but also broadening community – alumni community, research communities, communities around Middlebury – there is lots of inclusiveness there. Anything else on these threads that you want to see tying these entities together?

CK: Sustainability – thinking both institutionally and individually. Our students and faculty/staff all seem overwhelmed with time constraints. How can we think about how to live a healthy life? As an institution we don’t think enough about that.

ML: I want to add MCR’s word “intentional” because I think there is a lot of power to the concept of intentionality and it has to do with what CK just said because some people call that intentional living.

MCR: Recognizing and respecting different types of expertise and training across some of these boundaries. For example, I’d love to see our staff (i.e. facilities engineers who are generating new ideas for the biomass plant) presenting at the colloquium.

JB: Recognizing the different kinds of expertise and training that we can draw on from both the academic and administrative realms. Intentional engagement of various kinds of expertise across campus.

KM: It’s important to keep the past in mind. None of the problems we face lack historical precedence. Humans are engaged with the past in an important way while making decisions about the future.

RG: Being aware of unintended consequences. (i.e. don’t lose sight of past). Similarly, as we are emphasizing action in our teaching and research – don’t forget contemplation and other forms of research and study that are less obviously active. We should constantly ask ourselves if anything important is being forgotten?

RW: We need to instill both pragmatism and idealism in our students in a healthy balance.

ML: Humility.

MCR: Appreciation for different perspectives.

SA: I’d like to shift gears into that action-oriented mindset. It seems that there is a lot of agreement around the topics that have been added to the list, that these are all good things for Middlebury to be living up to.

Today’s discussion is looking across all of the environmental programs (ES Program, FECH, School of the Environment, sustainability programs). How do these things start to help as a whole to fulfill the joint mission that you have of equipping students and other audiences (alumni, the broader community, Monterey students, students in the summer program)? How do you use these programs to cut across this shared purpose?

Since the ES Program was started, the other environmental entities have emerged over time to meet broader goals. This group has spent a lot of time wrestling with who gets to decide what and how does it all work together and now let’s think about moving forward. What are some of the activities that are in one of these programs that need to happen to start pushing this edge, or across these programs that need to happen?

How do you keep your own thinking fresh on these issues? How do you make sure that you are still a learning community and how do you make sure that you are not resting on your laurels, but pushing your own thinking forward? How are the Middlebury faculty and staff pushing their thinking on these issues so that you are then in turn pushing your audiences’ thinking?

An example of an action that cuts across these programs that can help bring them together that needs more thought is: how do you bring outside people into campus conversations? Mark Tercek’s visit and the colloquium series are examples of this. You are already doing some things that are happening in that area, but what else could be done? Or is what is being done sufficient and you just need to build off of that?

I’m using this as an example because I’d like to get some thoughts about what needs to happen for these things to continue to stay alive in the Middlebury programs. Then we’ll break out into small groups and let you flesh out some of those ideas in more detail so that you have some things to move on after today.

CK: how to address the “preaching to the choir” problem – is there a way for us to broaden our message and audience? We have the same people coming to our events.

PN: After the divestment protest, there was a lot of dialogue on Midd Confessional from voices that aren’t present at ES events, but clearly had something to say. In terms of inclusivity, how can we learn from dissenting voices and how can they learn from us?

CK: Divestment did engage the entire campus. A lot of our topics don’t engage the entire campus and people are silent.

SA: Could use this as a small group discussion – when issues like divestment come up that present the opportunity for broader engagement, how are you prepared to deal with that situation as an educational opportunity?

JB: How to link learning goals of the ES program with what the sustainability integration office and other departments/programs are trying to achieve?

MCR: Programs like the Solar Decathlon – there could be fantastic touch points. It’s not part of the environmental program, but there must be ways to connect.

SA: Better linking of things that are not part of the program into it and to the learning goals specifically?

ST: Converse of this – I had former Solar Decathlon students in ES401 recently who didn’t know what a watt was until we discussed it in the energy unit. There’s a gap in the thinking of some of the students and maybe faculty on campus that what we do in the ES Program is not a special interest add on to “earthy crunchy” stuff, there are fundamental things going on that everyone would be well advised to engage deeply on. How do we get more people to recognize that we are part of their narrative as well?

RW: Liberal arts institutes struggle with the question – what is our core essence? It’s not only an issue of preaching to the choir, it’s also an issue of educating the choir in ways they might not want to be educated.

JT: Finding ways for faculty to learn and be able to connect that learning into what they are teaching and keeping everyone fresh. Educating ourselves as well as educating the choir.

NJJ: During a recent visit with Gus Speth, he suggested that new organizations are needed – old ones are not shifting fast enough to adapt or adjust. Rob Nixon’s thinking really helped people. We bring people into the colloquium and to the classroom, but we need to bring people in ways that they become part of our own dialogue and to do so across disciplines, programs and centers.

RG: The colloquium is great, but it’s not the right venue for every visitor or every need. We need more opportunities for workshops or conversations where we can enrich our own learning which can then be brought back to the classroom and local community. I think keeping fresh is a tremendous priority. The challenge is finding the time to do all of this.

RW: Students don’t know what they need to know even though they are passionate.

PN: There is currently a campus conversation about what is the role of an advisor in liberal arts education. Perhaps one way we can achieve some of these shared purposes is to think more intentionally about the conversations we are having with students about the courses they are going to be taking and planning for their undergraduate education.

MM: Helping students determine how classes and requirements fit in with the question “where do I want to go?”

ML: In thinking about the audience, we are both blessed and saddled with the words environmental and sustainability, which come with a lot of baggage and preconceived notions culturally. They bring a lot of students to us, but also bring a lot of resistance to learning certain things. We need to think more carefully about these culturally-laden terms.

JI: Stewardship is a word I’d like to add as it is a word that helps with the large and small in many ways, for example, JB’s work, that challenges students to think about stewardship of the campus and the broader community. And self-stewardship is a word that allows us to think about the larger responsibility of citizenship and action, but also stewardship itself.

JT: I lean more towards citizenship instead of stewardship, because some meanings presume entitlement and I think that this would undercut the goal of self-awareness. Being a citizen implies more a sense of humaneness. In some instances I’m not sure if stewardship is something that would fit all of these goals, but maybe citizenship or something in that direction.

KM : Are there moments in your teaching, work, research or thinking where you felt when things were really coming together and working? After the Balog film, my class had a discussion – they were awed, inspired and dismissive of it all at once – and their conversation was so passionate that it was like I didn’t have to be there.

# RW: These moments occur mostly when we have visitors in class, for example Bill McKibben and Darren Springer from Bernie Sanders’ office. Watching students go at these people with their newfound knowledge – I think that’s a beautiful example of it all working. It’s not between the professor and the students in the class, it’s between the students and someone from outside of the classroom.

JB: The Office of Sustainability Integration hosted “power potlucks” to reach student groups (i.e. distinguished men of color) who might not normally be engaged in something like the Be Bright campaign. We introduced them to energy basics and the carbon neutrality goal and then asked, “what could you do in your life on campus to further some of these goals?” Students were engaged and felt grateful to be able to apply what they have learned in the classroom.

**SA compiled the information from the discussion above into a Shared Purpose Statement:**

Middlebury’s environmental programs will create a broader community of learning and foster students’ abilities to positively and creatively engage in today’s and tomorrow’s challenges by providing educational experiences that:

* Raise awareness about issues, informed by history with an eye towards future solutions
* Seek a balance between
	+ contemplation and action;
	+ idealism and pragmatism;
	+ global challenges and local contexts;
	+ interdisciplinary approaches and the need for specific expertise
* Promote humility and create self-awareness—helping students understand the context of the issues they are addressing from different and diverse points of view
* Promote creative, intentional action that includes the ability to evaluate and adapt to address unintended consequences
* Contribute to and engage relevant communities.

**Small Group Discussions**

How do we get there? What actions are needed to ensure robust programs that build on these shared values and purpose?

**4 topics for small groups:**

* Linking learning goals to other activities that are happening on campus (i.e. biomass facility, Solar Decathlon)
* Enriching faculty and keeping faculty/staff thinking fresh and open to new ideas
* Role of the advisor and how to better capitalize on that
* Bringing in outside voices

Prompt from Sarah for group discussion – if you had the next year to focus on just this one topic, what kinds of things would do around it?

**Possible questions that the groups could use to facilitate discussion:**

Small groups will identify important next steps and indicate whether those actions are:

* already happening (if so where, and by whom)
* have to happen to keep competitive edge/mission
* innovative next steps to foster new thinking/ideas
* conducive to external or internal partnerships – who else can/should help

**Group #1 Report Out – JI, HV, PN – Role of the advisor and how to better capitalize on that**

\*Realized that current advising system is breaking down. First semester sophomore year is a lost period for students after being abandoned by their first-year seminar teachers and lack of social/informal engagements. Need to figure out a different model.

\*Students who gravitate to ES may be predisposed to some “deeper questions” about who they are and what life is all about.

\*Some new developments:

\*Each commons will host an informational session about one of the academic divisions for anyone who is interested.

\*Identify a pre-advisor (other than the chair) in each department to deal with early questions that students may have before declaring a major.

**Ideas for moving forward:**

\*Leveraging the commons by using meals as an intimate venue to talk with students, although there was agreement that anything after 4:30p can be difficult for faculty to attend.

\*Agenda-less meetings for fostering deeper conversations between faculty and students using the commons or FECH.

\*Bringing some of these deeper issues with more deliberation into the colloquium series. For example, maybe each year invite an alumni who has been out for 5 – 10 years to talk about their path so far. Being deliberate in picking certain themes that are important to us every semester.

\*All of us care deeply about advising and getting it right. It’s a campus-wide issue, not just one in ES.

\*There is a tension between the transactional duties of advising and the deeper conversations that should be happening. Maybe streamline the transactional piece so that there are more substantial conversations with students during advising.

\*Create something similar to the lunchtime Geography table that is held every Friday in Atwater dining seminar room for faculty and students. Someone may present something or it can be informal conversations.

CK: A student organized a weekly ES Tuesday lunch last year. Some were interesting, some were less so and some students really enjoyed it. It needed commitment of enough faculty and staff to be there every Tuesday.

ML: A few years ago students created groups to address life questions that they wanted answered. They invited faculty and good discussions were generated. It was student driven and had to do with life advising rather than course advising – deeper questions.

MCR: There are other commons-based discussions, like a recent “life after college” discussion hosted by Atwater.

ST: It’s difficult for faculty to commit to things in the evening – there should be more intimate social spaces in the dining halls to use during lunch.

PN: Some current spaces to reserve are: the President’s dining room in Proctor, seminar rooms in Atwater and Ross. There is also a room behind Crossroads Café, although the food would be more expensive.

RW: Bigger concern is time and a sense of pressure on faculty, who often feel they should work through lunch.

**Group #2 Report Out – CK, AM, MCR, JB – Linking learning goals to other activities that are happening on campus (i.e. biomass facility, Solar Decathlon)**

\*Not just formal learning goals, but goals at a variety of levels.

\*Discussed creating a database that includes all of the current sustainability challenges. Each issue would be written up as a case study and then appropriate faculty whose disciplines link with the issue would be consulted. Students could search the database and decide to do an independent study on an existing issue or they could be directed to do so by faculty. We might prioritize the items each year. Database could operate on different scales. Faculty could utilize it to find projects that would be relevant to a course being taught. Shorter term projects, not necessarily an entire course. Find a small project that could be tackled by a class in a few weeks.

\*Could use Winter Term courses to tackle some of the sustainability issues – maybe JB teaches with faculty and Facilities advisers. At the end of the course, students would present solutions to the challenge and there would be a response from Facilities and the sustainability office about how the recommendations might be implemented so students have an idea of the extent to which their recommendations were helpful. The courses could be linked to the formal learning goals as much as possible.

\*In order to broaden the audience, have the courses targeted not just to ES majors, but also to other majors who are thinking more interdisciplinary.

\*May be able to draw upon ES 401, Middcore or another existing model.

ML: Is there a project that can take place of the Solar Decathlon if it goes away?

JT: With the amount of money spent on Solar Decathlon, Middlebury could sponsor a competition around anything. Could be tied to classes, open to people outside of Middlebury, create collaborations with outside entities.

JB described the [Living Building Challenge](http://living-future.org/lbc) which is a performance-based alternative to LEED, and suggested a Vermont-designed competition.

ST: It would be great to do a renovation in a regionally appropriate way.

SA: Could build off of the SD experience to create more learning experiences.

RG: Projects that link the College with the town or the wider community. Ways to collaborate and be of service.

SA: Did your group talk about broadening the learning goals?

MCR: We talked about the idea of responding to needs rather than just starting a project because you come up with it.

SA: The more these projects can be tied to real needs and issues, the more effective the learning might be?

PN: There is widespread support among students for local organization Community Care Coalition. We could connect some of the learning goals working toward inclusivity, social and environmental justice.

MM: Spend time researching what organizations already exist. That could be a brainstorming retreat in itself.

JB: The Arizona State University sustainability program has a position similar to DM’s that actively goes out and links research to the community.

**Group #3 Report Out – KFG, MM, RG, ML, JT, AN – Enriching faculty and keeping faculty/staff thinking fresh and open to new ideas**

\*Not just enriching, but having our work in ES being valued – relates to our commitment and our pedagogy.

\*Aware if pressures on untenured faculty.

\*Monterey is great, but not all faculty have been able to make use of it.

\*Facilitating the process of learning from one another.

\*Interested in more opportunities for different voices and opinions to be heard. Invite a person to visit around a theme, not just environmental issues, but issues that have environmental aspects, and then people debate and discuss. An alternative to the model of someone coming in and just giving a talk explaining what they do. Instead, someone visits and raises a topic for discussion. This could create a space for more complexity, Students could see faculty respectively disagree with each other and see what it looks like to have a sensible conversation about opposing ideas.

\*Should we revisit and rethink the purpose of the colloquium? Why are we doing it? What are the goals? Should we explore different models?

\*Talked about money – could faculty get more money to visit places where we aren’t giving talks, but are learning new things that we could bring back to the Middlebury environmental programs?

NJJ: I’ve informally funded faculty in the past and think it’s really important. It’s a matter of formalizing the funds and announcing the availability.

ST: FECH should think about the sustainability workshops as an example of a larger mission. Broader workshops that take on a different pedagogy topic could be offered each year – not just for ES, but for the faculty across campus. Gaps could be identified and workshops arranged and taught by our own colleagues or outside experts.

RG: To tie money in, receiving a stipend for the sustainability workshop was helpful and symbolic to say that it was appreciated that participants took time during the summer to explore sustainability and that they are going to apply it to various courses.

ML: We don’t know enough about each other’s teaching and we could enrich ourselves by learning about each other’s teaching.

JI: I would love to have a culture in ES and at the College where people felt free to invite colleagues into classes to see their work, hear about their research or listen to their lectures.

NJJ: St. Olaf has a program where two faculty members can receive $500 for a proposal to learn something from each other. Interesting collaborations emerge, for example, two faculty from different disciplines ended up teaching a class together. You have to decide what you want to learn from a colleague and how. The design is always different depending on the applicants.

JI: We can utilize technology to learn from someone in a different place, for example, when Holmes Hummel from the US Department of Energy Skyped into the colloquium.

**Group #4 Report Out – DM, RW, NJJ – Bringing in outside voices**

\*In thinking about outside voices for students to hear and learn from, we first asked who?

Visitors who would be a draw for both students and faculty to engage with and who would be crosscutting across programs. Who visits the summer program and the environmental writers’ program – can we engage them during the academic year? Consider tapping alumni.

\*How do we engage these visitors?

Could teach a winter term course or some other residency model like the current short FECH residencies. Create longer term residencies? Utilize webinars, TED talks, videoconferencing

\*More deliberate connections to Monterey with people they are using. Make sure they let us know if they are using an expert that we also could utilize and vice versa.

\*Same with MCSE – can we be more deliberate partnering to bring in people who could benefit both centers in enriching ways?

\*Opportunities for faculty to go out and learn and come back to Midd with fresh perspective for themselves and for students.

\*Opportunities and more time for informal conversations – lunches, salon model used by physics, afternoon tea – those kinds of conversations and connection. Hear different viewpoints, cultivate forward-thinking education. How can we creatively structure the visits to go beyond the traditional have a lunch, give a talk model and we can maximize people in new ways?

\*Some goals for bringing in outside voice are stay informed, stay inspired and hear different viewpoints.

\*Deliberative dialogues – how to foster time and space to have those kinds of conversations.

RW: We decided that keeping competitive edges is not really a goal – the goal is to create the best ES program we can. But we do need to get our word out. We also need to get out and see what other people are doing. Some of the “lesser institutions” are doing many things much better than we are.

CK: The lesser institutions are doing the more innovative things.

NJJ: Some of these things are resource dependent or involve tweaking existing programs. How to utilize what’s already happening and be creative. What can we shift, change or leverage? Other things cost money, so we need to be bold about stating that in FECH proposal, or as part of the ES review.

**Creating connective tissue across the programs: What kinds and frequency of communication and feedback loops are necessary to accomplish the shared purpose?**

SA: I want to talk about how to get you all communicating more across your disciplines. Yes, money is needed, but being pressed for time is a harder issue to solve. If you were going to take two hours a month of your time next year to devote to connecting all of these programs, how would you want to spend that time?

PN: Is there a better way to coordinate with other centers in order to leverage organizational resources? Bringing in different voices because the way that a Rohatyn visitor engages on a topic may be quite different than a person we might be connected to. Rohatyn has approached the commons reading program about picking a summer book for first years that connects to one of the center’s themes, so 600 students coming to campus would have read a book that relates to their speaker series.

NJJ: This is happening informally with various centers, but I think we can take it to a different level to benefit the institution if we are thinking more creatively. We can also use technology to bring in outside voices through webinars, etc.

HV: Three things: 1) A solution to this problem may be to use the new and improved CTLR not only as a resource center that will draw different faculty and programs asking for money, but as a place for streamlining. 2) I served on a subcommittee for the undergraduate future of technology on the MOOKS (massive on-line courses) committee. Our main recommendation involved how to use technology to streamline communications about programs and about what faculty are doing, and then communicating that information through a database so that faculty are aware of what each other are doing. 3) I was also on a committee that examined the sophomore experience by interviewing students to learn about their experience and what they needed. Number one on most students’ lists was more time to talk to an adult. I’ve noticed that right now we are all saying that we need more time to talk to each other, so I think that both problems are linked.

CK: Maybe we should cut back on the number of speakers and create more time for faculty and students to get together and have conversations. Make it a deliberate part of programming.

HV: The feedback that I got from ES majors who spent hours with people in the field during a class trip to Hardwick was that it was better to do that than listen to a speaker for an hour and then leave. They learned more through intense engagement.

JI: As a direct answer to SA’s question about how to use two hours a month – we have the colloquium on Thursday, what about having a follow up and continuation of the discussion the next Tuesday? An hour a week for space and time to have these conversations such as they are. Cutting back on some things to create more open times.

BG: The College as a whole is asking this question – why are so many talks just attended by certain people. The committee on stress, comprised of students, faculty and staff, has been discussing that we need more time to talk to each other as human beings and less programming. Is it possible to create more programming that’s connected to many disciplines and departments, so that many different people will go to one talk? This is a broader College conversation that we can tap into.

KM: Bringing a speaker to campus is the number one model of service for faculty and students. That might need to be changed.

ML: If students want to hear from adults, we could create something like a council of elders – students could bring their questions for faculty to discuss.

PN: The religion department uses that model for their monthly colloquium. Students identify a question and everyone meets at a commons house for a discussion that engages both faculty and students. Sometimes it is related to an event (i.e. the Dalai Lama visit). Sometimes an outside person is brought in for the conversation, but they don’t give a talk, just a quick introduction to start the discussion. It took awhile to shift from faculty to students running the colloquium, but it’s now a tradition for new students that they are in charge.

ML: To pick up on Gus Speth’s comment that organizations that currently exist aren’t appropriate for today – what would an appropriate organization look like? How to develop a structure that would work for today, what kind of structures do we want to envision? I listed some properties/values – specialization, symbiosis, communication, exploration, risk and failure, feeding and being fed, transformation, emerging properties? To me, these are the questions and how do we develop something that answers these questions? That’s the connective tissue.

JB: Since both students and adults want to talk to adults, how about doing something like every other Wednesday have an open door period in FECH where students could talk to faculty and faculty could visit each other.

PN: Many faculty no longer have an “open door” policy. A different type of faculty is being recruited – more prominent researchers who are coming from a different model and don’t have time to chat.

JI: Rob Nixon from Wisconsin described that annually they have a magic bus model where the whole program gets on a bus and goes somewhere cool. I thought that was great.

SA: Face-to-face time is specifically the main theme being discussed here, not other forms of communication. This is very unusual. Are there any other kinds of communication that could take place given that time is a restraint?

ST: One of challenges I’m trying to solve is that the summer program is going to be temporally separate from ES program, but I don’t want it to evolve separately from it. I’m looking for ideas about how we can both learn from each other even though we don’t overlap in time? I can see how they will interact with the sustainability office and FECH, since these are year round, and the environmental writers’ program, but what about the ES program?

JT: How to create formal and informal ways for faculty to visit summer school classes if you happen to be around during the summer?

PN: How to leverage technology. There’s a discussion about putting pre-advising information on videos that students would be required watch before they visit their advisers so that they know the basics. Sarah Franco will be developing these tutorials. Could the ES program create videos or other ways to communicate our curricular structure – the basics of being an ES major – to streamline the advising process so that time spent with students is more effective? This could be one way of saving face-to-face time by using technological time.

KM: We have no central record of what we are all teaching, could a database be created of what’s being taught? You could search the database about a possible topic to teach and see every place in our curriculum where it’s already touched upon, plus every text and author. We would have a technological record of topics and texts that would save face-to-face time of asking for and exchanging syllabi.

NJJ: There are aspects that each environmental entity doesn’t know about the others and there is a mythology about how things are being decided and happening. Right now, there is a basic level about how we communicate what’s happening and what’s new with each other while trying not to overwhelm people. AM works on communications for the various programs through websites and a FECH Facebook page. What do we share internally to keep everyone up to date, but not overloaded? The new Bread Loaf environmental writers’ conference will have a liaison who will bring the ideas generated there back to campus. As there are more parts to the environmental programs, we may be missing opportunities, but if we hear from each other too much, no one will listen. How to balance this?

SA: One possible way to share information is to use Ignite presentations which are powerpoint presentations that work on a timer. This rapid-fire format may be an effective way to get a lot of information out in a very short time.

MM: Have more meetings like this retreat, but shorter and not just once a year. Could have some short presentations and then people informally catch up about what is happening in the various programs.

NJJ: We want to take some of the ideas from today and move forward with the visioning process during the next year. Part of it is doing things differently and recognizing what we need to do and what we need to let go of. It is important to know how we connect and how we can make those connections better for our students, and how we can understand each other’s work better. How to benefit Middlebury College overall. If anyone has ideas that are inspired by today’s discussion, please contact me and we can continue the conversation. Some of this will go into the ES Program’s external review, the summer School of the Environment, the sustainability program, and into the FECH proposal. It has been helpful for me to participate and listen and maybe gathering more often and for shorter periods of time would be valuable to create community and to collectively design the future.

JI: Today has shown how important the voices are of those of this group who we don’t see very often – you are not housed in FECH or on the ES Steering Committee). We need to think about how to integrate that subset particularly because it’s very important.

ML: There are gaps – education studies and arts are not represented today. We need to cultivate new representation for various areas.