



Environmental Consortium  
of Hudson Valley Colleges & Universities

*2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Student Summit of the  
Environmental Consortium of Hudson Valley Colleges & Universities*

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New York University  
Kimmel Center for University Life  
New York, New York

**Contents**

Keynote Biography ..... 2

Keynote Summary..... 2

Student Presentation Summaries ..... 5

Event Agenda ..... 9

About the Environmental Consortium..... 10

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## Keynote Biography

### About Adrienne Atwell, Keynote

Adrienne is a Senior Vice President and Senior Product Manager in Swiss Re's Americas Division, based in Armonk, New York, and holds responsibility for business-side Sustainability Management in the Americas.

As the Americas Division Sustainability Manager, Adrienne leads a team in implementation of Swiss Re's Sustainability Management protocol and provides environmental underwriting support to all Business Units. She represented Swiss Re in the publication of "Climate Change Futures", a joint project with Harvard Medical School and the UNDP. Under her project leadership, the America's Division has won Swiss Re's Sustainability Award for two consecutive years.

Throughout her career, Adrienne has developed extensive expertise in all areas of the environmental insurance industry. Prior to Swiss Re in 1997, Adrienne held the position of Environmental Liability Manager at J&H (later J&H Marsh & McLennan). Prior to that time she gained a strong foundation in environmental insurance as one of the original environmental underwriters at AIG for nearly a decade.

### About Swiss Re

Swiss Re is a leading reinsurer and the world's largest life and health reinsurer. The company is global, operating from 70 offices in 30 countries. Since its foundation in 1863, Swiss Re has been in the reinsurance business, and has three business groups: Property & Casualty, Life & Health and Financial Services. Swiss Re strives to address both sustainability-related risks and opportunities through combined efforts in risk assessment, product development, internal operations and promoting awareness. [www.swissre.com](http://www.swissre.com)

## Keynote Summary

### Adrienne Atwell, Swiss Re

Adrienne Atwell spoke personally about how evaluating her core values led her to a career with Swiss Re, and how Swiss Re's work involves taking environmental issues into account, not only in their line of work, but also with their own facilities and employees. Adrienne's love of the outdoors began as a child, in Pennsylvania, where she spent a lot of time in the woods and enjoying the environment. Today, her family is very important to her, and she wants her children to have clean water and be able to swim in ponds and rivers, and breathe fresh air. Social responsibility is also very important to Adrienne. Finding a company to work for that was in line with her core values was essential.



"The more we learn, the more we can affect change."

Swiss Re has been around for 150 years. In the insurance industry there is a lot of risk, and Swiss Re's business actually *is* risk. How well it is managed determines whether or not it stays in business.



The company researches many environmental issues to help them evaluate and formulate policies. Adrienne spoke about several of Swiss Re's priority environmental issues which are studied, such as, climate change, pollution, genetically modified organisms, nanotechnology, and pervasive computing. She also spoke about the need to understand the health impacts of these issues. Having a better understanding of the issues and their impacts helps Swiss Re manage its risks and policies.

In speaking about climate change, Adrienne made the point that if you change any part of a cycle in a natural system, it has an effect on the entire system. A small change will have a smaller effect, a big change will have a bigger effect, but both will affect everything throughout the system. Those changes then affect everything else throughout the system. For example weather can cause these systemic changes. A drought can lead to a forest fire, which causes species to disappear or mud slides to flow. Human populations are affected, and they build and develop other areas, and the effects can go on and on.

"Systems thinking tells us that if there is a risk, and you change it, or if you change any part of that, you can introduce an opportunity." Learning more about environmental issues, figuring out ways to make a change, and carefully implementing change, offers a tremendous amount of opportunity to make a systemic change.

Swiss Re helps mitigate risks to the environment by setting criteria that must be met before it will insure a client. They want to be sure that, for example, a mining company does not have the option to pollute and expect the insurance company to pay the damage. Swiss Re will set standards and criteria to be met before a policy is put into place, so what they insure are the true accidents that could occur. They also make sure that engineers are available to help mitigate damage immediately in case of an accident.

Businesses that take their employees' personal values into account can help diminish employee turnover, which in turn eliminates additional training costs, and can improve morale. Swiss Re's strong commitment to corporate and social responsibility has been important for their reputation, as well as employee retention, satisfaction, and community relations.

Swiss Re works to reduce its own impact on the environment. It has moved offices out of coal fueled buildings, it has built green buildings, and retrofitted many of their existing buildings with green technology.

"Engage in the dialogue and become part of the solution. Understand your core values and align them with your employer. You go so much further that way, and you are a happier person. Get involved wherever you can. This can be in any field or sector you get involved in."

Swiss Re has offered their employees cash incentives for things like buying a hybrid car or investing in solar panels for their home. The company looks for ways to engage its employees and to keep the dialogue open. If an idea is suggested, it is discussed, shared, and built upon, and often generates even better ideas. This type of dialogue is what Swiss Re is involved in locally, nationally and globally.



Swiss Re recently joined a new task force in Westchester County where the different sectors: business, education, government and non-government organization, are all working together to reduce their impact on the environment. With the amount of people working in the task force multiplied by all the people they communicate with outside the task force - that is where the big change takes place.

This is the most optimistic Adrienne has been in her career. By seeing local changes take place, in the different sectors, and by individuals and corporations, multiplied regionally, nationally and worldwide, there is a great opportunity for systemic changes that are needed to restore our environment and reverse detrimental environmental trends.



## Student Presentation Summaries



*From left to right: Ross Keogh, Nate Kimball, Natalia Gomez, Kate Ervin, Angela Hacker*

### **Angela Hacker, New York University**

Angela Hacker gave an overview of New York University's evolution in becoming a sustainability centered campus. The momentum of the movement on the NYU campus started with students. Clubs began to emerge over the years, such as Earth Matters, Green Arch, Wagner Environmental Policy Association, and the Environmental Law Society. Students gained successes: the Student Bar Association drafted resolution on energy that was passed, and Green Arch had its first victory early on with getting an agreement from the University to start an environmental studies program.

When Angela became involved with Green Arch, the students' group goal was to remain as positive and proactive as possible. Sustainability was necessary and would be beneficial to the University, so they felt the earlier NYU got started the better.

One effective tool they used was to engage students through their class projects. They were able to engage students in a GIS class to do GIS mapping for the campus. Jeremy Friedman led a tutorial with a few other undergraduate students at Gallatin who put together a series of indicators to determine baseline information on NYU's sustainability, and provided some profound recommendations to the University. This helped deliver the message from multiple angles and to a variety of campus stakeholders. These projects also opened the door to many decision makers.

In the summer of 2006 Green Arch sent a well crafted letter to the new Executive Vice President which detailed the issues they wanted to address. He was a catalyst for change at the NYU. The University came out swinging and is now the largest wind purchaser ([www.epa.gov/greenpower/toplists/top20ed.htm](http://www.epa.gov/greenpower/toplists/top20ed.htm)) in higher education. NYU has announced a Green Action Plan, ([www.nyu.edu/sustainability](http://www.nyu.edu/sustainability)) and formed a Sustainability Task Force.

For the students it is a dream come true, and it happened faster than they had expected. For Green Arch, it succeeded in what it set out to do – and now many of its members sit on the Sustainability Task Force. Because of the respect and mutual trust they established through their work, many students now hold leadership roles within the Task Force.

The committee work within the Task Force addresses areas such as energy, planning, academics, recycling, and conservation, and has made recommendations to the university. A document is in process of being created to summarize the accomplishments and recommendations made throughout the year. This document will set the stage for the Task Force's work for next year and beyond. It is an evolving process, and still very new. They'd like to institutionalize the process, start



setting benchmarks and align with the strategic plan. Angela would also like to increase their outreach, which is why she was at the Summit and hopes to build relationships with regional universities to share NYU's experience and learn from others.

### **Ross Keogh and Nate Kimball, Vassar College**

Nate and Ross spoke about the progress Vassar has made since the Environmental Consortium's campus greening conference held in November 2006. The main impetus for sustainability is run by the College Committee on Sustainability of which they are both members. It is comprised of diverse members of faculty, administrators, staff and students and formed in 2000, authorized by the President of the college as an ad hoc committee. The committee meets every two weeks to talk about a variety of issues. There are five paid student interns that work on issues such as recycling, composting, purchasing, communications with other departments of the college, local foods, and education. Subcontractors of Vassar are also very active in collaborating on sustainability projects. Greenway Environment is a private company that owns and operates a composting facility on the Vassar campus. They are directly involved with the Committee and regularly attend meetings. Aramark runs Vassar's dining services and buildings and grounds, and two representatives always attend meetings (one from dining, and one from buildings and grounds) and work actively with the committee. In November 2006 the Committee agreed to use the Talloires Declaration ([http://www.ulsf.org/programs\\_talloires.html](http://www.ulsf.org/programs_talloires.html)) as a framework to achieve their goals.

[View Presentation](#)

### **Kate Ervin, CUNY Hunter College**

Hunter College is at the beginning stages of organizing. They've developed a Campus Sustainability Coalition which intends to bring together clubs already operating on campus, as well as students and faculty who are already doing research and individual projects on sustainability issues. Hunter College is a commuter college and an urban campus, which makes it very hard for people to communicate and be aware of what's going on. Hunter is trying to extend that theme to creating a CUNY-wide collation. 46% of all college students in New York attend CUNY. There are 450,000 students in all in the City University of New York. Hunter is one of 23 institutions. CUNY is the nation's largest urban public university. One-third of its students are over 25, about a quarter are supporting families, and half of the students are working more than 20 hours a week.

The Campus Sustainability Coalition's challenge is to find students who have the ability to commit time to projects and to institutionalize the projects so that the framework is there and initiatives can continue as students leave. A few of their initiatives are: recycling, energy, and sustainable food. A project they've begun to create to help spread awareness of what faculty and students are doing is to record short interviews with people and post them on a website. They've also dedicated an initiative just on coalition building. Coalition building is important at the campus level, CUNY level, and the college and university level.

### **Natalia Gomez, CUNY Hunter College**

Natalia is an example of how environmental interests and work cuts across any and all disciplines. She is an undergraduate student at Hunter College, majoring in International Politics and Latin American and Caribbean Studies. She is a certified permaculturist and also an intern for NYPIRG (<http://www.nypirg.org/>).



For the recycling initiative of the Campus Sustainability Coalition, she began by meeting with the head facilities administrator and built a relationship with the department. Students conducted a recycling survey on campus to see how in or out of compliance the bins were. Many were out of compliance.

Following a friendly meeting with the facilities department to share their ideas and suggestions, Natalia was successful in getting new bins ordered for the campus. To get students involved and aware, they held an art contest for designing labels for the brand new recycling bins. This personalized the initiative and made it fun for Hunter students. Along the way, they met a student who attends the Brookdale campus, which does not recycle at all. They've now joined forces to find out how Brookdale can start a recycling program on its campus.

Their group's next step is approaching administration and getting budget proposals. They hope to be able to find a faculty member willing to support them and guide them through some of the issues.



## *Roundtable Summary*

Before the networking dinner, students were asked to discuss at their tables what the Environmental Consortium can offer or do for students to help them with their missions, or work on collectively to bring about changes on their campuses and the region. The outcome was a set of recommendations and ideas, summarized as follows:

- Use the internet to:
  - Publicize and share events;
  - Learn about other student groups in the region and what they do;
  - Post research and projects students have done, see what others are doing;
  - Share case studies;
  - List examples of other sustainability initiatives or task forces;
  - Provide useful tools or step-by-step models for students and committees to refer to;
  - Communicate by email;
  - Have link on institution to Consortium website;
  - Have a web forum as a means for sharing and communicating
- Hold more social events for networking opportunities. Hold more summits or workshops with focus on a specific topic.
- Hold a workshop or seminar for all college freshman about sustainable living, what they can do in their own lives, on and off campus, to make a difference. Give them information on how to become involved in various groups and organizations.
- Encourage campus sustainability groups and committees to include freshman, sophomores, juniors and seniors so that there is a continuum of student participation.
- Connect to the Hudson River and its ecosystem, hold a field trip.
- Have leaders (not just presidents) in the colleges and universities come together for a conference. It would be symbolic for changing times and help them lead and contribute to the future of more sustainable campuses.
- Create a standardized databank for baseline data on institutions. Offer incentives for colleges and universities to compete and submit the data.

The Student Activities Task Force has a listserv for students to join to receive notice of important Consortium announcements and opportunities.



## Event Agenda

- 3:00 p.m. Welcome Remarks  
**Lynne P. Brown**  
Senior Vice President for University Relations & Public Affairs  
Co-Chair, Sustainability Task Force  
*New York University*
- 3:15 p.m. Keynote  
**Adrienne Atwell**  
Americas Division Sustainability Manager  
*Swiss Re*
- 4:15 p.m. Student Presentations  
**Initiatives and Collaborative Efforts in Sustainability**
- Angela Hacker**  
Sustainability Task Force Steering Committee Member  
*New York University*
- Ross Keogh and Nate Kimball**  
College Committee on Sustainability  
*Vassar College*
- Kate Ervin**  
Coordinator, Campus Sustainability Coalition  
*Hunter College*
- Natalia Gomez**  
NYPIRG Environmental Group Leader  
*Hunter College*
- 5:00 p.m. Roundtable  
**Finding Common Ground: Students as a Regional Force  
for Change in the Hudson Valley**
- 6:00 p.m. **Dinner & Networking**
- 7:00 p.m. **Adjourn**



## About the Environmental Consortium

The mission of the Environmental Consortium of Hudson Valley Colleges & Universities is *to help shape the future of the regional and global environment through collaboration, education, and research*. The Consortium was formed in early 2004, and is currently comprised of 46 institutions of higher education, and has over 250 individual members. The Environmental Consortium recognizes that to fully understand and appreciate the natural world and its relationship to civilization, many areas of knowledge must be contemplated, and has adopted interdisciplinary study as its guiding principle and priority. The Consortium is headquartered at Pace University with Pace Academy for the Environment serving as the Consortium's secretariat.

A special thanks to NYU for hosting this Summit, to our keynote speaker, student presenters, and all the participants!

### Student Activities Task Force Members

Dr. Madeline Mignone, Chair  
Professor of Biology  
*Dominican College*

Donna Kowal, Member  
Staff Associate  
*Environmental Consortium of Hudson Valley Colleges & Universities  
& Pace Academy for the Environment*

Michelle D. Land, Director  
*Environmental Consortium of Hudson Valley Colleges & Universities*  
Program Coordinator  
*Pace Academy for the Environment*

**For a list of member institutions visit: [www.environmentalconsortium.org](http://www.environmentalconsortium.org)**

Environmental Consortium of Hudson Valley Colleges & Universities  
c/o Pace Academy for the Environment  
78 North Broadway  
White Plains, New York 10603  
914-422-4077  
[info@environmentalconsortium.org](mailto:info@environmentalconsortium.org)





# Sustainability at Vassar College

Ross Keogh '07

Nathaniel Kimball '09

Vassar's Committee on Sustainability

April 13, 2007

Environmental Consortium Conference

# Sustainability Profile of Vassar

- College Committee on Sustainability, comprised of faculty, staff, and students.
  - A dedicated faculty chair, and five paid student interns.
- Academic Departments: Environmental Studies, Geology and Geography, Anthropology.
- Student groups: Vassar Greens, Dems, VSA
- Subcontractors: Greenway Environmental, Aramark

# Sustainability Retrospective

- In November, 2006, convened a roundtable discussion of all elements of the campus sustainability conversation.
- Thirty+ people represented, faculty, students, staff and administration were there.
- Unanimous consensus to advance and institutionalize sustainability movements at Vassar.
- Chose the framework of the Talloires Declaration to achieve this goal.

# Talloires Declaration

- Drafted in 1990 by an international group of University and College Presidents in Talloires, France.
- Provides a concise sustainability mission statement and ten points of action for collegiate sustainability.
- Boasts over 300 collegiate members and an active network of knowledge sharing.

# What we did

- Divided up the ten action points amongst those present at the roundtable.
- Each group provided the point's campus history.
- Drafted suggestions for further implementation.
- Points were organized into a coherent document for the President by students in consultation with faculty.

# Recommendations

- Half-time faculty sustainability coordinator position
- Recognize the need for an institutional statement on our commitment to sustainability.
- Begin to develop coursework to enhance ecological literacy.
- Commit all stakeholders in the college to engage in ecologically responsible practices.
- Create a formal committee on sustainability.

# What we Learned

- Work within your college's power structure to capture the current wave of ecological sentiment
- Focus on institutional changes, not pragmatic ones.
- Involve all stakeholders
- Don't dictate what sustainability is; let it evolve organically.
- Avoid cost-benefit framing.
- Remember ecological education