Class project raises awareness of greenhouse problems

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Political science professor Beth DeSombre hit three birds with one stone when she assigned her Environmental Studies (ES) 300 students their semester-long project. Although the project-based class generally involves months of studying a hypothetical situation, DeSombre brought the course closer to home by having her students propose renovations for Wellesley's greenhouses and combine those plans with a space for the ES department. Everything was to be designed in a manner as environmentally friendly and cost-effective as possible.

"There are a lot of physical problems with the greenhouses right now, and we know that," DeSombre said. "They're just very old, [and] weren't built structurally well to begin with."

These problems were recognized a few years ago by Kristina Jones, director of the Botanic Gardens, who proposed a renovation for the greenhouses. Yet even with a positive response and a suggestion to simultaneously develop space for the ES program, plans were still uncertain.

"When President Walsh announced her retirement, a lot of potential projects on campus stopped, because nobody wanted to commit anything to the next president," said DeSombre. Jones and DeSombre decided together that the best thing to do would be to assign the proposal as a class project. If the next president's priorities were in line with those of the ES department, all the research would have already been done.

The class, which presented its findings at the Ruhlman Conference last Wednesday, consisted of seven students: Darrah Haffner '08, Jillian Brooks '07, Anita Yip '07, Kara Schimmelfeng '07, Margaret Rossano '07, Laura Van der Pol '07 and Emily Pigetti '07. In their presentation, they considered the life cycle of building materials, which directly impacts environment production, usage, and disposal. They spoke about their problems measuring the energy and water consumed by the college with two approaches, which both yielded very

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Workshop teaches students to network, find internships

Peace and Justice Studies alumnae discuss careers with current majors
Panel relieves and encourages

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Swett was only a Peace major at Wellesley since the “Justice” section had not yet been added. From a family of Wellesley grads, Swett seemed destined to come here. However, she said that she learned some of what she needed to know outside of the classroom. As an intern for the American Friends Service Committee and the chair if Wellesley’s Committee for Political and Legislative Action, Swett says it was clear that she could do something well.

From organizing hundreds of students on a trip to D.C. for a pro-choice march to today’s work with Boulder’s youth, Swett has come a long way from “not knowing what to do but knowing that I wanted to make a difference in the world.”

For those equally at a loss, Swett offers some advice. “I learned that I can be effective and possibly more effective working within systems. It is so important to learn to network and learn to write. Also, take advantage of your advisors and take time to reflect on what you’re learning,” she said.

Sharidan ‘89 is the director of Development and Community Affairs at UC Berkeley’s School of Social Welfare. She has a Ph.D. in Political Science, taught at Williams College, and worked for a non-governmental organization in Mexico for a year.

As a graduate of the same class as Swett, Sharidan was also a Peace major.

Student presentation attracts attention to “green” buildings

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different values.

One of the problems the group faced was coming up with an accurate measurement since the various plants need different amounts of water. “With the water baseline assessment, I interviewed the greenhouse workers,” said Yip. “They told me, ‘We don’t know how much water we use. We water this many hours per day, and it depends on the weather.’”

Schimmelfing, the group’s architectural space coordinator, presented a blueprint of the proposed building, which included the renovated greenhouse in conjunction with the ES department building. Schimmelfing, an architect major, said she might have become an ES major had there been a sense of community within the department.

“I don’t think we ever had a chance to build community,” said Yip.

“We don’t have any space, which has been a problem for us,” said DeSombre.

“We don’t have a department office, so when mail gets sent to the ES program, it bounces around campus until someone finds it.”

Last spring, the college officially adopted a sustainability statement that it considers part of its core vision, the presenters explained. The statement does not include any quantitative goals so that it does not have to be re-drafted as many times in the years to come, but does say that the college will at least consider the environmental impacts of the decisions they make.

This may lead to a certification from the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system, which considers itself the “nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high performance green buildings,” according to their website. “It’s looked upon quite highly,” said Haffner. Many colleges have already been LEED certified, including nearby universities such as Harvard. Wellesley has not yet been certified.

However, the presenters said that the college has taken several steps toward protecting the environment, though most are not visible to the students. “The athletic field site used to be contaminated,” said Haffner, and added that the college took care of it. “Wellesley really has worked a lot...in the last five years,” she said. The college has also implemented a pilot program in Pomeroy bathrooms by installing motion light sensors, and also by switching to energy efficient heating and air conditioning systems.

Although there is no certainty that the proposed building will be built, the ES 300 students are excited about the prospect.

“We’ve talked about it so much, and I’m really excited for this building, so that I can go there, and we can hang out,” said Haffner.

“Now when I look at the greenhouses, I see our building,” said Schimmelfing, “I spent so much time visualizing it.”