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Column Name: Being the change

Date: October 13th 2007 Cord Opinion Article

Article Title: Greenwashing the environment away

Being Green is so hot right now and being the trend conscious school that WLU is, can we be blamed that greenwashing is running ramped on campus?

Greenwashing is the act of claiming to be environmentally responsible, using words like 'sustainable' and prefixes like 'eco' while still continuing to engage in environmentally damaging processes.

It is impressive that Imperial Oil has become an environmentally 'responsible' company (just check out their website). I guess they have phased out all fossil fuel extraction and turned all their research dollars to renewable energy. What's that you say? They haven't? Then how can they claim to be embracing the culture of sustainability while continually extracting a damaging *finite* resource?

If you are wondering how that is sustainable, welcome to the world of greenwashing, where pure capitalists try to retain their clientele in a greening society by duping them into believing their lies. Scratch at the surface and you will hit oil not far beneath.

Of course I don't think Laurier is as bad for the environment as big oil but we have been caught greenwashing our practices while not really lessening our ecological footprint. With our recent growth and development we are probably using more resources now than we did in the recent past while, according to a recent WLU press release, claiming to be 'an environmentally conscious campus'. Last I checked environmental degradation through unchecked growth can't be sustained forever.

I wonder if WLU has ever undergone a sustainability study or completed a strategic environmental assessment on our growth and development plans policies and programs.

Some environmentally friendly things WLU have adopted are: biodegradable corn starch containers for take out at the dining hall (though using prime farmland for an unsustainable and subsidised corn industry is another issue); giving a discount for using a refillable mug at the Second Cup and Tim Horton's locations on campus; using 'green' cleaning products by janitorial staff; adopting a Bus Pass for all students; accepting a hybrid SUV from Toyota; and creating a big plastic sports field that does not require watering.

You could ask the question as to why we would support the use and spread of SUVs in a fully light, well maintained and flat city such as Waterloo, noting that as a hybrid this SUV now gets the same gas efficiency as a regular car? Though if you asked such a question you likely would be responded to with: "The SUV is big enough to take a student to hospital." I forgot cars lost that ability.

At least the speed bumps on Mid-Campus drive will not slow our security forces when they are racing to escort another student from Alumni Field so they don't destroy the plastic carpet that used, according to Graduate Student Representative on the Board of Governors Culum Canally, \$100 000 dollars from a 'greening the campus' fund.

In the joking words of Canally: “We should paint the parking lots and our vehicles green, with that fund, then we will be a really green school.” I would add changing the school colours as well to avoid being unfashionable.

It seems the school wants to be environmentally responsible but is missing a key component: an individual or group that could bring forth and implement environmental strategies that encompass the ideas of sustainability.

Erin Windebank, a PhD candidate in Geography and Environmental Studies, noted that after a search of the WLU policies available to the public web “there is no administrative body on the Laurier campus with the explicit responsibility to consider environmental issues and Laurier has not made a commitment to sustainability in any of its official policies”. When I searched the WLU policies site I confirmed these claims and the only mention of sustainability was long-term *financial* sustainability. There is an interesting policy on ethical purchasing which needs to be examined and upheld, but even in that there is no mention of environmental ethics.

Windebank is attempting to set up a committee that could give suggestions to Laurier on how to actually become sustainable in their operations (day to day activities and policies) and expansion (construction and growth).

Some initial thoughts would be to adopt and implement the Talloires declaration on Sustainability in higher education; abiding by LEED Platinum standards in all building construction and renovations; using heat recycling systems (which were supposed to be investigated in the Stadium upgrades); having recycling bins in offices, classrooms and around campus and ensuring they are actually emptied into larger recycling bins instead of the garbage; charging less for two sided copying and using 100% post-consumer recycled papers throughout campus; and finally, looking at the carrying capacity of our institution and surrounding neighbourhoods while re-assessing the limits to growth.

A pledge for sustainability needs not only the grassroots support from the bottom but the commitment and capacity to implement the policy from the top and throughout the organization.