

Williams College
Department of English
Williamstown Massachusetts 01267
Hollander 246

Office: (413) 597-2114
Fax: (413) 597-4032
rosenheim@williams.edu

x2363

May 16, 2020

To: Amanda Wilcox, Chair, Faculty Steering Committee

Dear Amanda:

The aims, activities, and accomplishments of the College Environmental Advisory Committee (hereafter CEAC) can be summarized as follows.

- Our aims were uncertain.
- Our activity was marked by vigorous discussions interrupted by bouts of paralysis.
- We accomplished almost nothing.

The reasons for these outcomes are worth close attention. In its current form CEAC no longer serves the college well. Put simply, issues of sustainability have become too complex for new members to become adequately conversant with the social, technological and economic questions involved in effectively advising the college. This is particularly true in a year like this one, when all appointed faculty and student members were new (including the chair), as were two of the committee's ex officio members. It became almost impossible to set an appropriate agenda considering how little we understood the underlying issues.

Fall meetings were therefore devoted to reports from staff centrally involved with issues of sustainability. These included Lisa Melendy (Athletics), Mike Evans (Zilkha Center), Chris Winters (Provost's Office), Temesgen Araya (Food Services) and Christina Sanborn (Operations). These meetings were extremely valuable in educating the committee, but there was no way the committee could in good conscience weigh in on questions such as how to measure the additionality of carbon offsets, the mechanisms involved in establishing a college carbon tax, or how to more accurately measure greenhouse gas emissions from college-related air travel. Though the committee as a whole benefited tremendously from the presence of

ex officio members such as Sarah Gardner, Mike Evans, and Chris Winters, it was not their task to set agendas. (Ex officio members are often also constrained by allegiance to their respective home units.)

By the beginning of 2020, however, we began gathering data on college air travel. The chair published an op-ed in the Williams Record noting the college's mixed record on sustainability, and encouraging students, faculty and alumni to urge the administration to deliver on its commitments in a number of specific ways, such as cancelling the proposed new art museum.

The Record agreed to publish five additional op-eds from the committee over the spring semester, exploring particular issues more deeply. Then the pandemic occurred, and committee work stopped until May.

Curiously, the pandemic also led to the one bright spot of the year. After thoughtful debate, the committee unanimously signed a letter strongly urging President Mandel to take advantage of the current financial crisis by instituting a permanent 25% cut in college air travel. We noted with distress that, according to the college's own records, carbon emissions have increased in six of the last seven years. Copies of the letter were also sent to the Provost, the Ad Hoc Financial Advisory Committee, and to the Board of Trustees.

The problems I've just outlined are not new to this year's committee. According to longtime CEAC members, only two of the committee's initiatives have been successful over the last decade. In light of this history, the chair recommends that the college undertake one of the two options listed below:

1. The college should dissolve CEAC. Such a decision would recognize that sustainability is now so deeply interwoven into the work of many units (operations, dining services, building, etc.) that CEAC is neither necessary nor effective as a voice for environmental accountability.
2. Alternatively, CEAC should be reconstituted as a committee in which all faculty and student members serve for staggered two-year terms. The number of student members should be increased to four. This would allow future committees to build on work done in prior years, rather than starting, as we did, from scratch. Further, the primary agenda for the incoming committee should be set by the outgoing committee, in consultation with the President and the Provost. This agenda should be communicated to the incoming chair during the final meetings of the committee the spring before the handoff is made. Indeed, this could be carried farther, and the committee could only be called into action as needed to tackle a particular issue.

These are dramatic changes, but the chair sees no other way to improve CEAC's operations. He will continue in his current position next year, and would be pleased to meet with the Faculty Steering Committee if they wish for any further information.

With best wishes,

Shawn Rosenheim, for CEAC

2019-20 CEAC Members

Temesgen Araya, Director of Dining Services (ex officio)

Henry Art, Director of the Center for Environmental Studies (ex officio)

Rita Coppola-Wallace, Executive Director, Design and Construction (ex officio)

Mike Evans, Interim Director, Zilkha Center for Environmental Initiatives (ex officio)

Sarah Gardner, Associate Director, Center for Environmental Studies (ex officio)

Huijun Huang, '22

Kenneth Kuttner, Professor of Economics

Shawn Rosenheim, Chair of CEAC and Professor of English

Christina Sanborn, Executive Director for Facilities Operation (ex officio)

Pallavi Sen, Assistant Professor of Art

David Shakirov, '22

Chris Winters, Associate Provost (ex officio)