



## **DRIVING DOWN ENERGY COSTS WITH ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS APPROACHES**

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**Wilson College is an independent college** with a proud history of educating women since 1869 through rigorous study of the liberal arts and sciences. Today, Wilson's mission includes women and men enrolling in adult degree and graduate programs. Guided by the Honor Principle and distinguished by a commitment to transformative student growth, Wilson prepares all its graduates for fulfilling lives and professions, ethical leadership, and humane stewardship of their communities and the world.

Wilson's 300 acre campus serves as a laboratory of environmental stewardship for students that includes a 100-acre Equestrian Center, the Fulton Center for Sustainable Living (FCSL) and 80-acre organic Fulton Farm, and 34 campus buildings totaling nearly 600,000 square feet. The Conococheague Creek, extensive meadows, greens, and an arboretum create a spacious and harmonious environment for learning about and managing significant stewardship challenges.

**Wilson's Commitment to sustainability is longstanding**, having begun in 1996 with the establishment of the Richard Alsina Fulton Center for Sustainable Living through a generous endowment from alumna Susan Breakefield Fulton. The Fulton Center's programs and outreach address three aspects of sustainability: 1) Environmental Sustainability: Promoting the long-term resilience of ecosystem components and functions for future generations, while meeting the needs of present societies; 2) Cultural Sustainability: Respecting cultural and historical heritage to ensure the lasting quality of life; and 3) Economic Sustainability: Recognizing that stewardship of our people, planet, and prosperity are critical to the resilience of individuals, enterprises and communities.

In this presentation for a Council of Independent Colleges session, I focused on the topic of how a small, private college can play a major, public role in driving down energy costs with environmentally conscious approaches, including:

- As a Founding Signatory to the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment (ACUPCC), Wilson pledged to become carbon neutral by 2040;
- Wilson was among the first 200 colleges and universities in the U.S. to complete a faculty/student-led greenhouse gas emissions study, working in concert with the Loyaltton Group and Sodexho Education, to establish baseline data for assessing Wilson's future progress toward the 2040 carbon neutrality goal;

- Wilson was one of the first colleges in Pennsylvania to work with the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Pennsylvania (AICUP) to conduct a voluntary environmental/energy audit to meet EPA standards and help other colleges do the same;
- In response to the findings of our greenhouse gas emissions study and the voluntary energy audit, we completed and submitted our Climate Action Plan to ACUPCC. The plan calls for four steps: 1) Reduce emissions through efficiencies and conservation; 2) Generate renewable on-campus sources of energy; 3) Purchase carbon offsets through Renewable Energy Credits (RECS); and 4) Purchase green energy in personal environments off-campus;
- While addressing Wilson's challenges, the College partnered with the Chambersburg Chamber of Commerce to sponsor an annual award for a business or organization that effectively combines efforts to be environmentally responsible and financially sound. Wilson worked closely with American Rivers and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection to protect the riparian rights of the Conococheague Creek that flows through the campus and with Shipley Energy Company to encourage energy conscious habits;
- Through the FCSL, Wilson offers biennial, international conferences on such topics as “Life After Cheap Oil” and “Energy and You,” attracting outstanding speakers including Bill McGibben (*Enough*), Lois Gibbs (*Love Canal*), Tom Whipple, editor of *Peak Oil Review*.
- Wilson also offers workshops and seminars to the community on a variety of projects that are ongoing at Wilson, including: producing high quality compost for the Fulton Farm from biodegradable waste and manure from its 100 acre Equestrian Center; producing biodiesel fuel; and demonstrating the effectiveness of energy cost reduction using wind and solar energy to power several campus buildings and return energy to the grid;
- In 2009, Wilson completed its \$25 million Harry R. Brooks Complex for Science Mathematics and Technology, the first LEED certified building in Franklin County, PA. While the design aimed for certification at the Silver level, but it actually qualified for Gold. Among factors contributing to long term energy savings is the Complex's Dedicated Outdoor Air System (DOAS) which draws on the latest in efficient heating and cooling technology;

- In 2009, the College also installed a new energy management system that achieves significant savings in energy costs and facilitates a campus-wide educational process for the Wilson community in the many small ways in which everyone can contribute to energy savings;
- Many smaller, but equally important initiatives are also proving to drive costs down, including: trayless dining; recycling; electric vehicles for on campus operations; guiding equipment purchases with Energy Star ratings; and upgrading and replacing HVAC systems in several academic buildings.

## Results

Wilson is now well on its way to: reducing its carbon footprint by 20% in the short run; recapturing costs of installing more energy efficient systems over three to five years; having a more educated and energy-conscious community; and serving as a source of knowledge and experience on environmental stewardship and economic sustainability for the region it serves.

Finally, not only is Wilson saving money, but its environmentally and economically conscious practices are attracting new donors and larger gifts from alumnae and friends who support the vision and are seeing the results of the program. We stand ready to assist other colleges who share a commitment to environmental, cultural and economic sustainability.



This piece is based on a presentation by Dr. Edmundson at the Council of Independent Colleges' January 2011 Annual Presidents' Meeting in Palm Springs, California. At the time, she was completing her final year as Wilson's President.