

December 5, 2005

From: Environmental Stewards

To: Board of Trustees

Re: Urge Adoption of Campus Master Plan and Student Role in Implementation

As environmental stewards (students and faculty in UEP 246, Environmental Problem Solving) we urge the Board of Trustees of Occidental College to adopt the proposed Campus Master Plan. If adopted and implemented, the Master Plan's vision for the campus and policy and planning guidance would make Occidental a more livable and environmentally sustainable place to learn, live, and work. This memo contains several recommendations that we believe can help interpret and complement the Master Plan so as to maximize its environmental benefits. Because implementation will be key to achieving these goals, we also recommend that the Board and Occidental Administration create opportunities for students to play a formal advisory role in the Plan's future refinement and implementation.

Adoption of Campus Master Plan

We congratulate the College leadership for launching a process to create a new Campus master Plan and for hiring a firm with a commitment to sustainability to lead the process. The environmental stewards decided to focus our class this semester on the master plan because we viewed it as an important opportunity to advance our goal of campus greening. The class researched and conducted projects on several of the main components of the plan, met with the project manager from Moule & Polyzoides to offer input on the draft plan, and promoted the plan's environmental objectives through outreach to the student body and an article in the campus newspaper.

We have reviewed the final draft of the Campus Master Plan and strongly encourage the Board of Trustees to adopt the plan. The plan contains an overarching vision and specific proposals that would significantly enhance sustainability and livability on the Occidental campus. We are particularly pleased by the inclusion of action plans to:

- Make central campus a car free zone
- Reconfigure roads and paths and improve pedestrian and cycling amenities to make it easier to walk and bike on campus.
- Improve connectivity to public transportation and offer incentives for commuting by transit.
- Reduce the number of parking spaces and the amount of land dedicated to parking.
- Utilize more native plants and low-water species in landscaping.
- Reduce hardscapes and increase the amount of permeable ground cover.
- Increase and enhance green and open spaces as places people will want to gather in.
- Commit to sustainability in building design, construction, and maintenance.
- Embrace LEED standards as benchmarks for green building.
- Prioritize infill development sites for the majority of future growth.

Additional Recommendations

During our research and discussions on the Campus Master Plan, our class identified a number of policies and programs that, while not incorporated in the final draft of the plan, relate closely to its goals. We hope the College will consider implementing these proposals as pilot programs that can complement aspects of the master plan.

- Offer car share program, starting with a small number of hybrid vehicles to test the program's popularity.
- Expand Bengal Bus operations to a wider range of destinations.
- Open a small snack and social lounge on upper campus to reduce the incentive to drive to lower campus.
- Offer bike share program so that students and staff with valid IDs can check out bikes.
- Adopt a flood management system linked to the year-round environmental benefits of permeable surfaces.
- Feature and identify native plant species in an educational garden in a prominent location on campus.

Interpretation of LEED elements

The draft Campus Master Plan commits to achieving LEED silver status (similar) for major building projects. As written, it is unclear if the reference to 'similar' means that Occidental will not seek to formally certify that these buildings meet the silver level. We believe that it is important that buildings with green design features be LEED certified so as to maximize environmental and fiscal benefits and ensure the credibility of the College's commitment to environmental building. The language on LEED in the master plan should be interpreted so that buildings are LEED certified as a default and to the maximum extent feasible. (For more detail on the benefits of certification, see the memo sent jointly by our class, the Environmental Club, and the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute to the Buildings and Grounds Committee urging LEED certification for the new residence hall due to open in 2007/8). The master plan also envisions LEED training and accreditation for key staff members, and we hope that their training will allow them to certify buildings or assist in certification so that it can be a regular part of the building process here at Occidental.

Student Participation in Implementation

If adopted, the Campus Master Plan will impact students during their years studying at Occidental and in the long term as returning alumni observing the changes made to campus over coming decades. The experiences and place-based knowledge of the student body can enrich the plan as it is phased in over time. The plan can also serve as an important educational tool on environmental issues and Occidental's role in a changing community. We strongly encourage the Board and Administration of the College to ensure that students will have an ongoing role in the implementation of the master plan.

- Create an advisory body with student representation to help implement the master plan. One option would be to re-establish the Council for a Livable Campus (which President Mitchell committed to in Spring 2005). The Council could have student representation and a role in coordinating environmental issues, including master plan elements with environmental implications. A fall-back option if the Council is not yet established would be to bring together students with interest in environmental and planning issues to provide advice to the committee overseeing implementation. This advisory body could include representatives from ASOC, the Environmental Club, the Environmental Stewards, a Resident Advisor or Hall Supervisor, etc.
- Continue to provide web-based information and discussion forums on the master plan that students (and staff and faculty) can access. The College posted the draft plan and launched a student-only weblog to gain feedback on the plan during the narrow window of time between the completion of the draft plan and its consideration by the Board of Trustees. These forums should be maintained and publicized to give more students the opportunity to provide input. There should also be a mechanism to periodically pass on this input to the committee charged with overseeing implementation of the plan.

Thank you for considering our views on the Campus Master Plan. We can offer the environmental stewards class as a forum for student research and projects in support of master plan implementation.