5. What I Learned from the Campus Plumber

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Gawking and awkward, we shuffled across the concrete floor between two huge metal tanks. One was a metallic blue, the other silver, and each connected to color-coded pipes that disappeared into the ceiling. We were in a room below the basement of the University Center. We had descended to the guts of the campus, and the tanks reminded me vaguely of two enormous, artificial kidneys.

Ross Winters was waiting in the space between the tanks. Beneath his Fu Manchu mustache, he grinned with a self-conscious smile. Ross is the campus plumber, a trade he learned during his stint in the Navy. “These tanks are boilers,” Ross told us as we settled down. “They boil water into steam. These yellow and red pipes carry the steam underground to the buildings.”

The pipes supply hot water to five buildings on campus. Ross named each building. He explained that the tanks heat water to 235°F at fifteen pounds per square inch (psi). Ross had brought us here to show us how we heat our classrooms and offices.

It was the first time I’d seen this room. Ross himself has worked for our university for over twenty years. Ours is not a big campus—about seven hundred faculty and staff—but I had never met Ross before this morning. Apart from the information Ross gave us, I found myself with a strong visceral response to the pressurized tanks, gleaming in this dark room. Ross and these tanks opened up a whole dimension of the campus—its physical operations—to me in ways I’d never before imagined. The tanks of pressurized water embodied the material realities of our lives at the university.
As Ross spoke, I found myself with a new perspective on the place I work. For most of us at a university or college, the campus is a picturesque backdrop for our teaching and learning, more or less attractive, more or less accommodating. College is where we, as students and teachers, go to give and take courses. Perhaps because students pass through colleges and universities and are by nature transient, campuses are not typically viewed as places in their own right. Nor are faculty likely to think of the campus itself as a part of the education we offer students. In this tour with Ross Winters, I realized from these tanks that we can learn not only at a college campus, but from a college campus. For the first time, I thought of the campus itself as a form of pedagogy.

Like the boiler tanks in the basement of the University Center, the campus as a whole—the campus as a material reality—is a silent syllabus in which the college gives ongoing, unremitting tutorials in who we are and what we value. Faculty and students are likely to privilege the college classroom as the iconographic image of a place of learning: it is metonymic for the campus and its central purpose, educating students. Yet it is perhaps the lessons that are encoded in the campus itself that have the deepest reach and most long-lasting effects on the students, because, like the heating systems in our classrooms, these lessons are inescapable and all the more powerful for being unspoken. They are taken in every day, all day, through the body—pervasive lessons that, like the ambient heat created by these huge water tanks, are unseen but shape the conditions of the lives we actually live on campus. Buildings are books, bearing mute testimony to a campus’s lived, as opposed to professed, values. If a campus teaches a way of life, usually that means lessons in displacement and disconnectedness.

I first began to realize the meaning of place at our school in pondering the impact of a 700-person community of employees—faculty, administrators, and staff—on local resources. Add to this some 3,600 students, about half of whom live in residence halls on campus. Given these numbers and competing pressures, we have realized there is an enormous, unexploited educational opportunity encoded in understanding the campus of the university as a place. In The Nature of Design, David Orr focuses on architecture and buildings when he writes, “The curriculum embedded in any building instructs us as powerfully as any course taught in it” (128). Yet there is a hidden curriculum in every feature of a campus—the heat in our classrooms, the paper we use, the food...
we eat, the electricity in our lights, the water we flush in toilets, and the irrigation for grounds.

Those of us in the boiler room were part of a Campus Sustainability Workshop. Some years ago, I had been asked to chair our new Campus Sustainability Committee. Though I had been active for decades in our Environmental Studies program and write frequently on natural history and environmental issues, nothing in my background had trained me in the scientific and technical details that characterize much of the work on sustainability. My PhD, in fact, is in the English Renaissance—a far cry from the architecture and chemistry and engineering degrees that decorate the names of most of the people I've met who are leaders in the field.

Nevertheless, I've had a long-standing interest in environmental issues and environmental writing. Right out of graduate school, I began writing on environmental issues for national magazines. It's a passion I've followed, leading me to write books of creative non-fiction on endangered animals and other topics. My most recent book is on water issues in the West. Called *Red Delta: Fighting for Life at the End of the Colorado River*, the book describes the efforts to save and restore the abandoned delta of the Colorado River in Mexico—once one of the great desert river deltas in the world. In the process, I came to be deeply interested in water issues in the American West and, more broadly, as a major global issue for the coming century. Though experts warn of global conflicts over access to dwindling water resources, I discovered that we don't have to go to China, or India, or North Africa to discover pressing questions of conservation and ecological justice with regard to water.

In fact, I came to realize that even in the Pacific Northwest, water is a major issue. My school is located in this wet and green part of the country. Most people associate the state of Washington with abundant water: it's a state defined by beautiful waterways like Puget Sound and by its abundant rain. Yet the state is already at the limits of water use. And so I found my own environmental interests in water and in place intersecting on my own campus, where I live and where my professional identity has been largely shaped. As my interest in sustainability has grown, I have felt called to make my values inform my life and to work to live more directly. I wanted my own writing and scholarship to inform the way I live, even at work. And so, in our Campus Sustainability Committee, we early on focused our efforts on making the campus into a model of water sustainability among colleges and universities in the region.
We secured a series of significant grants that totaled $110,000 from a local foundation—The Russell Family Foundation located in Gig Harbor, Washington. The foundation emphasizes water sustainability and the protection and restoration of Puget Sound. Our committee dived into both sustainability and water.

One of the advantages of teaching on a relatively small campus like Pacific Lutheran University is that you have the chance to make a difference. In my years at the university, I’ve helped organize a number of interdisciplinary workshops, largely in Writing across the Curriculum. Yet our sustainability workshops have been quite different from anything I’d ever done before, and not just because they include information on the number of Btu’s in the University Center boilers. It’s because, in addition to faculty and students, we included staff who literally work on the ground. We included Ross Winters and many of his colleagues in Facilities Management: irrigation specialists, groundskeepers, print shop workers, plumbers, electricians, and more.

As important, we made these people our teachers. This tour of the boilers, for example, was the first item on the workshop agenda, after introductions. That was intentional. We wanted to make a statement, particularly with faculty, who are used to thinking of themselves as the ones who know and who, frankly, are likely to dominate discussions in a workshop. Most of the people in Facilities Management are invisible to faculty, part of the unnoticed background, almost like the water tanks. Yet these are the people who, like Ross, could teach us about the campus as an actual place: how it creates the material conditions of our lives.

At the heart of our workshops are our tours of the campus, with plumbers and groundskeepers and recycling people leading us in tutorials on the unseen campus. These walking tours have been among the most popular elements of our very successful workshops. Participants feel they are learning the campus in startling new ways. In part, this is because faculty are being schooled by people they may never have seen before on campus, but who make the place run and who know the place intimately. In part, this is also a function of simply walking the campus. It is like seeing the place for the first time, though many of us have worked here for years. Walking becomes a way of knowing the place in new ways.

The tours show us the campus as a living place, a place where we live as well as work and study and teach. For a person trained in poetry, the field of sustainability can seem highly technical,
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driven by data and statistics. Even the word sustainability sounds like jargon. To be placed is to have a sense of who you are and where you belong. It is a trope, I believe, of inhabitation. Thinking of sustainability in terms of the trope of place, of dwelling, gives a sense of heart and purpose to our work on our campus.

Wendell Berry offers the definition in *The Unsettling of America* that, more than any other, guides my own thinking about place and the back-and-forth that it implies between culture and nature:

> We have given up the understanding—dropped it out of our language and out of our thought—that we and our country are part of each other, depend upon one another, are literally part of one another; that our land passes in and out of our bodies just as our bodies pass in and out of our land; that as we and our land are part of one another, so all who are living as neighbors here, human and plant and animal, are part of one another, and so cannot possibly flourish alone; and therefore our culture must be a response to our place; our culture and our place are images of each other and inseparable from each other, and so neither can be better than the other. (22)

As we walk the campus and hear from Ross and others, we find ourselves opening up a conversation with parts of the campus we had not thought much about before. We’re really just getting to know the neighborhood and our neighbors. If we have not exactly repressed an awareness of how we live, we have certainly ignored the consequences of our lives on a campus, as if colleges and universities can live without ecological consequence and responsibility. As if work and study are somehow separate from living.

I love our campus. We have ancient evergreen trees where barn owls roost. We have wetlands where green herons nest. I have invested so much time in campus sustainability because I believe that, if you care for something, you also have to take care of it. In the rest of this essay, I’ll describe how at Pacific Lutheran University we’ve learned to make the unspoken lessons of the campus more explicit—how we’ve linked the hidden curriculum of the campus to the explicit curriculum of our courses. Before that, I’ll deconstruct one of the underlying metaphors for a college education and a college campus, one that makes us think of the campus as an ecology of the mind, rather than an ecology of place.
Academic Pastoral

Ivy-covered walls are the iconic image of a college campus. They symbolize the “hallowed halls” of a college education. Ironically, in the Pacific Northwest, where my university is located, ivy is a problem plant. It is not a native species. It is an invasive species that overruns everything else. Our grand native evergreen trees, like Douglas fir and western hemlock, have no defenses against the ivy that grows up their trunks, slowly chokes them to death, and topples them.

The ivy that grows on our campus is English ivy. It’s the same type of ivy that defines the campuses of higher education in England and Europe, as well as on the East Coast of the United States. It serves as a useful metaphor that reminds us that the East is the intellectual center and that we in the West remain the colony. Just as early settlers carried cows and viruses to the colonies, which overran and extirpated local flora and fauna, intellectual settlers carried their alien ivy—a symbol for overrunning local knowledge.

Ivy on the buildings on our campus is a statement. Its quiet message is that education is something imported, something transplanted, something foreign to our own particular campus. It is the image of an education that is alien to knowledge of our own particular place.

Ivy is a bane on our campus. One of our projects to restore the campus is to rip out the ivy. It is hard manual labor, another physical way of knowing the campus. As we rip out the ivy, we are also deconstructing the traditional idea of a campus landscape. Ivy is part of the iconography of what I have come to call the academic pastoral. Ivy has been one of the principle plants through which a campus speaks. What ivy says is that the campus is a privileged location in the “landscape of the mind.”

The pastoral genre is a shaping figure in our conception of the college campus and of academic life. As an inheritor of the medieval church’s monastic ideal, the scholastic life invites us to see the campus as a place set apart from the real world, a refuge and a retreat into contemplation. As a principle locus in the contemplative life, the university campus is traditionally imagined as an idyllic retreat, sequestered and cloistered. Under sheltering trees and within its ivied walls, the academic world is a retreat that parallels a pastoral retreat. Both offer a contemplative retreat into a nature whose topography is defined by its place in the mind. In the
Renaissance, Francis Bacon made the connection between learning and the pastoral explicit. An education, according to Bacon, is not simply the learning of facts and information. In *Of the Advancement of Learning*, Bacon addresses the ways in which a contemplative life can produce virtue in the active life. It’s a complicated argument, which we need not go into here. What is interesting is that he thinks of this education as taking place through an education in the “Culture of the Mind” (134). Culture here is not only a noun, but a process. The mind is a landscape, which an education cultivates. Bacon exploits the pastoral metaphor in his language, describing an agri-culture of the mind. The mind is figured as a ground or soil on a farm. By careful tillage and husbandry, it can be made not simply to know but also to acquire the virtues that will prepare it for the active life of, say, civic engagement.

Bacon calls this process of mental cultivation “Georgics of the mind” (134). These Georgics are a direct reference to one of the pastoral poems of Virgil, the Roman poet, treating life on the farm. Bacon points out that the ancient poet “got as much glory of eloquence, wit, and learning in the expressing of the observations of husbandry.” The rural life, the life in connection with soil, produces the culture of the mind:

> And surely if the purpose be in good earnest not to write at leisure that which men may read at leisure, but really to instruct and suborn action and active life, these Georgics of the mind, concerning the husbandry and tillage thereof, are no less worthy than the heroical descriptions of Virtue, Duty, and Felicity. (134)

For Bacon, the culture of the mind is a kind of magical process, like the tilling and husbandry of soil, producing its crop of virtue in the actual life of the student. These metaphors still inform our notions of pedagogy. We still think in terms of teachers cultivating the fertile soil of young minds. In the rhetoric of the learning, the university is a topos for the contemplative life as a temporary retreat that prepares students for active lives in the world.

The trope of the pastoral typically treats nature as a place for learning, often focusing on self-knowledge and the virtues of the good life (as opposed to the court or the world). However, the pastoral genre may locate its lessons in nature, but it is not naturalistic. It does not locate its characters in specific places. The pastoral is not
a field guide to actual places and creatures. The pastoral provides a topography of an imaginary nature. It is an ideal space. The pastoral is a venue for learning in a green world of the mind.

Both Shakespeare’s Forest of Arden and Petrarch’s Arcadia present an ecology of ideas, not of life in nature—a “landscape of the mind.” Whether thought of as escapist or as retreat, the pastoral is the site of “remarkable symbolic richness,” according to Helen Cooper in Pastoral. She writes, “The landscape becomes an extension of [the poet’s] mind, and means of exploring it. . . .” (5). As Sukanta Chaudhuri says, in reference to one of the great pastoral poems, Shakespeare’s As You Like It, “The centre of the pastoral state has passed within the mind. . . . The mind reacts to the landscape out of its own resources, producing a state of mind very different from what the landscape, directly interpreted, would induce” (361).

The most powerful and beautiful description of the pastoral as landscape of the mind is found in Andrew Marvell’s seventeenth-century poem, “The Garden.” The literal site or location is an aristocratic garden, the mind cultivated not on a farm but on a country estate. The impulse to withdraw into the mind, described in this poem, is vaguely Platonic:

Meanwhile the mind, from pleasures less,
Withdraws into its happiness:
The mind, that ocean where each kind
Does straight its own resemblance find;
Yet it creates, transcending these,
Far other worlds, and other seas;
Annihilating all that’s made
To a green thought in a green shade. (lines 41–48)

Nature is an image of the mind, and pastoral withdrawal becomes an expression of the impulse for self-contemplation. This version of pastoral encourages us to think of nature not as a place, but only as an echo of the human mind.

“A green thought in a green shade”: the mind does not simply transcend nature, but it “annihilates” it. This pastoral is more than a metaphor, more than a trope. It is a stance toward the world, particularly when we remember that the global environmental crisis has been perpetuated by highly educated people for whom nature is a reflection of human desire.
If the archetypal ivy-covered university campus looks like a cross between a medieval cloister and a country estate, green in trees and lawns, that is because its landscaping and architecture embody this garden of the mind, this academic pastoral. And if education has connotations of retreat and escapism, they can be traced to this intersection of contemplation and pastoral. The only plumbing in this intellectualized version of the pastoral as a place is in the unplumbed consciousness. All the photographs in college recruitment catalogs of classes outdoors, reading on the campus green, participate in this image of college not as its own place, but as a more or less generic landscape of withdrawal into a mental green world. It is the natural habitat not for creatures and people, but for various species of mind. It is from this tradition that my own university draws its sense of the education we impart. The planning document for Pacific Lutheran University states that “the practices of the life of the mind [are] placed at the center of the community” (PLU 2010 14).

My quarrel is not with an education in the life of the mind as such. My quarrel is with the way the academic pastoral removes our work—teaching and learning—from our lives. The landscape of the mind at a university converts nature from a specific place to an intellectual abstraction, where even plants and animals are “resemblances” or thoughts. It is like an intellectual theme park. Insofar as the academic pastoral teaches us that place and nature can be ignored, or are important only as a reflection of ourselves and our ideas, it teaches that only people matter, that the culture transcends nature, and that nature is an accident of consciousness.

The pastoral as found on the college campus is not so much an ecology of place as it is a psychology of space—an ethic of self-referentiality and, ultimately, self-indulgence. One message of the pastoral genre is that nature can provide, or is the site of, an education. But the academic pastoral everywhere teaches that nature itself is not quite real and that the particularities of our lives in a place are unimportant. Paradoxically, this retreat into an academic pastoral reinforces the constant messages of the larger culture, with its nonstop indoctrination in the values of privilege and consumption without consequences.

One further obstruction is likely to prevent academics from thinking of the campus as a real place where real lives are located. Humanists may be particularly susceptible to the blandishments of this temptation, one that is closely related to the poetics of the
The academy is a place that privileges language, that imagines itself not as a place but as a discourse. Or, perhaps more accurately, as a site of multiple and conflicting discourses of knowledge. In his influential essay, “Inventing the University,” for example, David Bartholomae writes:

> Every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion—innvent the university, that is, or a branch of it, like History or Anthropology or Economics or English. . . . Or perhaps I should say the various discourses of our community, since it is in the nature of a liberal arts education that a student, after the first year or two, must learn to try on a variety of voices and interpretive schemes. . . .” (511)

The emphasis on “inventing” the university in discourse is revealing, since it suggests that the university is an idea, or series of ideas. That is, it is not an actual place, with an ecology of living beings both human and “other-than-human.” Rather, it is conceived as a discursive ecology, an epistemological ecology. And it is not an ecology at all, really, but a political diversity. In such a conception of an education, students do not learn to place themselves in an ecology of place, but rather in an abstraction whose primary reality is linguistic. Locating yourself is imagined in metaphorical terms only, within an academic discourse. Students and faculty learn disciplinary commonplaces, but they do not learn anything about their common place in the university.

It cannot be surprising, in such a pedagogical context, that universities can be such highly literate places, but ones which more or less ob-literate their own sense of place. Through the guided walks in our workshops, much of the power lies in simply reintroducing ourselves to the neighborhood. It is part of making the campus—and our lives on campus—real. Of connecting our students’ lives to their education and our lives as faculty to the place where we work.

**The Campus as Pedagogy**

After visiting the hot water tanks in the University Center, participants in our workshop broke into small teams. I stayed with Ross Winters, the plumber, who led a group of five of us to Stuen Hall, one of the residence halls on campus. We went straight to
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one of the bathrooms, tiled in pale green that gave it a vaguely hospital feel.

We turned on a faucet in one of the sinks and let it run into a bucket. In one minute, we filled a five-gallon bucket. The faucet had a flow of five gallons per minute (gpm).

Ross reached into his equipment bag and pulled out several aerators—devices that look like small baskets, about the size of a nickel. We fitted one onto the end of a faucet.

We measured the flow again for one minute.

This time, the bucket was less than a third full. In fact, the aerators reduced the amount of water coming out of the faucet to 1.5 gpm.

Ross invited us to imagine how much water—and money—we might save if we did a plumbing retrofit for the entire campus.

In fact, that’s exactly what we were doing as part of our sustainability on campus.

The problem with the way we live is that we think water comes from the faucet. We think that light comes from the switch on the wall. And we think that food comes from the grocery store. These delusions are particularly self-serving.

Every shower, for example, provides our students with a daily education written in water. Many of the dorms on our campus were built in the 1950s and 1960s when bigger meant better. The faucets were profligate in their use of water. With old shower heads that sloshed about ten gallons per minute over the bodies of the students, a ten-minute shower used one hundred gallons of water alone. Ten minutes? That’s a short shower for most Americans. The typical toilet uses about five gallons of water per flush. Where is all this water coming from? Not from valves and pipes. On our campus, it comes from Parkland Light and Water, which taps wells into local aquifers. In Tacoma, the water comes from rivers that have to be dammed (with implications for salmon runs). Where does the water go when we’re done with it? It flows into Puget Sound. According to a series of articles in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, every day two billion gallons of untreated water are dumped into Puget Sound.

As part of our workshop exercise, we computed how much money the campus would save if all the faucets and showerheads were changed out with aerators. We also asked what would happen if every student took a shower that was two minutes shorter per day. The result would be an annual savings of $137,000. At
our campus, that constitutes a half percent raise for every faculty person each year.

In fact, in our program of retrofitting both the aerators and plumbing in all residence halls on campus, over a series of years we have seen clear trends in water conservation. In several residence halls now, we have changed aerators. (It turns out they have to have “locks” on them or students will remove them and use them for smoking drugs.) We have also redone plumbing. The pipes and underground valves have been changed, which have their own effects at reducing water consumption. The toilets now flush with three gallons, and we are experimenting on campus in some places with waterless urinals.

Working with Facilities Management, one member of our Campus Sustainability Committee has calculated the effects these changes have had on campus water consumption. Rose McKenney has a joint appointment in both Geosciences and Environmental Studies. She provides the following numbers. In the academic year 2000–2001, the campus as a whole used almost eighty-three million cubic feet of water (740 gallons per cubic foot). Almost half of that water usage (thirty-six million cubic feet) came from the residence halls; the rest is consumed in irrigation, gyms, the university cafeteria, and academic buildings. Even though we have had an increase in student enrollment, in the last five years we have reduced water consumption in the residence halls by nearly 25 percent. It is down now to twenty-seven million cubic feet. Through various other conservation methods, we have reduced total water usage on campus to fifty-five million cubic feet—down over 33 percent (McKenney 6).

Changing the plumbing in the dorms may seem prosaic, but in fact we’re replumbing students’ lives. We are rewriting the implicit education they get every time they take a shower. What’s more, it’s a private education, an education in the restroom, not the classroom. What is the lesson of a ten-gallon-per-minute shower? What’s the lesson of every shower, every day, with the old shower-heads? Mostly the shower is an exercise in waste and excess. Not only is the long shower okay, it is desirable.

Must students know that they are flushing low-flow toilets for them to be receiving an education? One of the central principles of the sustainable efforts on campus is that we won’t put anything in the dorms that we would not also use in our own homes. In other words, we want green plumbing that is so good that students might
not even notice that it’s been changed. That’s not hard to do, by the way. Yet we want students also to be aware of what they are using—because we want them to realize that they have choices when they leave PLU and have their own houses. To make sure students are as aware as possible, we’ve consulted with the people in the residence halls—the students, their resident-hall assistants, and the leaders in Student Life—before the plumbing retrofits began. More important, we are developing a campuswide campaign of interpretive signage that let’s everyone know about our sustainable initiatives. We want everyone to know that they have choices. It’s part of the education on campus.

The shower stalls illustrate the ways in which every element of the campus is a pedagogy. Unfortunately, in most instances, what the campus teaches contradicts the values that the professors and administration profess. The mission of our university is to “empower students for lives of thoughtful leadership, service, inquiry, and care—for other people, for their community, and for the earth.” Our work on sustainability is an effort to understand more fully what it means to care for the earth. We also understand it as an effort to make the university walk our talk. The university should be model of an environmentally conscious life.

David Orr insists, “Design is pedagogy” (126). The whole campus tells a story. Students read the story unconsciously, and it structures or reinforces their desires. We may try to teach students about global environmental crises, but if our campuses do not reflect an awareness of place and ecological integrity, what are we really teaching them? As Orr writes, “Students begin to suspect, I think, that those issues are unreal or that they are unsolvable in any practical way, or that they occur somewhere else” (128–29). In fact, the displacements built into a college campus may teach that the task of the educated life is to displace as many costs, and as many problems, as possible onto other cultures and other creatures. Or it can illustrate the possibilities of a new relationship to nature and place.

A Campus Story Written in Water

Our emphasis on plumbing at Pacific Lutheran University is not accidental. We chose it intentionally as a way to give us a focus in working with the campus. We want to become a model of water sustainability among college campuses. A number of considerations led us to choose water.
The campus once had a stream that flowed directly through our campus, Clover Creek. Not that long ago, people in Parkland, the local town, caught large salmon in it. About fifty years ago, Clover Creek was diverted from campus through culverts and concrete channels. The old channel of Clover Creek is still visible on campus, though not many recognize it. The channel is near an area on campus we are working to relandscape and restore as a signature project.

Plus, water defines the Pacific Northwest. As rain and river, as sound and ocean, water shapes our lives and sculpts our landscapes. Ironically, though we think of ourselves as having too much water, experts say we are at or near the limits of our water resources. Water is also one of the ways our daily lives intersect with global environmental and political issues. Many experts believe that fresh water will be the biggest environmental issue of the coming century. And finally, water is a vessel for potent cultural significations. Water carries meaning. It figures in theology and philosophy. Heraclitus used the river to describe the flux of things. It is a poetic symbol, as in Shakespeare’s “sea change.” We live in a floating world. Even our brains float within our skulls.

We are rewriting the story of the campus as it is written in water. In our campus workshops, we have had two goals. One has been to plan and prioritize sustainability projects on campus—to redesign the campus as a place. The other has been to link curriculum to campus operations. The goals reinforce each other, and we have been importing the campus itself into the curriculum. The campus has become a 140-acre laboratory for research and experimentation.

I want here to illustrate how we are using the curriculum to understand the campus and how we can better care for it. In introductory courses, for example, student research into the use of water—or power or trash—gives a local habitation to questions of resource use, resource waste, and resource conservation. As a result of our workshops, for example, religion professor Kathlyn Breazeale redesigned her lower-division course to look explicitly at the role of water in various theologies. The relationship between water consciousness and water ethics—between awareness and behavior—comes home when she asks the students to research specific questions about their own water use. The questions include the following: Where does the drinking water on campus come from? Where does the sewage go from campus? Where does
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other wastewater on campus go, and can you trace the routes? How many vending machines on campus sell bottled water? Which buildings on campus have low-flow toilets? Which residence halls on campus have low-flow showerheads? Which buildings on campus have aerators on the faucets? Who are the leaders on campus in sustainability? What effects does the campus have on its watershed?

Other questions could address irrigation on campus, use of pesticides and herbicides, and storm water runoff. In all these questions, students begin to discover that their own lives are implicated in water.

At a higher level in the curriculum, several students in the Environmental Studies program have conducted their senior research projects on the campus. A number have focused on water use on campus. A year ago, for example, Eric Friesth conducted a study of student water attitudes and water behavior. He called his study, “A Drip in Time: Water Audit and Survey of Environmental Attitudes of Students in Pacific Lutheran University Residence Halls.” Eric surveyed student attitudes toward conservation and water use. Some two billion people on the globe currently do not have adequate access to clean water. UNESCO predicts that within the next half century, every individual in the world will have about one-third less water available to him or her. Our students are probably typical of American attitudes more widely: Eric found that PLU students do not believe that water scarcity affects them. They do not worry about the availability of drinking water. Overwhelmingly, students believe that water conservation is important. According to Eric’s survey, however, only 29 percent turn off the water when brushing their teeth.

For our students, the environment is an abstraction. They do not understand how water issues apply to their own lives. Eric concludes that technological solutions to water issues are not enough. Students need to understand how their attitudes must change. He urges PLU to become “a model of how to use water.”

Both these models of campus research—lower-division introductory classes and senior-level capstones—reengage students with the campus. The students also discover new teachers and new experts on campus. To conduct their research, they have seek out people in Facilities Management. Eric Friesth had to work closely with David Kohler, director of Facilities Management, and with Ross Winters, the Campus Plumber. Students answering the
questions in the lower-division religion class had to seek out people in Facilities as well. We not only now ask students to seek them out to learn from them, but we also increasingly bring them into our classes to give presentations. Barbara McConathy directs the vigorous recycling program on campus and has won several awards for her work. She also does a wonderful classroom presentation on campus trash. We produce about 180 tons of solid waste per year. Under her leadership, we now have one of the highest recycling rates among colleges and universities in the region—over 60 percent.

This increasingly visible role of people from Facilities Management has been one of the most rewarding features of our work. These are the people who know the most about how the campus as a campus actually works. David Kohler, for example, has been one of the three faculty mentors on several senior capstone projects. What’s more, faculty members are learning from students and their research. We have asked students in both workshops to make public presentations based on their capstone research.

Perhaps that is the strongest value of our work in sustainability. Not only has it enriched our sense of the campus as a living place, but it has also expanded our notions of community. To enter into anything like a deepening dialogue with the campus and how we live on it, we have had to involve people who have been largely invisible. The people from Facilities Management have a kind of knowledge not displayed by the faculty. It is not as highly prized by the academy, but it is crucial. It is local knowledge. These are the people who know the campus as a physical reality that they tend and care for daily, not as an abstraction in the landscape of the mind.

Every Campus Needs a Wilderness

I’ll conclude with a story of local knowledge and expanding community. As I mentioned, we have an area on campus near the University Center where the old Clover Creek once flowed. When the University Center was built about thirty years ago, long after the creek was rechanneled, several faculty members from natural sciences put an artificial pond in the area. The idea was to create a natural area on campus. Over the years, however, the area has fallen into neglect. Overgrown and dark, it is now widely avoided and even reviled.

The area has no official name, though we now call it UC Pond. Students and faculty consider it dangerous. Groundskeepers
consider it a problem area. Yet one of the main paths from upper
to lower campus passes right through this pond, across a small
bridge and through the woods. Nothing has ever happened in the
area. No one has been mugged—or worse. But it’s seen as a crime
scene waiting to happen.

Our Campus Sustainability Committee has more or less adopted
the area. Safety provides the compelling rationale for the university
to restore the area, and we want to make it a signature statement
on sustainability.

For some time we have been developing plans for this space, incor-
porating it into the Campus Master Plan. The goal is to remake it into
a sustainable native garden and an outdoor learning space. It will
be planted with native plants, using storm water runoff from nearby
buildings. In one workshop, we were discussing ideas for this space,
when one of the groundskeepers in the workshop stood up.

Her name is Yvonne Butler, but she prefers to be called Wulli
(pronounced Woolly). She is another person I had only just met in
the workshop.

“I wanna remind you that there’re animals livin’ there,” she said.

Wulli talked particularly about a green heron nesting in the
trees in the woods. It was a testimony to a textured and precise
knowledge of the campus and its community. It was a defense
of the space as a wildlife area and a reminder that our pastoral
campus—our place—supports many species of animals other than
humans. Surely part of knowing a place, of caring for a place, is
attending to the lives of creatures as well as humans. We make our
lives in their geographies, their territories, as well as our own. It
was immediately clear that we needed to conduct an inventory of
the plants and animals we have on campus. One of our two Sus-
tainability Fellows (who are undergraduate students) is developing
this inventory over the summer. We will use this knowledge to help
build a sustainable wild place on our campus.

Wulli spoke with a passionate commitment to our campus and
its rich fauna. Her voice provided a local knowledge that the rest
of us lacked. She was a spokesperson for the many invisible and
secret lives all around us. She reminded us that we need to care
for the many other creatures, like the green heron, with whom we
share our place. Sharing our campuses with other creatures must
be as important a message about our place in this world as we can
share with students.
Bibliography


