VCU advocates a sustainable lifestyle for students

SUPRAJA RAJAGOPALAN
CO-EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

With the importance of sustainable living increasing in public awareness, VCU has added its name to the list of universities working to create an environmentally friendly campus. Modeled off of Governor Kaine’s 2009 initiative for a “Virginia Year of Environment,” VCU kicked off its own year of environment Oct. 1 at the Rice Center, the first building in Virginia to be given the U.S. Green Building Council’s highest suitability rating of LEED platinum certification.

Efforts to create a greener campus began in April 2008, when then President Eugene P. Trani signed the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment. VCU became one of five hundred colleges to commit to addressing global warming, and to creating a plan to eliminate net greenhouse gas emissions on campus. Since then VCU has taken a number of measures to reach this goal. These measures include actions from adding classes that promote sustainability to partnering with VCU dining services during “Waste Week” to raise student awareness about the amount of food wasted at Market 811 in Shafer Court.

The Oct. 1 kickoff was a cohesive measure to continue these efforts. The event announced the university’s intention of holding many lectures, events, and workshops about the issue, over the 2009-2010 school year on the subject. “My hope is that sustainability becomes an integral component to the academic, administrative, clinical, operational, and research activity VCU engages in everyday,” said Jacek Ghosh, VCU’s Director of Sustainability. “I would like to see sustainability become ingrained in VCU’s DNA as a matter of course.”

VCU students have been quick to join the university’s movement. On Nov. 18, Green Unity, a student run organization, held its own year of environment kickoff in Commons Plaza. The four hour long event was meant to highlight sustainable practices students could engage in.

“Our main purpose for hosting this event was to introduce the students to various community and student organizations that promote healthy and sustainable living styles,” Elle Chang, an officer of the organization, said. “We want students to learn that protecting and preserving the environment is very important for the future generations.”

The group divided Commons Plaza into four sections. Each section was representative of a particular season; practices of sustainable living that applied to each season were highlighted. The first quadrant was winter-themed, and focused on gardening. The second was spring, and focused on conservation. The third was fall; the quadrant was dedicated to eating in season. The last quadrant, summer, dealt with recreational activities and transportation. Participants featured in the quadrants included a number of other VCU student groups, such as VCU Recycling, Energy Management, Linux User Group, Farm to Family, Center of Rural Culture, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and VCU Cycling Club, among others. The event was funded by VCU SGA.

“Being environmentally aware should be more than a trend, it should be a lifestyle, even if that means reusing your water bottles, bringing your own bag when you go grocery shopping, or supporting locally,” Chang said.

According to Chang, the event was a huge success. She’s hopeful that it motivated a series of important lifestyle choices for the students of VCU. “If people can just learn how important it is and make small changes in their lives, then bigger and more positive changes will follow.”
Electric cars to save the auto industry?

ANEESH GOEL
BUSINESS EDITOR

With automobile manufacturers struggling to sell traditional gasoline powered vehicles, their focus has switched to developing cars that run on alternative fuels. Specifically, the Obama administration has approved billions of dollars in taxpayer funds to assist car manufacturers in planning and producing electric vehicles. President Obama has set a target for these manufacturers to have 1 million electric vehicles on the road by 2015.

However, most analysts agree that this goal, though commendable, is highly unrealistic. Michael Omotoso, a senior manager for J.D. Power & Associates, commented on President Obama's target, "We're saying it will take three to five years longer. Realistically, manufacturers could be selling 80,000 to 100,000 by 2015."

In addition, consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP projected that global electric-vehicle output might reach 700,000 by 2015. Clearly, there is a consensus among business analysts that President Obama's goal may result in disappointment as it is most likely unattainable.

The government has approved an $11 billion loan for auto manufacturers to develop and begin production on electric vehicles. Ford Motor Company, who has been approved for $5.9 billion, is the largest such recipient of government funds. Ford plans to produce electric vehicles, similar to filling up their current cars with gasoline. However, charging an electric vehicle could take over 100 hours just to reach half battery capacity. It's impractical for consumers to wait this long to energize their automobiles.

Clearly, electric vehicles are facing an uphill battle for consumer acceptance. Government support is the first step for auto manufacturers to begin to develop these vehicles; but ultimately there are many hurdles ahead that must be overcome before Americans begin mass purchasing these vehicles.

The forces of elementary economics, supply versus demand, will ultimately determine the level of sales of electric automobiles. Specifically, fuel prices will be pivotal for automobile manufacturers, according to the Center for Automotive Research. With gasoline at $6 a gallon, the center predicted that U.S. sales of plug-in vehicles may reach 518,000. At $2.50 a gallon, total sales may be only 169,400. If fuel prices remain stable at their current level, it's difficult to see why Americans would purchase these expensive all-electric vehicles at all. With cheap gasoline prices, there would be simply no demand for these vehicles. Instead, government policy and regulation would be pushing these vehicles into the market.

Another major factor contributing to the viability of electric cars will be the infrastructure necessary to deliver energy to these vehicles. For the purposes of daily commuting, consumers will be expected to recharge their vehicles at home by plugging them into a common electrical outlet overnight. However, there will be difficulties with charging vehicles when away from home for extended periods of time, such as during road trips. In this case, it is necessary for the government and auto manufacturers to work together to create an infrastructure where consumers would be able to recharge their vehicles, similar to filling up their current cars with gasoline. However, charging an electric vehicle could take over three hours just to reach half battery capacity. It's impractical for consumers to wait this long to energize their automobiles.

Clearly, electric vehicles are facing an uphill battle for consumer acceptance. Government support is the first step for auto manufacturers to begin to develop these vehicles; but ultimately there are many hurdles ahead that must be overcome before Americans begin mass purchasing these vehicles.

The government has approved these funds for automobile manufacturers to produce electric cars, the real question is whether or not consumers will actually buy these automobiles.
Features
Laura Westermoreland honors-library liason

Laura Westermoreland has recently been hired by VCU's Cabell Library, and one of her duties, is to act as a liason for Honors students.

Q: Describe what you do for the Honors College.
Laura: I work with the Honors College in many different capacities. I act as a liason with the National Scholarship Office, serving as a gateway to the library for the students applying for scholarships. I help them with research related to their applications or refer them to someone else in VCU Libraries, depending on their research needs.

I also collaborate with Mrs. Connolly and Ms. Shircliff to market library services to the Honors College Community. I ask them to place news of new services on the blog.

I also offer course integrated instruction for classes offered in the Honors College—particularly Honors Rhetoric. The students come to the library and I teach them where to look for research and how to do it. This lays the foundation for further library use. The most important part of this is helping students navigate the library and, specifically, web-based research.

I also work with Dr. Smith-Mason offering support for students in the Freshman Research Institute and Honors Summer Undergraduate Research Program.

Furthermore, whether in regards to a class or another program, I offer individual research consultations for any Honors Student. Depending on the information students are looking for, I will meet with students personally to help them start or finish their research, or refer them to the appropriate librarian.

Q: What else do you do for the library?
Laura: I also work the “Ask Us” desk on the first floor of Cabell, where students can come anytime without an appointment for research assistance. Additionally, I do outreach activities for the library, such as tours and workshops. I also am part of the instructional services team that creates web-based content to support research.

Q: Are there any hidden things about the library that we should know about?
Laura: First, there is the Presentation Rehearsal Studio. There, any student can practice and record themselves presenting so they can preview how it would appear to others. However, to record yourself, you must bring a flash drive. For more information, see http://www.library.vcu.edu/services/facilities/presentationroom.html.

Another thing worth knowing about are the Walk-In Research Clinics that are currently underway. These clinics are somewhere between getting help at the “Ask Us” desk and an individual consultation, because it allows an extended interaction without an appointment. The clinics are open to any student with a research need can just walk in.

For more information on any of the services described in this interview, please feel free to contact Laura Westermoreland, at lwestmoreland@vcu.edu.

VCU students find ways to save

For the past week, I’ve been wearing the same pair of socks for three days. Why? I am broke. During this time period, I found out a lot of interesting ways to save money.

Use your swipes! Most freshmen have a meal plan of at least 200 swipes and 150 dining dollars since it’s required when living in dorms. This is a lot of swipes and students learn this at the end of the semester when they have 80 unused swipes left. Swipes don’t recycle to next semester, so why not use them? Shafer’s is not the only place to use swipes. Check out www.campusdish.com for advice on the best dining plan for you, as well as which places participate in the meal exchange.

For those that have extra money, going once a month or every other month to Costco or Sam’s Club is the most cost-efficient method. Buy food and toiletries that you use and eat most often. Cereal, dried fruits, or microwavable macaroni and cheese are all good foods to buy because they can be stored and eaten later. Deodorant, shampoo and conditioner, toilet paper, laundry detergent, and dryer sheets can also be bought in bulk at Sam’s Club.

There’s not much to do when it comes to laundry. Most likely, you’re going to have to shell out some money if you’re living in the dorms. If you have friends with an apartment, offer to buy the laundry supplies and dryer sheets, in exchange for use of the dryer. Obviously, not everyone knows someone in an apartment, so to reduce the frequency of laundry loads, re-wear clothes that are not dirty. That shirt you threw on for 10 minutes to the coffee shop in can easily be worn again before washing.

Many students know or have heard of the store Rumors. It is down the street from West Grace dorms at 404 N Harrison St. This store is a local favorite because it is within walking distance of campus, and it buys and resells clothes at budget-friendly prices (you can find tees for $3). Not only that, the owners choose trendy clothes to buy from customers. Brand new clothes are also brought in and sold at low prices. Clothes can be sold from opening until 5 p.m. for either store credit or cash. Selling clothes for store credit keeps your wardrobe fresh, without spending money.

Studying is not the only thing to do at VCU that doesn’t cost money. Every Friday and Saturday night two free movies are shown in the Commons Theatre. VCU also offers free social events at least once a month. Find more information at http://events.vcu.edu/. Most of the events take place in the University Commons. Breakpoint offers free board games and occasionally free pool or Thunder Bowling. Check out http://www.usca.vcu.edu/breakpoint/ for times and events.

When all else fails just remember, there’s no place like home. Going home is a good thing because you can do all of these things for free. You can eat, do laundry, and use all the toiletries without a care. I’m planning to go home this weekend to do laundry and re-fill on food...for free.
Students create own clubs to fulfill interests

TRACY KENNEDY
FEATURES EDITOR

While many first year students start laying down their roots by joining clubs and athletic teams, two Honors College freshmen are molding VCU to fit their needs by starting their own organizations.

Meet Paul Connet, founder of the Honors College Debate Team.

Q: Tell me why you wanted to start a debate team here and why you think you’re qualified to lead one.

A: I did debate for two years in high school, my Junior and Senior year... I made it to state finals last year---was undefeated into states, then did horrible there. I didn’t even place. Well, you win some, you lose some.

When I came to VCU, I was a little shocked that they didn’t have a debate team or a forensics team. I was like, “What’s going on here? I know someone wants to debate.”

Q: So how did you get started?

A: I held a couple of interest meetings and tried to get the word out. The first couple of interest meetings only one person showed up, then a few people started showing up, and then from there on, people started bringing their friends, so there’s been consistently a small group coming to the meetings.

Q: What did you need to do to start the team?

A: To have a student organization, you have to have at least 5 people, including whoever is organizing it, and you have to have 5 officers... I appointed positions in the first and second week, when we had 6 people, so it worked out perfectly.

Q: How has the turnout been so far?

A: We’ve consistently had 5 to 6 people coming to the meetings. The one hard thing about starting an organization is finding a time to meet. We’re in the process of doing that... finding a time that works for most people.

Q: What have you been doing at the meetings?

A: At the two interest meetings, I’ve been teaching them about the different styles of debate and why I like debate, and what you can learn from debate: becoming a good public speaker, becoming quick on your feet, and how to ask leading questions. From then on we started talking about a form of debate called Lincoln Douglas.

Q: What kind of people are you looking for to join your team?

A: I only want people better than me... no, just kidding. Yeah, I want everyone to come. Like I said, I didn’t start debate team until Junior year. It’s something that you can pick up just by doing mock debates and tournaments.

Q: Do you have a coach?

A: Not yet, but we’re still looking for one...I’m looking for a coach who can be there because in tournaments, they also work as judges. You really have to be dedicated to debate to do it.

Meet Travis Wagner, founder of the Skeet Shooting Club.

Q: Tell me why you wanted to start a skeet shooting club while here and why you think you’re qualified to lead one.

A: It was a big part of my life, a big part of me growing up. I wasn’t ready to give it up yet. I’ve always wanted to go to a school that had a team, but I figured that if I went to a school that didn’t have a team, then I would start one.

I’ve done this for the past 7 or 8 years...I’ve shot in national competitions in Sparta, Illinois; Rochester, New York; San Antonio, Texas.... I’ve shot in state level competitions all over the state. I’m a board certified basic shotgun instructor...I’m pretty qualified. I’ve done this for a while.

Q: So how did you get started?

A: I’ve talked to 4 or 5 people who are interested and would like to put time into it, but that’s about it... if I get enough email activity, then I can start holding interest meetings. I need to have the 5 people that VCU requires.

Q: What makes skeet shooting different from any other sport?

A: There are really 3 different parts of
Features

Interests: debate and skeet-shooting

I was a little shocked that [VCU] didn’t have a debate team.” - Paul Connet.

the sport... All three are much more of a mental game than a physical game. It's all about keeping your head straight, keeping your thoughts in line and not letting your emotions dictate what you do. Usually missing the target is because of a lapse in focus, and then you miss more because you let it get to you... the [more laid back] you are, the better you are.

Q: What kind of people are you looking for to join your team?

A: I think it needs to be open to beginners. I think it has to be. I wouldn’t exclude anyone because there are going to be a lot of beginners in there, anyway. I’m trying to cater to beginners... There’s not going to be a lot of competing at the beginning... we’re just going to keep it basic.

If you are interested in joining the Honors College Debate Team, please contact Paul Connet at connetpb@vcu.edu.
If you are interested in joining the Skeet Shooting Club, please contact Travis Wagner at wagnertr2@vcu.edu.

Looking for something to do? May we suggest a good concert....

LMFAO with Shwayze: 8 p.m. Dec. 9 at The National
Elliott Yamin: 7:30 p.m. Jan. 2 at The Birchmere (Alexandria)
Sean Paul: Jan. 15 at The National
John Mayer with Michael Franti & Spearhead: 8 p.m. March 16 at John Paul Jones Arena

Jay-Z with Young Jeezy: 7 p.m. March 7 at Norfolk Scope and March 3 at Verizon Center
Taylor Swift with Gloriana and Kellie Pickler: 7 p.m. March 20 at John Paul Jones Arena
After a tough eight years, the Yankees are back!

NIYANT JAIN
SPORTS EDITOR

It’s been since elementary school for most college students, and now a new generation of school kids is able to witness a victorious Yankees squad.

Eight years after Mariano Rivera blew game seven of the 2001 World Series against Arizona, the Yankees are finally back with their twenty-seventh World Series. The eight seasons in between were filled with failed free agent signings and frustrating losses in October, including the 2003 World Series and the 2004 American League Championship Series.

The Yankees defeated the defending champion Philadelphia Phillies in six games on Oct. 2. Core members of the team such as Derek Jeter, Jorge Posada, and Rivera were able to relive their success during the late nineties. The Yankees persevered through the sixth game with the leadership of Hideki Matsui. He homered once and had a World Series record tying six RBIs. His performance has critics across the nation calling him “Mr. November.” Rightfully so, he was named the World Series MVP.

Matsui, who was a standout player in Japan, signed with the Yankees in 2003 and has now taken a distinguished place among Yankee greats such as Lou Gehrig, Babe Ruth, and Reggie Jackson. His acclaim has many hopeful to increase the international popularity of the sport.


Anticipation raises as field for world cup is set

NIYANT JAIN
SPORTS EDITOR

With Uruguay holding Argentina to a draw and France with a handball goal by Thierry Henry against Ireland, the roller coaster ride of World Cup qualifications came to an end in late November of 2009. Thirty-two teams have qualified for the World Cup, including the United States. The 2010 World Cup is the premier soccer tournament in the world. This coming summer, South Africa will host nations from all over the world to compete to become champions. It is the most watched sporting event in the world. Nations such as New Zealand, Honduras, and North Korea have qualified for the first time in over 25 years, while countries such as Brazil, Germany, Italy, and Spain will be making regular appearances.

The United States squad looks to be its strongest in years. This past summer the US team stunned the soccer world at the Confederations Cup. They beat the defending World Cup champions, Italy, during qualifying; however, that victory pales in comparison to their next win. The US beat the currently number one team in the world, Spain, 2-0. It dismantled Spain’s 35-game winning streak coming into the match. Unfortunately, the United States lost to Brazil in the finals, that too was a well-fought game with Brazil edging out 3-2.

“It’s a constant evolution to try to move the team higher and higher so that you have a chance to go to the final and play the best teams and feel confident that you not only belong on the field, but that you can win,” said Bob Bradley, the United States coach.

Fernando Torres, the star Spanish forward, said of the Americans, “The people can see they have fantastic players, a fantastic team.” The future of American soccer looks bright and hopefully they will reap their reward in South Africa this summer.
Oxford provides exciting educational and social opportunities for honors student

As we consider studying abroad, most of us are looking forward to a fun semester in a new, exciting place. We’re hoping for a less stressful workload than we are accustomed to as Honors College students. Well, this may be a bit obvious, but Oxford University is not exactly known for being a place to come and goof off. If you are considering studying abroad here, keep in mind that you will have a considerable workload—but certainly nothing that you can’t manage. Now that I’ve said that, you will also have just as much, if not more, fun. In my experience so far, it seems I am either doing work or going out, and not much in between. Be prepared to get behind on your TV shows, especially because Hulu doesn’t work outside of the US; you might even start forgetting what it was you used to watch.

I applied to Oxford through Washington International Studies Council (WISC). From what I’ve seen of the other programs, it really is the best one to apply to Oxford through. They have two different types of programs, Associate Members and Visiting Members. Associate means you are accepted through WISC, and Visiting (which I am doing) means you are accepted by Oxford. As a Visiting student, I have a few perks, such as total library privileges and an Oxford email, a.k.a. being able to join the Oxford network on Facebook. Both are great, though—Associate is a little cheaper and has almost complete privileges, which cannot be said for other programs here. Also, included in the program fees are weekend trips to excellent sightseeing places in England—including Blenheim Palace, the birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill, Stratford-upon-Avon, the birthplace of Shakespeare, Bath, Stonehenge, and many more.

Enough about the program, there’s a great deal going on with the system in Oxford that we are not familiar with at all. First of all, Oxford University is like the United States—it is one big entity comprised of 37 different colleges that function on their own. I’m a part of Magdalen College, and in a completely unbiased way, it is one of the best—we have a deer park within our walls! Each college is pretty small compared to what with what we’re used to—Magdalen is one of the biggest with around 400 undergraduates and 300 graduates.

The education system at Oxford also varies from the United States system. Oxford is based on a tutorial system. Regular students here have daily lecture schedules, but as study abroad students, you have one-on-one meetings with both of your professors. Visiting students take two primary tutorials—meaning you have weekly meetings with both professors. Associate and Visiting Members. Associate means you are accepted through WISC, and Visiting (which I am doing) means you are accepted by Oxford. As a Visiting student, I have a few perks, such as total library privileges and an Oxford email, a.k.a. being able to join the Oxford network on Facebook. Both are great, though—Associate is a little cheaper and has almost complete privileges, which cannot be said for other programs here. Also, included in the program fees are weekend trips to excellent sightseeing places in England—including Blenheim Palace, the birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill, Stratford-upon-Avon, the birthplace of Shakespeare, Bath, Stonehenge, and many more.

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Physician-assisted suicide deals with euthanasia and can be categorized in two groups. Firstly, euthanasia literally means ‘good death’ and is a Greek philosophical concept that prescribes for the painless death of a human being upon their discretion. Physician-assisted suicide can either be when a doctor literally gives his patient some sort of medication or other method that will result in the termination of that patient’s life, or when the doctor instructs the patient indirectly about how to achieve the end to the patient’s life.

Currently, there are only a few countries in the world that actually allow patients to take the route of ending their lives through physician-assisted suicide, but the number is growing every year. Today, this list of countries include Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and even the United States (Oregon and Washington).

According to Hippocrates, and the Hippocratic Oath, a physician may not prescribe a drug, or use any other methodology, to intentionally cause the death of a patient. The Oath primarily deals with non-maleficence, beneficence, autonomy, and justice. Non-maleficence is defined as “to do no harm,” while beneficence is an action done specifically to help another. I will try to organize my arguments to include these principles. This Hippocratic theory though was not always considered suicide; for those with untreatable illnesses, or patients who were already dying, this route was well accepted.

Some Greeks, like the Stoics and the Epicureans, went even further to justify physician-assisted suicide. They said that it could also be used for those who were ‘bored’ with their lives. This Hippocratic approach is very pro non-maleficence. I believe, however, that the concept of beneficence actually supports the current idea of physician-assisted suicide, and I support it as well. When a patient has a terminal disease with a very small chance of recovery, or if a patient is in a state of unbearable pain, then he or she has the right to a death. In the society we live in now (though this is applicable for any time period), the quality of life is what determines the value of life. At a point when the quality of life is so low that one wishes to end it (with no psychological problems), the patient’s autonomy should be respected. When one loses autonomy, one’s quality of life goes down considerably and thus the value of that life decreases.

Autonomy leads into another important concept which differentiates humans from all other animals, choice. Respecting one’s choice is the quintessential method by which to grant autonomy. Above all, we are all granted the right to choice (morally speaking); one’s life is what one ultimately owns unconditionally above all else. It should then be one’s personal decision as to when it should end (within certain boundaries of course, as mentioned above).

I do not believe that justice plays any part in whether one chooses to agree or disagree with physician-assisted suicide, because ultimately, one can show ‘fairness’ and thus ‘justification’ for either side. What is not just is to come to a conclusion that physician-assisted suicide is not morally justified under any circumstances.