

Students present sustainable ideas for Campus Master Plan

By Christine Edgeworth '15

On June 24, 2014, Chancellor Syverud announced his Fast Forward Syracuse campaign, including a new Strategic Plan, campus master plan, and "Operational Excellence Program." In light of these plans, Sherburne Abbott, SU's Vice President of Sustainability Initiatives, challenged the students in her course, The Grand Challenge of Climate Change, to explore how sustainability can play a role in the Campus Master Plan. What role should sustainability and environmental values play in supporting the academic mission of the university, she asked, and how they could be incorporated into the Campus Master Plan?

Jason Ashley, a senior Political Science and Citizenship and Civic Engagement double-major, responded to the challenge. "The value of sustainability requires that when we create new spaces, or renovate existing ones, we give incredible attention to the impact of materials (including their extraction) on the surrounding environment, of the spaces' context within the larger campus, and give great deference to the future use and impact of everything about the space."

For his project, Jason chose to focus on the use of green space, suggesting that we eliminate the majority of Crouse Drive to make room for a biological sanctuary with a 50-seat amphitheater. He highlights how this would not only serve as a quiet space; it would also provide many environmental benefits, such as absorbing greenhouse gases, creating a wind break to reduce the wind tunnel effect on the Quad, absorb rain water instead of sending it downstream during heavy rain events, "and reduce the need for salt and other resources for ensuring a drivable area."

Chiara Klein, a senior English and Textual Studies major, recommended that SU invest in green or vegetated roofs. "Green roofs are effective in their functioning as carbon sinks and sources of rainwater collection...They resonate with a mission to locally address a global issue of climate change, and they provide a university setting with the opportunity to be progressive, engaged, and exemplary," she says.

The class presented their suggestions to Sasaki Associates, the firm SU is partnering with to carry out these plans, on October 27th, so it will be interesting to see what role sustainability will have in the Campus Master Plan and if any of these students' ideas will be adopted.