

FORT HILL
STRATEGIC PLAN PROPOSAL

This proposal addresses several of the strategic planning directions by developing initiatives at Fort Hill. The project utilizes the grounds and first floor of the historic Lyman estate home to accomplish the following:

1. Further development of the creative recycling center known as TRACES (*The Recycling and Arts Center for Education and Sustainability*) in the former billiard room (Toddler Room) and dining room (offices and Group A) of the Lyman estate
2. Creation of a meeting, workshop and retreat space in the former living room (Group S) of the Lyman estate building for use by the college community
3. Implementation of a landscape plan that was designed by Smith students in the spring of 2006

October 12, 2006

Introduction

The Fort Hill project builds on existing initiatives and college programs and involves many members of the College community in a meaningful project that effectively supports sustainability, collaboration within the college and the community, and student learning by offering opportunities for students to develop creativity and leadership skills. The project preserves and honors a historic site with minimal impact on the parking and traffic in the neighborhood.

The Center for Early Childhood Education (CECE) enrolls children infancy – preschool (www.smith.edu/forthill) and is located on a site referred to as Fort Hill, which includes the new CECE building and the historic Lyman estate home. The school serves as a laboratory for research, pre-practica, observation and projects for students and faculty in the departments of education, psychology, landscape studies, art, and engineering and supports the child care needs of Smith employees. The CECE employs approximately fifteen workstudy students each semester. Fort Hill has established a reputation for excellence and regularly hosts visitors from programs throughout the United States. The TRACES project described below began as a way to support the curriculum at Fort Hill, which emphasizes materials that can be transformed and combined, rather than those that have a pre-determined use. The book Beautiful Stuff: Learning with Found Materials, by Cathy Topal and Lella Gandini, was researched and written at Fort Hill and has attracted the attention of both early childhood centers and recycle centers across the country.

1. TRACES – *The Recycling and Arts Center for Education and Sustainability*

TRACES (www.smith.edu/forthill/traces.php) is committed to educating children, teachers and the Smith College community about the potential uses of recovered materials for educational, creative and artistic purposes and for the benefit of the environment. TRACES was developed by students in the Praxis program, under the direction of the director of the CECE, and continues to develop as a student-run initiative through the workstudy program. TRACES accepts donations of obsolete or discarded materials from local businesses and distributes these materials to the college community. Among the materials are rolls of copper wire, canvas, and vinyl, tiles, screening, corkboards, yarn, many types and sizes of paper, foam and wood. There are many more materials available and the possibilities for expanding the program are unlimited.

The TRACES project was inspired by the Remida in Reggio Emilia, Italy. The Remida is part of an international network of creative recycling centers, which operate in Italy, Denmark, Sweden and Australia. The centers collect and supply reusable materials, primarily seconds and obsolete new materials from industry, to the community for creative and educational projects. The name Remida originates with the mythological King Midas and suggests the value and beauty of discarded materials. The international Remidas have “embraced the philosophy of revaluing waste materials and educating for a more sustainable future.” (<http://remidawa.com>, 10.12.06)

Martha Lees, the director of the Center for Early Childhood Education at Fort Hill (CECE), participated in a student/faculty study tour to Reggio Emilia, Italy with Susan Etheredge and several Smith students, including Heidi Keirstead, '07. The group visited the Remida in Reggio Emilia and Martha began planning how to develop a similar center at Fort Hill. To support the project, the College permitted the use of a room in the Lyman estate for one year. The materials are available to the early childhood program, as well as to all members of the College community.

Two Praxis internships at Fort Hill were created for the Summer of 2006. The Fort Hill budget supported Heidi Keirstead '07 and Gwen Reichert '07 in attending a two-day conference in New Jersey to learn about developing a recycling center. They returned and drafted a mission statement, cleaned out and set up a space for the project, drafted a logo and the acronym TRACES, gathered materials from donors, and developed the systems to support the center. Two students, Kendra Colburn, AC and Rachel Gelfand '07 are continuing the project this fall through their workstudy positions. They are promoting the project on campus and have received positive and enthusiastic feedback from students. They brought materials to *Spontaneous Art Night* at the Campus Center and opened the center to engineering students to access materials for projects (Borjana Mikic's students are designing a play structure as part of the course requirements for EGR 100).

TRACES is in its infancy and continues to develop. Several student groups have expressed interest in the project and have generated ideas for how the project might support their learning. The potential for the project is significant, and already we have received encouraging feedback. For example:

- A neighbor walking her dog was invited to see the TRACES space and she replied, "My jaw dropped – this is unbelievable – what a wonderful idea!"
- In response to an e-mail describing the project, a faculty member responded: "...what a great project."
- Engineering students visiting TRACES to get materials for a project commented, "Awesome...This is better than Wal-Mart....I wish there was lots more – expand it – if we can find stuff here we can use our budgets for other stuff."
- Faculty from California State University, Chico, found the TRACES project on our website. They have e-mailed and requested information and are working to develop a similar project at their university.

2. Space for Meetings, Workshops and Retreats

The first floor of the Lyman estate building is elegant and is handicapped accessible. There is a rich and interesting history of the site documented on the Fort Hill website. The large room in the rear of the building, originally the living room, has southern exposure and includes two sets of French doors, access to a porch, hardwood floors and interesting architecture. This project proposes to furnish this room to make it available as a space for meetings, workshops and retreats. The space is about a half-mile from campus and offers a private, yet easily accessible, space. The TRACES project, history of the site, and student involvement at the CECE offer opportunities for creating interesting exhibits and displays on the first floor.

3. Landscape Plan

The Fort Hill grounds have involved students in a variety of capacities in the past two years and have the potential for continued involvement. During the 2005-2006 year, students from the landscape studies program and the department of art developed projects at Fort Hill. Students from the department of engineering are developing projects this fall. Audrey Smith '07 spent her Praxis internship this summer preparing and maintaining garden beds at Fort Hill.

Two students, Abigail Carr '08, Lindsey French '08, worked on a special studies with Nina Antonetti and Kirin Makker in the spring of 2006 and developed a plan for the Fort Hill grounds that includes structures reflecting the history of the site and details areas for respite, for playground activities and for improved parking. Abigail and Lindsey's plan includes a park-like setting with picnic tables and a gazebo that would complement the use of the space for meetings and retreats, as the doors of the meeting room access the former gardens. This project proposes developing the students' plan.

Summary

The Fort Hill project offers

- collaboration with local industry and businesses
- opportunities for students to develop skills and real-world experience through internships and work study
- access to free materials for students and departments
- an environmentally responsible project
- a project that is cutting-edge, involves many of the constituencies at Smith, and models collaboration, creativity, sustainability, global connections
- opportunities for collaborative learning and for developing networks
- access to students with diverse backgrounds (art students, those with environmental interests, educators, etc.)
- preservation and meaningful use of a historic site
- a welcoming and unique site for members of the college community to meet