Abstract

This project seeks to explore the multi-disciplinary nature of the environmental sciences. It examines an online magazine as a form of communication and a possible answer to the question of how to get more people interested in environmental science. Methodology involved advertising the magazine to the Smith and Northampton communities, collecting submissions, editing submissions and publishing the magazine online. Results were that there was an interest from the Smith community, as there were twenty-one total submissions. There was no response from the Northampton community. These findings show that an environmental magazine is an excellent means of communicating environmental information, as well as a means of getting people interested in environmental science and initiating dialogue about environmental issues.

Introduction

Environmental science is a multi-disciplinary study that infiltrates many different subjects, topics and issues. In one way or another, environmental science is inseparable from every subject. However, oftentimes the environmental connection is disguised and disregarded. For example, within the study of economics lies the issue of poverty. Environmental science connects with issue in the realm of environmental racism and the argument that poor or minority communities receive an unjust amount of pollution, illegal dumping and proximity to toxic waste sites (Bullard, Mohai, Saha & Wright 2007). The health of the environment should be the driving force behind arguments pertaining to issues such as poverty, because in the end the health of the environment dictates the health of the public. In the words of David Orr, “If saving species and environments is our aim, we will need a broader conception of science and a more inclusive rationality that joins empirical knowledge with the same emotions that make us love and
sometimes fight” (Orr 2004, 31). This statement enforces the fact that there is a need for the environmental sciences to be recognized as multi-disciplinary because the more widely it is recognized as broad science, the more easily it can be applied to important decisions and policy making processes. This point in time of the earth’s history is crucial, as it is a time to make decisions about development strategies, energy usage and consumption habits. The decisions made today will greatly affect the outcome of tomorrow.

In order for the environment and environmental issues to become more widely recognized as multi-disciplinary, there needs to be more dialogue and conversations about the environment. Conversations and communication are the breeding grounds for action, but in order for there to be more conversation, there needs to be a revival of environmental interest. The environmental movement flourished in the 1960s and 70s. A major accomplishment during this time period was the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA was established in order to “protect human health and to safeguard the natural environment—air, water, and land—upon which life depends” (EPA 2007). The EPA still remains in existence today. However, the popularity of the movement among the general public began to fade. As people began to lose interest, the environment was no longer a fashionable topic to support, also known in the media as a “hot topic” (Dowie 2000). Through readings and class discussions we noticed this trend, but we also noticed how intertwined environmental sciences are with other subjects. Rebecca is an English major, and I am a Spanish major. We each found our own personal connections between our chosen areas of study and the environmental sciences. Our studies, whether they were in the English department or the Spanish department, led us to find connections with environmental issues and inspired thoughts within us about the environment. Because of these personal
connections, class discussions and readings we wanted to create a project that would inspire the same thoughts that we had in other people. We also wanted to make our project accessible to people outside of the Environmental Science and Policy (ES&P) department. We came to the decision to create an online environmental science, arts and culture magazine to which people from the Smith and Northampton communities could contribute. We believed that by creating an appealing, easy to read publication, people would become inspired by something as simple as a photograph and start thinking about environmental issues. We hoped that these thoughts would cause people to initiate dialogue, which could possibly lead to environmental action. Another purpose of this magazine was to encourage members of the Smith and Northampton communities to find connections like we did between their interests, passions, etc and the environment. We hypothesized that if people began making these connections as well as viewing other people’s connections, they would then start to think about the environment and incorporate more environmentally conscious actions into their daily lives. We also wanted this magazine to facilitate people’s discovery of how the environment is an inseparable amenity in any subject, topic or issue.

**Methods**

To begin the process of this project, we first created a general interest by word-of-mouth among our peers. By doing so, we created a small awareness of the project we would be doing. The next step was to compose and send an email advertising our magazine. The email was sent to our houses, Lamont and Emerson, the classes we each attend and the environmental science and policy department. After the email, we created flyers which we hung in different places around campus. The purpose of the flyer was to attract a wider variety of contributors. They were hung
in spaces on campus where they might attract attention from people outside of the ES&P department, such as the library, Campus Center and dining halls. The email contained more written content than the flyer, but each relayed the same message. Both called for submissions of any sort as long as they related to the environment. For example, submissions could include but were not limited to poetry, short essays; excerpts from class papers and photographs. The email and the flyer also both stated a submission deadline of April 14th, which gave people about a three week period to send us something. While we were waiting for contributions we named our magazine, made an email account for people to send submissions and researched other online environmental magazines. We chose the name Mad Gardens. The use of the word “mad” signifies that the content of the magazine has much variety, and “gardens” relates to the environmental aspect of this project.

Since submissions arrived slowly, we extended the deadline two extra days until April 16th. In this way, everyone who wanted to participate in this project had the chance. We also continued to talk to and encourage our peers to contribute. After the extended deadline several more submissions came in. We then began to organize submissions into the order we thought fit to present them in the final product. Organizing submissions included editing, and in this context, editing meant checking the grammar of the written submissions and choosing which and how many photographs from one person we wanted to accept.

**Results**

Overall, we received fifteen submissions from eleven different people. To enhance the magazine, we each offered contributions of our own as well. Including our submissions, the magazine has
twenty one submissions. Of the twenty one submissions, fourteen submissions were photographs. One contributor, Jaimi Inskeep ’12, wrote a short paragraph about the relationship of each of her photograph submissions to nature and the environment (see Appendix 1). The content of all the photographs varied, but many were of flowers. Seven submissions were short essays or excerpts from class papers, and there was one poem. Two of the short essays pertained to conscious eating and food choices. There is also one poem. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of submissions. Also, the most popular area of study that contributed to Mad Gardens was the ES&P minor. Other areas of study were represented about equally. Figure 2 shows this distribution. We did not receive any submissions from outside of the Smith community. After researching other online environmental magazines, we chose to subscribe to issuu.com, which is a website that allows for uploading documents to publish in online magazines and journals.

**Discussion**

Our peers expressed an interest in participating in the project and were very supportive of the idea. Mentioning the project created dinner conversations about possible submissions, which lead to environmental discussions. There was also an expressed interest from peers to continue this project into next year. In regards to the website, issuu.com allows for uploading word documents, PDF files or PowerPoints in the format of a virtual book or magazine. We intentionally chose to keep this magazine online and not publish a hard copy. We believe that is an environmentally conscious choice because no paper is used. There are other online environmental magazines and journals, such as the Orion magazine and Earth First!. However, these publications are in a website format. While this type of format is easy to navigate and
divides content into themed sections, they do not have the feel of a real magazine, which is what we wanted and why we chose issuu.com.

One of the biggest challenges we had while working on this project was editing. Issuu.com limits uploading space to 100 mb per document. After we put all of our submissions into a word document, the size of the document was 147 mb. The larger size of the document was due to so many of the submissions being photographs. We believed that each person deserved a place in Mad Gardens so it was difficult to decide which photographs not to include. One way we were able to include most of the submitted photographs was by resizing them. In the end we were able to include a submission from each person who sent us something.¹

If we were to do this project again, there are several things we would modify. First, we would start advertising for submissions earlier in the semester. This would give people more time to contribute, and they would not feel pressured for deadlines. Also, instead of using printed flyers as means of advertisement, we would plan ahead to figure out a way to send emails to larger portions of the student body. Flyers could be used for the off campus areas we would like to target, such as Main St., Northampton. Using less paper and more emails for advertisement would match our choice to keep Mad Gardens online for sustainability purposes. In the scenarios where emails as advertisement would be impossible, such as in the Northampton community, flyers could be printed on the reverse side of already used paper materials. We would like to target the Northampton community because it incorporates a wider type of contributor. For example, there is a wider pool of non-students and people who have had experiences beyond the Smith undergraduate experience. While the majority of contributors were involved with the

¹ To view full magazine online, visit: [http://issuu.com/evsart/docs/madgardens](http://issuu.com/evsart/docs/madgardens)
ES&P department, there were also contributors from other departments. The fact that the majority of contributions came from people in the ES&P department could be associated with the fact that both Rebecca and I are ES&P minors. Much of the advertising for submissions was done to the ES&P department and people within those classes. A third modification we would make is that we would limit the number of photographs people can submit as well as the size of the photographs submitted. In some cases, people submitted more than five photographs or photographs of a very large size. Making guidelines for photograph submissions would reduce the challenge of making the complete final document the right size to upload.

During our research of other environmental magazines, we came across a quote from a reader of Orion magazine. The reader wrote that this type of publication caused “serious thinking on the deeper connection between the environmental and social and political issues.” This is the type of thought we had hoped to inspire with our magazine, and we received similar comments from readers of Mad Gardens. One reader commented that, “after reading Colleen O’Toole’s submissions about conscientious eating at Smith I feel like I am aware of how much food I take from the dining hall.” We received other similar comments, which lead us to the conclusion that overall, this project supported our hypothesis that Mad Gardens would inspire thoughts and discussions about the environment among contributors and readers.

The comments we received and the conversations we became part of because of this project not only support our hypothesis but show how powerful written word can be. Submissions as simple as short essays and photographs can be thought provoking. In an explanation of her photograph of a splash of water, Inskeep writes that it “represents the power of water, and when many
molecules move together they make a splash. This is a metaphor for the difference people can make when the come together and fight to preserve the environment.” The written explanations illustrate how photographs and other types of art can hold just as much meaning as a piece of writing. Providing people with a space to communicate about the environment and the different themes it encompasses is a powerful process. However, Mad Gardens is still in its beginning stages and has not yet been able to provoke environmental action.

For the future, we hope to form a student organization out of Mad Gardens. Forming an organization would give more students the chance to participate in the creation and editing processes of new issues. An organization would also mean that the magazine would be persistence on campus, which would allow for more advertising and exposure. More advertising and exposure over a longer period of time could possibly give Mad Gardens more achievement in its purpose to attract a wide and varied audience of viewers and contributors. Several of our contributors, peers and professors said that they would like to see this project continue into upcoming years. They also expressed an interest in being part of the project. In order to start an organization we would need to go through the following steps: meet with the Organization Resources Committee (ORC) Vice-Chair of Chartering, submit a new charter submission form, revise the charter with ORC and attend a hearing at a Senate meeting in order to present and defend the charter. If approved we would then submit forms for funding. (Smith College SGA)

This interest to be involved with Mad Gardens shows that with some encouragement people are willing to relate to, write about, read about and discuss the environment. It is human nature to feel a connection with the environment. This statement can be supported by examining the
environment from the perspective of an indigenous culture. For example, one of the largest indigenous groups of Latin America is the Quechua. The Quechua originate from the Andean region of South America and have been in existence for more than 500 years. The Quechua believe in the goddess Pachamama, which can be most closely related to the idea of Mother Earth. Pachamama is the goddess of fertility and harvest, and the main idea of Pachamama is that everything within nature is connected, and that humans are one with Mother Earth. Nature does not belong to humans, but rather humans belong to nature. In the words of Angelica Navarro, lead climate change negotiator from Bolivia, “We are not different [from Mother Earth], we’re part of Mother Earth, and of course, if you do harm to Mother Earth, you do harm to yourself” (Dangrossmanmedia 2010). However, humans of today’s day seem to be losing this connection with nature, and the belief that when we cause harm to Mother Earth, we cause harm to ourselves directly relates to environmental issues of today, such as pollution. If people carelessly pollute, whether it is air pollution, water pollution or throwing litter on the ground, the earth and environment become damaged and begin to degrade. Since humans are not separate from the earth’s natural environment, they are in the end affected by the pollution they create. Angelica Navarro also said that human effects are already visible “with the lack of water, the droughts.. or more sea rising levels.” Because of increased greenhouse gas emissions, there has been an increase in flooding and droughts. These types of incidents affect farmers and agriculturists who depend on the land and climate to make a living. This brings us back to the question of how do we get more people interested involved in environmental issues? A publication such as Mad Gardens is a space for people to open dialogues, be creative and relate environmental issues to them selves in some way that would motivate them to become involved.
We have several plans for Mad Gardens if it were to be continued in the future. First of all, each issue could be themed. Themes could include energy, sustainable development, biodiversity, food, waste, recycling and many more. Having a set theme for each issue would organize each issue more neatly. As of right now, the current issue of Mad Gardens contains submissions from a variety of different subjects. Another idea for the future of this magazine is initiating lunch table dialogues between professors and students from different departments. For example, during lunch there would be a set topic of discussion. We would bring in a few professors and students from different departments, such as Chemistry, English, Economics and Art. These people would then be told to discuss the chosen topic. The purpose of this activity would be to demonstrate how people from different backgrounds and interests would all be able their field to the environmental topic given. Notes would be taken during each conversation so they could be published in Mad Gardens. The purpose of publishing notes from the lunch conversation would be to reinforce the idea that environmental science is multi-disciplinary. Also, publishing the conversation could cause readers to be interested in attending the lunch talks as well, which would add more perspectives and insights to the conversations. Since oftentimes discussion motivates action, another thought for the future of Mad Gardens is that at least once a semester the members of this group could organize some sort of action to go along with the theme of an issue. For example, if the theme of the issue is global warming, the group could hold an activity in which they write and recruit members of the Smith and Northampton communities to write letters to state representative and congress. A continuance of Mad Gardens in future semester would further support the conclusion that this project was a success, as it gave people a place to environmentally express themselves and inspired environmental thoughts and conversations.
These 3 pictures were all taken in Hawaii. The first one represents the power of water, and when many water molecules move together they can create a huge splash. This is a metaphor for the difference people can make when they come together and fight to preserve the environment. The second picture is of a lone grasshopper and shows one of many species that lives on this planet. Humans are not the only ones here, so we need to think of our impacts on everything around us. The third photo is of the shore on Hawaii. It was taken on a portion of the shore that is not regularly attended and represents the pristine beauty that is all around in the world that needs to be preserved.

- Jaimi Inskeep, ‘12

This picture shows why we need to preserve the planet and save endangered species. It is not for us; it if for future generations to be able to appreciate and enjoy what we have been lucky enough to be able to experience.
Figure 1- The most popular submission type was photograph, followed by short essay and poem.

Figure 2- Areas of study that contributed to Mad Gardens.
Works Cited


