What do bibimbap, kheer, and bulgogi beef all have in common? They are Asian dishes served in the Comstock/Wilder dining room, which is a popular dining spot for students. Smith takes a team-approach in bringing Asian cuisine to campus. Chef Mark Ricker, Cook’s Assistant Sue Moszynski, and Dining Room Coordinator Marion Peret work together as a three-person operation to create delicacies from India, Korea, China, and other Asian countries. With a combined 74 years of food experience, the Comstock/Wilder team takes pride in preparing delicious dinner meals Sunday through Thursday.

Pat Mahar, area manager in dining services who oversees Comstock/Wilder, says the team collaborates well. Mark directs the food ordering, menu development, and food preparation; he also serves on the executive union board of Local #211. Sue is responsible for the salad bar and prep as well as some shared cooking tasks with the chef while Marion manages the dining room. Student workers support the staff by washing the dishes, assisting with food production and replenishing the buffet table.

Back in 2001 dining services underwent operational changes and some of the smaller dining rooms were consolidated into larger ones. The Asian concept emerged several years later when students expressed a desire for more variety in food selection. The team, which is considered “essential personnel,” mastered authentic cooking techniques from interesting places such as the Amherst Chinese School, YouTube, members of Smith’s Japanese student organization, the Sazanami Club (they showed staff how to roll sushi), and countless Asian cookbooks. On different nights of the week, Comstock/Wilder features Asian meals including Indian food on Mondays, Korean on Wednesdays, and a rotation of Thai, Vietnamese, and Chinese dishes on Thursdays. All of the ingredients are fresh and purchased from local farms in Westhampton, Hadley, and other area towns.

“I like the fact that we do our own menus and get to investigate other cultures,” said Sue. Of course, the kitchen staff enjoys sampling their delectable offerings. Pat proclaims “we eat better than anyone on campus.”
Learning From Experience

Julianne Ohotnicky, Smith’s Dean of Students for the past five and a half years, was inspired by her own college experience, which included being an orientation leader as a junior. Orientation is now just one of her many responsibilities at Smith, which include oversight of Counseling and Health Services, the Office for Student Engagement, Multicultural Affairs, International Students and Scholars, Residence Life, the First Year Experience, supporting the Wellness office, and advising the Student Government Association and the Judicial Board.

Julie’s role at Smith is to support students outside the classroom, helping them to learn and grow, be successful, and graduate. Although she has many responsibilities and meetings with staff and administration, she works hard to connect with students and “make Smith the best experience for students.” She attends many events, enjoys listening and supporting others, and is approachable and friendly to everyone on campus.

Julie is a member of the senior management team and a key member of the emergency response team, handling situations like the October snow storm and power outage at the College. She feels fortunate that she is encouraged to connect with senior staff for support and has opportunities to participate in many important conversations at the College.

Current projects for Julie include a volunteer leadership opportunity performing New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) accreditation of another college, which took her to Geneva, Switzerland, to the Institute of Higher Education this fall. She feels honored to have been selected by peers for such a leadership role.

Projects and challenges at Smith include working on sustainability in Student Affairs and finding beds and housing for all of the Smith students. Julie notes that it is wonderful to have so many students, but it is difficult to keep up with renovations and housing needs.

Her vision for the future of Smith is “another 200 years of rich education for women,” and for herself, she imagines working in women’s education for the rest of her career.

CEEDS at Smith

The Center for the Environment, Ecological Design and Sustainability (CEEDS) opened its doors about a year ago with the mission to graduate women who excel at integrating knowledge across disciplines in support of environmental decisions and action. The commitment to collaboration is evident both in its initiatives and in the team located within CEEDS. This group includes the director of sustainability, faculty from the engineering and landscape studies programs, and staff from the environmental science and policy program. CEEDS also houses the people behind the Ada and Archibald MacLeish Field Station and Smith’s Environmental Monitoring initiatives.

Even as the weather turns cold, CEEDS projects are heating up. Currently, CEEDS is spearheading the Blue Skies Initiative, a proposal put forward by President Christ in conjunction with the other presidents of the Five Colleges. The Blue Skies Initiative asks the Smith community for ideas of potential projects which address academic, co-curricular, and operational aspects of sustainability. To learn more about the Center and its new initiatives, see www.smith.edu/green.