Date: December 1, 2014
To: President Bettison-Varga
From: President’s Advisory Committee on Sustainability
Re: New Residence Hall Sustainability and Certification

Introduction

We, the members of the President's Advisory Committee on Sustainability, have discussed sustainability and certification of the planned new residence hall extensively in Committee meetings and sought student input through multiple venues. Having considered the many perspectives expressed through these means, we recommend that the new residence hall be built to a) surpass the state mandated level of environmental sustainability, b) inspire future work and progress in campus sustainability, and c) visibly demonstrate Scripps’ commitment to working toward a sustainable future. We recommend at least LEED Gold Certification to concretize and achieve this goal.

Background: Student Engagement

Student Representatives: Mia Fargo-Iwamasa, Lauren Mitten, Jessica Ng, Lucia Nunez, and Mieke Ruina

We, the student representatives, began engaging students around sustainability in the new residence hall shortly before the October 10th Board of Trustees meeting, when Donna Ng brought the likely discussion of LEED certification to our attention. To prime student discussion, we published an article in The Scripps Voice reviewing past activity around the building: the 2012-2013 survey, petition, panel, and fundraising endeavor in which several of us were involved. We held a BeHeard forum on October 7th about LEED certification, where attendants voiced strong support for sustainable building. Students asked what the relative costs of the building would be with and without certification and at various levels of certification. Several attendants were critical of LEED as a certification system and proposed the Living Building Challenge as an alternative. Upon Donna Ng and architect Liz Moule's suggestion, we held a forum with Liz Moule on October 30th where students asked about and suggested potential sustainable features in the new hall. Students expressed passion for genuine, progressive sustainability and disappointment that Scripps still seems to be catching up to the mainstream in sustainability. We were pleased to learn of Liz Moule’s expertise in sustainable design, critical perspective on LEED, and desire to continue soliciting student input.

Recommendation

In the context of ongoing anthropogenic environmental destruction, Scripps must pursue a caring relationship with the natural environment and shape future leaders in sustainability. The new residence hall presents an opportunity to work toward this institutional responsibility. We ultimately support the most sustainable building feasible, in which “sustainability” encompasses
both the building’s impact on the natural environment and its function as an educational and inspirational tool for future progress.

We recommend LEED Gold certification at the minimum as an intentional, visible move toward a more sustainable Scripps. We recognize that LEED Gold Certification is an imperfect step toward sustainability rather than the end goal; nevertheless, we believe it is a useful vehicle for accountability, recognition, and increased sustainability. The ongoing benefits of a LEED Gold residence hall—from employee training to student education to resource monitoring—will offset the initial investment throughout the building’s lifetime. Furthermore, we will join the other undergraduate Claremont Colleges in housing a LEED Certified building at the Gold level or higher, visibly demonstrating our participation in the consortium's collective sustainability efforts.

To determine whether LEED Platinum uncertified or certified would be most aligned with our goals, we would need to know how a Platinum building would manifest the above concept of sustainability within the budget constraints. To that end, we recommend that a report of building feature options and estimated costs for LEED Platinum be made available to the Sustainability Committee.

Above all, we envision the new residence hall as a site of possibility, a structure and space that will encourage students to learn deeply and live fully, that will foster a culture of conscience and empowerment, and that will continually inspire work in sustainability. Pursuing a more sustainable building will both uphold and instill in future students the Scripps ideals of confidence, courage, and hope in which we deeply believe.