

As a plant ecologist I look at sustainability through biodiversity lenses. How many corn and bean fields will be planted where native forests and prairies were cleared? How many invasive plants will threaten the remaining fragments? How will these fragments be used, preserved, protected? How will we deal with soil erosion, loss of soil fertility, increased fertilizer demands, run off and eutrophication of our waters? And still feed a growing population?

The issue I hope we tackle is how can we reverse the consumer mentality so deeply ingrained in our society? I believe, as Durning (1991) encouraged, we need to be “asking how much is enough.” And as he clearly indicates, happiness is not equivalent to consumption. So how do we help ourselves and our students realize this and change course? How do we instill a culture of sustainability in place of consumerism?

Some of our senior capstone general education classes address these ideas under the “green initiatives” approach. Ideally, sustainability would be a campus initiative manifested throughout the educational experience of our students, not just as they depart from college. I hope to gain insight on how we can nurture and develop such a broad initiative, and in particular how we can spread it beyond simply an academic topic and make it a “way of life” for our entire campus.

Durning, Alan. “Asking How Much is Enough,” Chap 9, State of the World 1991, Norton, pp.153-169