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What I Learned from the Campus Plumber

Gawking and awkward, we shuffle across the concrete floor between two huge metal tanks. One is a metallic blue, the other silver, and each connected to color-coded pipes that disappear into the ceiling. We're in a room below the basement of the University Center. We've descended to the guts of the campus, and the tanks remind me vaguely of two enormous, artificial kidneys.

Ross Winters is waiting in the space between the tanks. Beneath his Fu-Manchu moustache, he grins with a self-conscious smile. Ross is the campus Plumber, a trade he learned during his stint in the Navy. "These tanks are boilers," Ross tells us as we settle down. "They boil water into steam. "These yellow and red pipes carry the steam underground to the buildings."

The pipes supply hot water to five buildings on campus. Ross names each one. He explains that the tanks heat water to 235° at 15 psi, or pounds per square inch. Ross had brought us here to show us how we heat our classrooms and offices.

It's the first time I've seen this room. Ross himself has worked for our university for twenty years. Ours is not a big campus—only 700 faculty and staff—but I have never met him before this morning. Apart from the information Ross gave us, I find myself with a strong visceral response to these pressurized tanks, gleaming in this dark room.

As Ross spoke, I realize this room was not simply a different part of the campus. It gave me a different perspective on the campus. I realize that for most of us at a university or college, the campus is little more than a picturesque backdrop for our teaching and learning. As students and teachers, college is where we go to give and receive and education. It's more like a venue where we gather than a place in its own right. We are not likely to think of the campus itself as a part of our education. I realized from these tanks that we can not only learn *at* a college campus. We can learn *from* a college campus. For the first time I thought of the campus is itself a form of pedagogy.

Like the boiler tanks in the basement of the University Center, the campus as a whole—the campus as a material reality—is a silent syllabus in which the college gives ongoing, unremitting tutorials in who we are and what we value. Faculty and students are like to privilege the college classroom as the iconographic image of learning. Yet it is perhaps the lessons that are encoded in the campus itself that have the deepest reach and most long-lasting effects on the students, because, like the heating systems in our classrooms, these lessons are inescapable and all the more powerful for being unspoken. They are taken in every day, all day, through the body: ambient lessons that, like these tanks, are unseen but deeply felt. The buildings are books, bearing mute testimony to a campus's lived, as opposed to professed, values. If a campus teaches a way of life, usually that means lessons in displacement and disconnectedness.

As we begin to recover a sense of the campus as a place, we have realized there is an enormous unexploited educational opportunity encoded in our campus as a place. In *The Nature of Design*, he focuses on architecture when he writes, "The curriculum embedded in any building instructs us as powerfully as any course taught in it" (128). His comments on this "hidden curriculum" focus on buildings, but apply to every feature of a campus—the paper we use, the food we eat; the electricity in our lights, the water we flush in toilets; the heat in our buildings and the irrigation for plants.

Those of us in the boiler room are part of a Campus Sustainability Workshop. Three years ago, I had been asked to Chair our new Campus Sustainability Committee. Though I had been active for decades in our Environmental Studies program, and write frequently on natural history and environmental issues, nothing in my background had trained me in the scientific and technical details that characterize much of the work on sustainability. My Ph.D., in fact, is in the English Renaissance—a far cry from architecture and chemistry and engineering degrees that decorate the names of most of the people I've met who are leaders in the field.

Nevertheless, I've had a long-standing interest in environmental issues and environmental writing. Right out of graduate school, I began writing on environmental issues for national magazines. It's a passion I've followed, leading me to write books of creative nonfiction on endangered animals and other topics. My most recent book is on water issues in the west. Called *Red Delta: Fighting for Life at the End of the Colorado River*, the book describes the efforts to save and restore the abandoned delta of the Colorado River in Mexico—once one of the great desert river deltas in the world. In the process, I came to be deeply interested in water issues in the west. It's one of the most pressing environmental topics of this

young century, and I discovered that we don't have to go to China, or India, or North Africa, to discover pressing questions of conservation and ecological justice with regard to water.

In fact, I came to realize that even in the Pacific Northwest, water is a major issue. My school is located in this wet and green part of the country. Yet we may think of the region as wet and green, but we're already at the limits of water use. And so I found my own environmental interests in water and in place taking root where I work. The task has seemed increasingly to me to make my values inform my life, and to make connect work to living more directly. I wanted my own writing and scholarship to inform the way I live, even at work. And so, in our Campus Sustainability Committee, we early on focused our efforts on making the campus into a model of water sustainability among colleges and universities in the region. We secured a grant from a local foundation—The Russell Family Foundation—which emphasizes water sustainability and the protection and restoration of Puget Sound. We dove into both sustainability and water.

One of the advantages of teaching at a relatively small campus like Pacific Lutheran University, with about 3400 students, is that you can to make a difference. In my years at the university, I'd helped organize a number of interdisciplinary workshops, largely in Writing Across the Curriculum. Yet our sustainability workshops have been quite different from anything I'd ever done before, and not just because it include information on the number of btu's in the University Center boilers. It's because, in addition to faculty and students, we included staff who literally work on the ground. We included Ross Winters and many of his colleagues in Facilities Management.

As important, we made them our teachers. This tour of the boilers, for example, was the first item on the workshop agenda, after introductions. That was intentional. We wanted to make a statement, particularly with faculty, who are used to thinking of themselves as the ones who know. Most of the people in Facilities Management as are invisible to faculty, part of the unnoticed background. Yet like Ross, these are the people who could teach us about the campus as an actual place.

At the heart of our workshops are our tours of the campus, with people like Ross leading us in tutorials on the unseen campus. These walking tours are themselves a way of knowing the campus, and many of us feel like we're learning the campus in startling new ways.

The tours show us the campus as a living place, a place where live as well as work and study and teach. For a person trained in poetry, the field of sustainability can seem highly technical, driven by data and statistics. Even the word sustainability sounds a bit like jargon. To

be placed is to have a sense of who you are and where you belong. It is a trope, I believe, inhabitation. It's a trope for dwelling and it gives a sense of heart and purpose to our work in sustainability.

Wendell Berry offers the definition in *The Unsettling of America* that, more than any other, guides my own thinking about place and the back-and-forth that it implies between culture and nature:

We have given up the understanding—dropped it out of our language and out of our thought—that we and our country are part of each other, depend upon one another, are literally part of one another; that our land passes in and out of our bodies just as our bodies pass in and out of our land; that as we and our land are part of one another, so all who are living as neighbors here, human and plant and animal, are part of one another, and so cannot possibly flourish alone; and therefore our culture must be a response to our place, our culture and our place are images of each other and inseparable from each other, and so neither can be better than the other. (*Unsettling* 22)

As we walk the campus, and hear from Ross and others, we find ourselves opening up a conversation with parts of the campus we had not thought much about before. We're really just getting to know the neighborhood, and who are neighbors are. If we have not exactly repressed an awareness of how we live, we have certainly ignored the consequences of our lives on a campus, as if we can live without ecological consequence and responsibility. As if work and study can be separate from living.

I love our campus. We have ancient evergreen trees where barn owls roost, and we have wetlands where green herons nest. I have invested so much time in campus sustainability because I believe that if you care for something, you also have to take care of it. In the rest of this essay, I'll describe how we've learned to make the unspoken lessons of the campus more explicit—how we've linked the hidden curriculum of the campus to the explicit curriculum of our courses. Before that, I'll deconstruct one of the underlying metaphors for a college education, and a college campus, that makes us think of the campus as an ecology of the mind, rather than an ecology of place.

Academic Pastoral

Ivy-covered walls are the iconic image of a college campus. They symbolize the "hallowed halls" of a college education. Ironically, in the Pacific Northwest, where my

university is located, ivy is a problem plant. It is not a native species. It is an invasive species and it overruns everything else. It kills them. Our grand native evergreen trees, like Douglas fir and western hemlock, have no defenses against the ivy that grows up their trunks and slowly chokes them to death.

The ivy that grows on our campus is English ivy. It's the same type of ivy that defines the campuses of higher education in England and Europe, as well as on the east coast of the United States. It serves as a useful metaphor that reminds us that the east is the intellectual center, and that we in the west remain the colony. Just as early settlers carried cows and virus to the colonies, which overran and extirpated local flora and fauna, intellectual settlers carried their alien ivy—a symbol for overrunning local knowledge. Ivy on the buildings on our campus is a statement. What it says is that education is something imported, something transplanted, something foreign to our own particular campus. It is the image of an education alien to knowing our own particular place.

Ivy is a bane on our campus. One of our projects to restore the campus is to rip out the ivy. It is hard manual labor, another physical way of knowing the campus. As we rip out the ivy, we are also deconstructing the traditional idea of a campus landscape. Ivy is part of the iconography of what I have come to call the academic pastoral. Ivy has been one of principle plants through which a campus speaks. What ivy says is that the campus is a privileged location in the "landscape of the mind."

The pastoral genre is a shaping figure in our conception of the college campus and of academic life. As an inheritor of the Medieval church's monastic life, the scholastic life invites us to see the campus as a place set apart from the real world. While the pastoral genre treats nature as a place in which we learn who we are, there is nothing naturalistic about the nature of the pastoral. Nothing that locates people in specific places. As the locus of the contemplative life, the university campus becomes a kind of idyllic retreat into a nature that is a place in the mind, sequestered and cloistered. In the Renaissance, Francis Bacon made the connection between learning and the pastoral explicit. An education, according to Bacon, is not simply the learning of facts and information. In *Of the Advancement of Learning* (1623), Bacon addresses the ways in which a contemplative life can produce virtue in the active life. It's a complicated argument, which we need not go into here. What is interesting is that he thinks of this education as taking place through an education in the "Culture of the Mind" (134). Culture here is not only a noun, but a process. The mind is a landscape, which an education cultivates. Bacon exploits

the pastoral metaphor in his language, describing an agriculture of the mind. The mind is a ground or soil on a farm. By careful tillage and husbandry it can be made not simply to know, but in the process to acquire the virtues that will prepare it for the active life of, say, civic engagement.

Bacon calls this process of mental cultivation a "Georgics of the mind." These *Georgics* are a direct reference to one of the pastoral poems of Virgil, the Roman poet, treating of life on the farm. Bacon points out that the ancient poet "got as much glory of eloquence, wit, and learning in the expressing of the observations of husbandry." The rural life, the life in connection with soil produces a culture of the mind:

And surely if the purpose be in good earnest not to write at leisure that which men may read at leisure, but really to instruct and suborn action and active life, these Georgics of the mind, concerning the husbandry and tillage thereof, are no less worthy than the heroical descriptions of Virtue, Duty, and Felicity. (134)

For Bacon, the culture of the mind is a kind of magical process, like the tilling and husbandry of soil, that produces a crop in the life of the student. These metaphors still inform our notions of pedagogy. We still think in terms of teachers and the teachers fertile soil of young minds.

Central to the trope of the pastoral is the idea of a retreat from the world. The pastoral is not field guide to actual places and creatures. It offers the topography of an imaginary place. The green world of the pastoral is a place for learning, but you'd be in trouble if you treated the pastoral as a survival manual. The pastoral is a venue for learning in a green world.

Both Shakespeare's Forest of Arden and Petrarch's Arcadia present an ecology of ideas, not life in nature—a "landscape of the mind." Whether thought of as escapist or as retreat, the pastoral is the site of "remarkable symbolic richness," according to Helen Cooper in *Pastoral*. "The landscape becomes an extension of [the poet's] mind, and means of exploring it . . ." (5), she writes. As Sukanta Chaudhuri says, in reference to one of the great pastoral poems, Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, "The centre of the pastoral state has passed within the mind. . . . The mind reacts to the landscape out of its own resources, producing a state of mind very different from what the landscape, directly interpreted, would induce" (361).

The most powerful and beautiful description of the pastoral as landscape of the mind is found in Andrew Marvell's seventeenth-century poem, "The Garden." The site here is an aristocratic garden, the mind cultivated not on a farm but on a country estate. The impulse to withdraw into the mind, described in this poem, has something in it vaguely Platonic:

Meanwhile the mind, from pleasures less,
Withdraws into its happiness:
The mind, that ocean where each kind
Does straight its own resemblance find;
Yet it creates, transcending these,
Far other worlds, and other seas;
Annihilating all that's made
To a green thought in a green shade. (41-48)

Nature is an image of the mind, and pastoral withdrawal becomes an expression of the impulse to self-contemplation. This version of pastoral encourages us to think of a nature not as a place, but only as an echo of the human mind.

"A green thought in a green shade": the mind does not simply transcend nature, but it "annihilates" it. This pastoral is more than a metaphor, but a stance toward the world, particularly when we remember that the global environmental crisis has been perpetuated by highly educated people for whom nature is a reflection of human desire.

If the archetypal ivy-covered campus looks like a cross between a medieval cloister and a country estate, green in trees and lawns, it is because it embodies this garden of the mind, this academic pastoral. And if education has connotations of retreat and escapism, they can be traced to this intersection of contemplation and pastoral. The only plumbing going on in this version of the pastoral is in the unplumbed consciousness. All the photographs in college recruitment catalogs of classes outdoors, reading on the campus green, participates in this image of college, not as its own place, but as a more or less generic landscape of the mind. It is the natural habitat not for creatures and people, but for the mind. It is from this tradition that my own university draws its sense of the education we impart, the "life of the mind." The planning document for Pacific Lutheran University states that "the practices of the life of the mind [are] placed at the center of the community" (PLU 2010 14).

My quarrel is not with an education in the life of the mind as such. My quarrel is with the way the academic pastoral removes our work—teaching and learning—from our lives. The landscape of the mind at a university converts nature from a specific place to an intellectual abstraction, where even plants and animals are "resemblances" or thoughts. It is like an intellectual theme park. Insofar as the academic pastoral teaches us that place and nature can be

ignored, or are important only as a reflection of ourselves and our ideas, it teaches that only people matter, that the culture transcends nature, and that nature is an accident of consciousness.

The pastoral as found on the college campus is not so much an ecology as it is a psychology of space—an ethic of self-referentiality and, ultimately, self-indulgence. That nature can provide an education is a message of the pastoral. But the academic pastoral everywhere teaches that not quite real and that the particularities of our lives in a place are unimportant. Paradoxically, this retreat into an academic pastoral reinforces the unremitting messages of the larger culture, with its non-stop indoctrination in the values of privilege and consumption without consequences.

One further obstruction is likely to prevent academics from thinking of the campus as a real place where real lives are located. Humanists may be particularly susceptible to the blandishments of this temptation, one that is closely related to the poetics of an academic pastoral. The academy is a place that privileges language, that imagines itself not as a place but as a discourse. Or, perhaps, more accurately, as a site of multiple and conflicting discourses of knowledge. In an influential essay, for example, David Bartholomae writes in "Inventing the University":

Every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion—invent the university, that is, or a branch of it, like History or Anthropology or Economics or English. . . . Or perhaps I should say the various discourses of our community, since it is in the nature of a liberal arts education that a student, after the first year or two, must learn to try on a variety of voices and interpretive schemes. . . ." (511).

The emphasis on "inventing" the university in discourse is revealing, since it suggests that the university is an idea, or series of ideas. That is, it is not an actual place, with an ecology of living beings. Rather, it is conceived as a discursive ecology, an epistemological ecology. And it is not an ecology at all, really, but a political diversity. In such a conception of an education, students do not learn to place themselves in an ecology of place, put rather in an abstraction that is discursive. Locating yourself is imagined in metaphorical terms only, within an academic discourse. One learns disciplinary commonplaces, but they do not learn anything about their actual place.

It cannot be surprising, in such a pedagogical context, that universities have can be such highly literate places, but which more or less ob-literate their own sense of place. Through our

guided walks in our workshops, we are really simply re-introducing ourselves to the neighborhood. It is part of making the campus—and our lives on campus—real. Of connecting our students' lives to their education, and our lives to our work.

The Campus as Pedagogy

There's something a bit unsettling and vulnerable about finding yourself in a shower stall with your colleagues. Even with all your clothes on, you're aware that this is an intimate space. After the boiler rooms, that's where we head next on our campus tour. We walk over to Stuen Hall and find ourselves looking at shower heads in the bathrooms. The tiles in the shower were pale green of the 1950s. It was a bit like standing in a hospital surgery room.

The problem with the way we live is that we think water comes from the faucet. We think that light comes from the switch on the wall. And we think that food comes from the grocery store. These delusions are particularly self-serving.

"Look at those shower heads," Barbara McConathy tells us. Our guide for this stop on the sustainability tour, Barbara also works in Facilities Management. She's the Environmental Services Coordinator. The title is perhaps a bit misleading, since her principle responsibility is to manage the solid waste recycling program at Pacific Lutheran University. She works with Ross Winters, and she is explaining to us the plumbing in the residence halls.

"Those shower heads are new," Barbara says. "They're part of the plumbing retrofit we're doing on dorms on campus. One dorm at a time."

Every shower, for example, provides our students with a daily education written in water. Many of the dorms on our campus had been built in the 1950s and 1960s, when bigger meant better. The old shower heads sloshed about ten gallons per minute over the bodies of the students. In a ten minute shower—short for most Americans—that's 100 gallons for the daily shower alone. The typical toilet uses about five gallons of water per flush. The faucets in the sinks? The water pours out at up to 5 gallons per minute. Where is all this water coming from? Not from valves and pipes. On our campus, it comes from Parkland Light and Water, which taps wells into local aquifers. In Tacoma, the water comes from dammed rivers. Where does the water go when we're done with it? It all flows into Puget Sound. Every day, 2 billion gallons of untreated water are dumped into Puget Sound.

In 2002, the entire campus used 75 million gallons of water, and the residence halls were the single biggest consumer of water. It's all about the daily shower. So we started changing the shower heads. These new shower heads, Barbara McConathy explains to us, flow at two gallons

per minute. The toilets now flush with three gallons, and we are experimenting on campus in some places with waterless urinals. We have placed aerators on the faucets that reduce the flow to .5 gallons per minute. (The aerators are little baskets on the faucets, and it turns out they have to have "locks" on them, or students will remove them and use them for smoking drugs.) The pipes and underground valves have been changed as well, which have their own effects at reducing water consumption. We made it a principle not to put anything in the dorms that we would not put in our own houses.

Changing the plumbing in the dorms may seem prosaic, but in fact we're replumbing students' lives. We are rewriting the implicit education they get every time they take a shower. What's more, it's a private education, an education in the restroom, not the classroom. What is the lesson of a ten gallon per minute shower? What's the lesson of every shower, everyday, with the old shower heads? Mostly it's an exercise in waste and excess. Not only are they okay, but they are desirable.

Must students know that they are flushing low-flow toilets for them to be receiving an education? One of the central principles of the sustainable efforts on campus is that we won't put anything in the dorms that we would not also use in our own homes. In other words, we want green plumbing that is so good that students might not even notice that it's been changed. That's not hard to do, by the way. Yet we want students also to be aware of what they are using—because we want them to realize that they have choices when they leave PLU and have their own houses. To make sure students are as aware as possible, we've consulted with the dorms before the plumbing retrofits began. More important, we are developing a campus-wide campaign of interpretive signage that let's everyone know about our sustainable initiatives. We want everyone to know that they have choices. It's part of the education on campus.

The shower stalls illustrate the ways in which every element of the campus is a pedagogy. Unfortunately in most instances what the campus teaches contradicts the values that the professors and administration profess. The mission of our university is to "empower students for lives of leadership, service, inquiry, and care—care for others, for community, and for the earth." Our works on sustainability is an effort to understand more fully what it means to care for the earth. We also understand it as an effort to make the university walk our talk. The university should be model of an environmentally-conscious life.

David Orr insists, "Design is pedagogy" (126). The whole campus tells a story. Students read the story unconsciously, and it structures or reinforces their desires. We may try to teach

students about global environmental crises, but if our campuses do not reflect an awareness of place and ecological integrity, what are we really teaching them? As Orr puts it, "Students begin to suspect, I think, that those issues are unreal or that they are unsolvable in any practical way, or that they occur somewhere else" (128-29). In fact, the displacements built into a college campus may teach that the task of the educated life is to displace as many costs, and as many problems, as possible onto other cultures and other creatures. Or it can illustrate the possibilities of a new relationship to nature.

A Campus Story Written in Water

Our emphasis on plumbing at Pacific Lutheran University is not accidental. We chose it intentionally as a way to give us a focus in working with the campus. We want to become a model of water sustainability among college campuses. A number of considerations led us to chose water.

The campus once had a stream that flowed directly through our campus, Clover Creek. Not that long ago, people in Parkland, the local town, caught large salmon in Clover Creek. About fifty years ago, Clover Creek was diverted from campus through culverts and concrete channels. The old channel of Clover Creek is still visible on campus, though not many recognize it. The channel is near an area on campus we are working to re-landscape and restore as a signature project.

Plus, water defines the Pacific Northwest. As rain and river, as sound and ocean, water shapes our lives and sculpts our landscapes. Ironically, though we think of ourselves as having too much water, experts say we are at or near the limits of our water resources. Water is also one of the ways our daily lives intersect with global environmental and political issues. Many experts believe that fresh water will be the biggest environmental issue of the coming century. And finally, water is a vessel for potent cultural significations. Water carries meaning. It figures in theology and philosophy. Heraclitus used the river to describe the flux of things. It is a poetic symbol, as in Shakespeare's "sea change." We live in a floating world. Even our brain floats within our skulls.

We are rewriting the story of the campus as it is written in water. In our campus workshops, we have had two goals. One has been to plan and prioritize sustainability projects on campus—to redesign the campus as a place. The other had been to link curriculum to campus operations. They reinforce each other, and we have been importing the campus itself into the curriculum. The campus has become a 140-acre laboratory for research and experimentation.

I want here only to illustrate how we are using the curriculum to understand the campus and how we can better care for it. In introductory courses, for example, student research into the use of water—or power or trash—gives a local habitation to questions of resource use, resource waste, and resource conservation. As a result of our workshops, for example, a religion professor redesigned her lower-division course to look explicitly at the role of water in various theologies. The relationship between water consciousness and water ethics—between awareness and behavior—comes home when she asks the students to research specific questions about their own water use. The questions include the following: Where does the drinking water on campus come from? Where does the sewage go from campus? Where does other waste water on campus go, and can you trace the routes? How many vending machines on campus sell bottled water? Which buildings on campus have low-flow toilets? Which residence halls on campus have low-flow shower heads? Which buildings on campus have aerators on the faucets? Who are the leaders on campus in sustainability? What effects does the campus have on its watershed?

Other questions could address irrigation on campus, use of pesticides and herbicides, and stormwater runoff. In all these questions, students begin to discover that their own lives are implicated in water.

At a higher level in the curriculum, several students in the Environmental Studies program have conducted their senior research projects on the campus. A number have focused on water use on campus. A year ago, for example, Eric Friesth conducted a study of student water attitudes and water behavior. He called his study, "A Drip in Time: Water Audit and Survey of Environmental Attitudes of Students in Pacific Lutheran University Residence Halls." Eric surveyed student attitudes toward conservation and water use. Some 2 billion people on the globe currently do not have adequate access to clean water. UNESCO predicts that within the next half century, every individual in the world will have about 1/3 less water available to them. Our students are probably typical of American attitudes more widely: Eric found that PLU students do not believe that water scarcity affects them. They do not worry about the availability of drinking water. Overwhelmingly, students believe that water conservation is important. According to Eric's survey, however, only 29% turned off the water when brushing their teeth.

For our students, the environment is an abstraction. They do not understand how water issues apply to their own lives. Eric concludes that technological solutions to water issues are

not enough. Students need to understand how their attitudes themselves must change. He urges PLU to become "a model of how to use water."

Both these models of campus research—lower-division introductory classes and senior-level capstones—re-engage the students with the campus. They also discover new teachers and new experts on campus. To conduct their research, they have seek out people in Facilities Management. Eric Friesth had to work closely with David Kohler, Director of Facilities Management, and with Ross Winters, the Campus Plumber. Students answering the questions in the lower-division religion class had to seek out people in Facilities as well. We not only now ask students to seek them out to learn from them. Increasingly we are bringing them into our classes to give presentations. Barbara McConathy does a wonderful classroom presentation on campus trash—we produce about 180 tons of it per year. Under her leadership, we now have one of the highest recycling rates among colleges and universities in the region—over 60%.

This increasingly visible role of people from Facilities Management has been one of the most rewarding features of our work. These are the people who know the most about how the campus as campus actually works. David Kohler, for example, has been one of the three faculty mentors on several senior capstone projects. What's more, faculty are learning from students and their research. We have asked students in both workshops to make presentations to the group based on their capstone research.

Perhaps that is the strongest value of our work in sustainability. Not only has it enriched our sense of the campus as a living place, but it has expanded our notions of community. To enter into anything like a deepening dialogue with the campus and how we live on it, we have had to involve people who have been largely invisible. Even in our workshops, we have had to be careful how we structure discussions so faculty do not dominate, as they are wont to do. What happens when faculty dominate the discussions? The people from Facilities Management typically go silent. You can almost watch them disappear. Faculty typically have the ideas. But the folks from Facilities Management have the local knowledge. These are the people who know us as a part of the campus, not the campus as an abstraction in the landscape of the mind.

Every Campus Needs a Wilderness

I'll conclude with a story of local knowledge and expanding community. As I mentioned, we have an area on campus near the University Center, where the old Clover Creek once flowed. When the University Center was built about 30 years ago, long after the creek was re-channeled, several faculty members from Natural Sciences put in an artificial pond in the area.

The idea was to create a natural area on campus. Over the years, however, the area has fallen into neglect. Overgrown and dark, it is now widely reviled and avoided.

The area has no official name, though we now call it UC Pond. Students and faculty consider it dangerous. Groundskeepers consider it a problem area. Yet one of the main paths from upper to lower campus passes right through this pond, across a small bridge and through the woods. Nothing has ever happened in the area. No one has been mugged, or worse. But it's seen as a crime scene waiting to happen.

Our Campus Sustainability Committee has more or less adopted the area. Safety provides the compelling rationale for the university to restore the area, and we want to make it a signature statement on sustainability. We've hired landscape architects and "habitat engineers" to redesign the area. We want to recycle stormwater run-off from the campus through this area. Part of this area will become a native garden, including a tribute to the old Clover Creek that once flowed here. In the topography of the campus, we want this to be an intimate space, a place for close encounters with nature. Every campus needs a wild area. One of our workshop discussions on this area illustrates for me exactly why.

In our latest workshop, we worked with the landscape architect on specific designs for the area. The plans generated enormous enthusiasm. We've found the sustainability project has given people a real sense of hope and empowerment on campus.

As we began talking, a short woman with a raspy voice, weathered skin, and braids rose in the back corner. She introduced herself as Yvonne Butler, and said she liked to be called Wulli. She said she had been the groundskeeper responsible for the pond area for years, and she had something she needed to say to us.

She was another person I had only just recently met, that she too had worked on campus for many years. We had met a few months earlier when we gave the landscape architect a tour of the pond area.

In the workshop Wulli pointed out that many of our plans would require a bulldozer to go in and rip the area up. "I wanna remind you that there're animals livin' there," she said.

Wulli talked particularly about a green heron nesting in the trees in the woods. She didn't want us to tear out its nest, drive it away, or worse, kill it. I was moved and impressed by Wulli's speech. It was a testimony to a textured and precise knowledge of the campus and its community. It was immediately clear that we needed to conduct an inventory of the plants and

animals we have on campus. One of our two Sustainability Fellows is developing this inventory over the summer.

But we had something deeper to learn from Wulli. She was concerned less about species and statistics than about the life of this individual and particular green heron. Wulli was reminding us that the campus is not simply about people. Hers was the voice of local knowledge, nuanced with the texture of invisible and secret lives.

Wulli spoke of a place she knew intimately, a knowledge textured with secret and invisible lives. Wulli reminded us why a campus should include a wild area. For the green heron, the campus is quite literally its home, part of its territory. For Wulli it defined the value of the UC Pond as a place. It reminded us all that the campus is a community of lives. Not just human lives. A campus is about the creature also live there. She reminded us the campus is a community of lives. Not just human lives. It is about creatures too. For the campus, the heron is quite literally its home, its territory, its place. For Wulli, the green heron defined the campus as a home. A living place.

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