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Stockton Students and Faculty Helping NJ Towns to “Go Green”

Sustainability Initiative Reaches Area Policymakers

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Contact: Tim Kelly
Stockton Public Relations
(609) 652-4950

Galloway Twp., NJ – Recognized as a leader in alternative energy and environmental education, The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey is now reaching beyond its campus to help municipalities across New Jersey improve their environmental practices and save energy.

As part of the College’s broad-reaching Sustainability Initiative, faculty and students in Political Science and Environmental Science have been working with municipal staff and policymakers across the state to develop green initiatives, including projects from rain gardens to energy audits.

Political Science Professor Patrick Hossay expressed the value of this new endeavor in that “This initiative allows the students in our sustainability curriculum to gain real world experience and hands-on skills that will enable them to be vital players as New Jersey moves to a greener future,” Hossay said. Citing the Global Warming Response Act, which limits the level of statewide greenhouse gas emissions, Hossay explains, “Municipalities across the state have an interest in getting ahead of the curve and adopting greener, more energy-efficient practices. ...but they often don’t have the in-house expertise or people-power. We’ve found that by working with these municipal leaders, we can offer our students vital experience and training and help catalyze better environmental practices.”

The project began in Galloway Township, where Stockton College is located. Stockton students and faculty designed and constructed a rain garden at the Galloway municipal building. Professor of Environmental Science Tait Chirenje, the designer of the garden, explains, “Rain gardens are designed to absorb rainwater runoff from solid surfaces like roofs, driveways, and parking lots. This runoff can have considerable environmental impacts on local rivers and streams. Rain gardens can help protect these natural resources.”

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This garden is not only helping the township manage its stormwater runoff, it has allowed the township to address parking lot flooding that often made parking spaces unusable in freezing weather. Student teams also conducted an energy audit of the municipal facilities, proposing a set of changes that have allowed the township to save energy and money. Recently, another student team completed a carbon inventory for the township, measuring the greenhouse gas emissions from municipal operations and the township overall to establish a baseline for Galloway's commitment to reduce its greenhouse emissions.

Barbara Fiedler, Galloway Township Director of Community Education, expressed her great satisfaction with the partnership. "Stockton faculty and students have been extremely helpful. It can be difficult to identify and pursue green options, especially when budgets are tight. Stockton's efforts have allowed us to make real progress on multiple projects that otherwise would probably not have happened." Future plans include an expansion of the township's recycling efforts, the development of a community garden, and continued cooperation on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

This initiative is not limited to Galloway. Hossay and his students are working with an array of towns across the state, from Galloway and Hamilton in South Jersey, to Middletown and Long Branch at the central shore, and Montgomery Township near Princeton. Vicky Ackroyd, who is conducting a greenhouse emissions inventory for Montgomery Township expressed her enthusiasm. "This program lets us be a part of the solution instead of just studying it in books. The work I'm doing is going to help change local policies. How many college students can say that?" Theresa Idell, a political science student who is working on an energy audit of the Northfield School and will be conducting an evaluation for solar power installations in Middletown, expressed similar enthusiasm. "We've learned how to use professional equipment to help with real-world problems. And, we're really helping make New Jersey a greener place." Jenna Kennett, an Environmental Science Senior who is headed to Vermont Law School added, "This has been a great way to see how environmental policy is really made before I start a career in environmental law." Summing it all up, senior Jason Simmons states that "The threat of global warming means we need to make changes for the future. This program helps towns define a more sustainable future, and it helps us see what's really possible."

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If you'd like more information on this topic, or to schedule an interview with Dr. Hossay or students involved in this project, please call Jennifer McGinn at (908) 278-7263 or e-mail Jennifer at jennifermcginn@msn.com.