

In 1964, University of Michigan students rallied against the injustices of racial discrimination as part of the national civil rights movement. Today, sustainability and the social injustice of exploiting our common resources is one of the most important causes our generation fights for. We came to the University of Michigan to understand the world around us and to develop a higher consciousness about the context in which we live.

The courses we have taken that addressed sustainability have changed our lives and deeply influenced our way of thinking about the world around us. However, at a meeting of student leaders from around the campus last fall, everyone agreed that we need to expand sustainability in education at the University of Michigan. Students chose sustainability in education as one of their top priorities in a survey administered by the Student Sustainability Initiative. Our vision is that every student who graduates from the University of Michigan, regardless of their major or department, will have the basic ecological literacy that is necessary to be a responsible and informed citizen of a global world.

This is not the vision of student leaders alone. From the Medical School Green Team and Green Greeks to the Environmental Law Society and the solar car team, there are over 30 student groups on campus dedicated to sustainability. This fall, students organized a zero waste alumni tailgate that prevented tremendous amounts of waste from going to the landfill and educated our community of Alumni about Michigan's commitment to sustainability. And just last year, over 1000 University of Michigan students signed a petition to create the Office of Campus Sustainability that is driving institutional change in all aspects of our university. This semester, as part of the Integrated Assessment of seven critical aspects of sustainability on the Michigan campus, 43 students spent over 2600 hours gathering data and creating recommendations on sustainability that will be reviewed by Mary Sue Coleman and the Executive Council on Sustainability this summer.

Student interest in sustainability is widespread and filled with passion and inspiration. It's not just students from the Program in the Environment and the School of Natural Resources who are excited about sustainability. Engineers, writers, architects, business students, social scientists, humanists, artists and students from all disciplines are looking for courses to take that will give them an opportunity to learn about how sustainability can and should be integrated into their future careers.

I'd like to share some comments from my fellow students with you:

VIDEO

Although hundreds of students planned educational events, political campaigns and green initiatives in celebration of the 40th anniversary of Earth Day, student activism alone is not enough. We need your help. We look to you for inspiration and guidance. You are the people who help us understand the many challenges, complexities and perspectives surrounding sustainability. And you are the people who challenge us to think in new ways and provide us with the tools we need to create a more sustainable world.

As you participate in discussions on teaching sustainability today, I encourage you to remember the student interest and energy that was the inspiration for this seminar. As the great American philosopher John Dewey once said, "Education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself." How you integrate sustainability into your fields and your teaching will shape our generation and ultimately help us to create a more sustainable world.

Thank you for all that you do.