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Campus group continues sustainable house hunt

The center has resource-conserving plans for house, but no University-owned properties are available

BY JON ITKIN
DAILY EMERALD FREELANCE REPORTER

James Hiebert wants a house. Hiebert, a co-director of the Center for the Advancement of Sustainable Living, says a student-maintained home is the ideal way to foster sustainable values.

Since its inception, CASL has been working to gain usage of one of the University-owned properties in the East Campus neighborhood to serve as a living space, classroom, research facility, studio and workshop location.

CASL members would modify the house in ways that would increase energy efficiency (their goal is to reduce energy consumption from non-renewable resources to zero); reduce waste through composting, recycling and other methods; curb water use with rain-collecting devices; increase self-sufficiency with greenhouses; and reduce natural resource consumption by purchasing used building materials. And they plan to do it all on a

relatively low budget.

"Forming good habits at home is one of the best things we can do to make a difference in the world," Hiebert said. "We might not realize it, but an incredible amount of resources is consumed in houses and other buildings. Once good habits are established in our daily lifestyle, we take them everywhere we go."

Started in 2002 by former graduate student Jo Rogers, CASL's imperative is to "demonstrate ecologically and socially sustainable technologies and living practices in a residential setting."

Much of the inspiration behind the CASL house project comes from the Campus Center for Appropriate Technology, a sustainable living project at Humboldt State University, in California. Since 1978, CCAT has maintained a home on the Humboldt State campus.

Miah Mann, the CCAT project engineer and botanist, said its purpose is to provide "opportunities and examples of how to live more lightly

on society within an urban environment." The program has been successful, reducing energy use and waste production to 5 percent of the average home while having consistent student support.

"CCAT has also been a major point in attracting prospective students to Humboldt," Mann said.

Many University faculty members have expressed approval for the CASL plan. Vice President for Administration Daniel Williams gave the organization a letter of commitment in August of 2003.

No permanent location has been set aside for the house. CASL members say this is because the house would be a combination of a living space and a classroom, which creates problems for University Housing. Also, the University is still considering development options for the east campus area.

"CASL has good support within the administration, but the plan for east campus is not yet complete," said Robert Melnick, dean of the School of Architecture and Allied Arts. "In my view we have come a long way, but there is obviously still further to go."

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Housing: New responsibilities merit raises

Continued from page 1

management, warranting a refinement of written job descriptions and an increase in salaries, Eyster said.

The University has recently come under scrutiny for allowing pay raises despite a statewide salary freeze for state employees, but because those who received a pay raise were given additional duties as a result of the restructuring, the pay increases are within the law, Eyster said.

"When the job changes, the salary can change," Eyster said.

Eyster was quick to say the restructuring in no way reflects on the abilities of the classified staff — there was simply a need to "change leadership to a leadership that's more experienced in dealing with specialized facility maintenance."

Classified workers, such as the custodial workers who clean the residence halls, have been trained in cleaning family housing units to broaden their skills, Eyster said, which in turn should lead to a great level of efficiency.

Access to one pool of workers rather than two separate groups will allow quicker response to whichever area of housing is in need of maintenance or housekeeping.

Eyster said if there is a sudden surge in the number of vacant units, the units will not have to sit empty

while an inefficient number of workers tries to clean them out in a timely fashion.

Because workers now have greater flexibility in job duties, "we can flood that area with staff and get (the units) turned over more quickly," Eyster said.

No major problems have arisen thus far as a result of the restructuring, but Eyster said he is still working out the details and looking for areas in need of improvement.

"Whenever you make a change, there's going to be some folks who don't think it's a good idea," Eyster said.

Wayne Moore, the area union representative for all University classified employees, said many University housing employees have expressed concern with the change and its subsequent effects on their workload.

"It's definitely bringing people out of the woodwork," Moore said.

Moore said that University Housing's classified employees are proud of the work they do on campus and are worried the increased workload is causing them to neglect important areas of their jobs.

"The big concern is it's forcing them to compromise the level of attention they put into their other job areas," Moore said.

Union organizing is often a slow

process, Moore said, and the group has yet to decide what action, if any, is needed to take on the issue.

A union meeting will be held soon after Thanksgiving to further discuss the issue.

Eyster said he is aware that some employees are upset about the restructuring and is open to discussion about possible remedies or changes that might need to be made to satisfy all employees.

"It wasn't the intention in that restructure to make their jobs harder than what their job description specifies," Eyster said.

The University's Human Resources department has an employee who specializes in examining job classifications and recommending changes.

Any worker who believes his or her job description is in need of reclassification can contact a supervisor, the Human Resources department directly or Eyster to request a review, Eyster said.

If it is discovered an employee now has a greater workload and more responsibilities than his or her job description warrants, the job will be reclassified or the workload will be decreased.

"If we had made a mistake, we'll correct it," Eyster said.

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