the initiative to lead

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Hiram College has placed emphasis on sustainability for generations, but it is only in recent years that students have taken up the stride to push those efforts even further. In 2019, students across Hiram's campus took part in a walkout during Global Week for Future, also known as the 2019 climate strike. Over 200 students signed a petition asking the College administration to address the issue of climate change. After seeing the participation from across campus, many students took the initiative to lead Hiram to a greener future. In 2020, the student-led Sustainable Development Committee (SDC) was born. Students involved with the SDC's creation hoped to take action and bring the Hiram community together through sustainable initiatives and education with a mission "to ensure that student interest in sustainable development is taken into account and acted upon with the support of empirically driven evidence indicative of the necessity for change at Hiram College."

In the first year of its creation, the SDC instituted a composting program in partnership with the College's dining hall and created a position for a Sustainability Coordinator, which is now held by Hiram alumnus, Zack Fox '21.

From 2020 to 2023, the compost program collected over 20 tons of food waste and other organic material that have been converted into biologically rich compost for use at the James H. Barrow Biological Field Station. From the collection of food waste, to overseeing the composting process, and delivering the compost, students are in charge of the entire process from start to finish.

Now in its fourth year, the SDC has started a waste diversion program, had Hiram's campus designated as a Level I Arboretum through ArbNet, and started a pop-up thrift store for students to donate and purchase gently used clothes. With around 20 members, the committee works closely with other campus organizations including the Field Station, Environmental Appreciation Club, and Student Senate to collaborate on initiatives.

This year, the committee is headed by its first female chair, Betty Marin '24. As a political science major and Spanish minor, Marin has been involved with the committee for the last two years.

"It's a very hands-on campus experience, especially with giving back to the community. It really has made me a more well-rounded person," Marin said. "I didn't even know how composting worked when I joined."

Even as a political science major, Marin has a love for the outdoors and caring for nature. She has worked at the James H. Barrow Biological Field Station as an animal care steward, frequents Hiram's Northwoods Field Station in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and can often be found backpacking or exploring the outdoors. There was no question that Marin was on the trajectory to take the reins of the SDC this year.

"When people are enthusiastic about projects like composting, it has a lot of profit. It makes you feel good, it makes everyone work together. It really is a passion project of mine," Marin said.

While she has been instrumental in the composting program and the Arboretum designation project over the past two years, Marin's favorite project she's been able to work on has been the thrift store that the SDC is developing.

Known as the Secondhand Stand, the thrift store operates out of the TREE House basement and hosts frequent pop-ups across campus. The SDC placed donation bins in residence halls and asked for students to donate lightly used clothing and shoes. The response was amazing, allowing the thrift store to thrive.

Last year, for Transgender Day of Visibility, the Secondhand Stand hosted its first pop-up closet with the help of the Hiram College Library and PRYSM club. This pop-up, referred to as a "closet" to try and reclaim the term "being in the closet," aimed to help address identity expression and clothing insecurities.

Marin hopes to establish a permanent location for the Secondhand Stand that is regularly staffed by SDC members this year. She also has big goals for recruiting new members and hosting inclusive, educational events across campus this academic year.

As the SDC Chair, Marin knew she had big shoes to fill. The group is known across campus for its work, as more and more students become interested in what sustainability means to them.

"It deepens my connection with Hiram and deepens my connection with the people in this program. This committee has made my experience at Hiram better because I am so hands-on in the community, which helps with my leadership skills," Marin said about her experiences so far leading the SDC.

After graduation this spring, Marin plans to continue her education by receiving a post-graduate paralegal studies certificate and entering the career field. Marin hopes to one day find herself back in the sustainability space.