

IGNITE CHANGE. GO GREEN.

Alumni Spotlight:

Laura Draucker '03, Chemical Engineering
Director of Sustainability at Amherst College

In this interview series we bring you inside the world of Villanova alumni and explore how their work relates to creating a sustainable future. In this issue we hear from Laura Draucker, the Director of Sustainability at Amherst College.

What did you study while attending Villanova?

I studied and graduated with a degree in Chemical Engineering in 2003. I then went on to get my PhD in Chemical Engineering with a focus on green chemical processing at Georgia Institute of Technology.

In your own words, how would you define sustainability?

I don't think it's possible to define sustainability in a singular way. Throughout my career I have worked on "sustainability" in and with government, industry, non-profit, and higher education. In these different roles, the definition of sustainability has shifted from the economic-driven triple bottom line to the science-driven planetary boundary approach and everywhere in-between. Currently working in higher education, I see my role as a sustainability director to instill motivation and hope in our young people that they can tackle the complex problems that creating a healthy, just, and safe society within the boundaries of our environment require.



Why is sustainability important to you?

A degree in engineering was perfect for me because I really love problem solving, and in my mind figuring out how to achieve sustainability and tackle climate change are really the ultimate problems. It's messy, complex, and requires considering the holistic life cycle impacts of the decisions you make. It can seem overwhelming at times, but when you get a win it is so rewarding to know you have contributed something positive to our world.

How have you supported or been involved in sustainability efforts through your career or personal life?

My career has been almost completely focused in sustainability. I am currently the Director of Sustainability at Amherst College, where I approach sustainability from an operational standpoint (i.e., reducing energy use, setting climate goals) as well as through student engagement and education. Prior to Amherst College, I worked at the World Resources Institute in Washington DC developing life cycle greenhouse gas accounting standards for industry. Out of graduate school, I did a post doc at the EPA and a contract with the Department of Energy which focused on energy systems. But my work in sustainability really started with my undergraduate thesis under Dr. Punzi at Villanova measuring the absorptive properties of materials for applications in waste water treatment.

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What is your favorite weekend/evening leisure or hobby?

Living in Western Massachusetts I love getting outside and enjoying local food and beer. We have two young children – Colin, 5 and Annabelle, 8 months - so they take up quite a bit of my “leisure” time!

What is your favorite memory as a Villanova student?

My chemical engineering graduating class was around 20 – 25 students, and we took almost all our courses together. It was really nice have a tight knit group of people to go through the trenches with, so I have a lot of great memories with them including our annual junior-senior flag football game. My senior year we had a few big snow storms, and I will never forget shoveling snow with my roommates at our off-campus house and then ending up at the pub with most the rest of our senior class for snow day beers.

What do you feel is the most exciting development in the sustainability field over the last year?

Well it hasn't been a great year for sustainability generally and climate action specifically in light of the priorities of our new administration, but I am trying to look for silver linings. One of those has been the Paris agreement – a few years before the Paris conference the United States dropping out would have severely hampered efforts to reach a global deal. I was very happy to see other countries, as well as U.S. cities and states (and colleges and universities like Amherst and Villanova!) stand by the Paris agreement even with our federal government's decision to pull out. Additionally, I think renewable energy has reached a tipping point and will continue to replace dirtier forms of electricity generation, which is not only beneficial in our fight against climate change but creates a healthier environment for us all.



If you would like to connect with Laura you may do so via email at ldraucker@amherst.edu