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Shi Center for Sustainability

Furman University

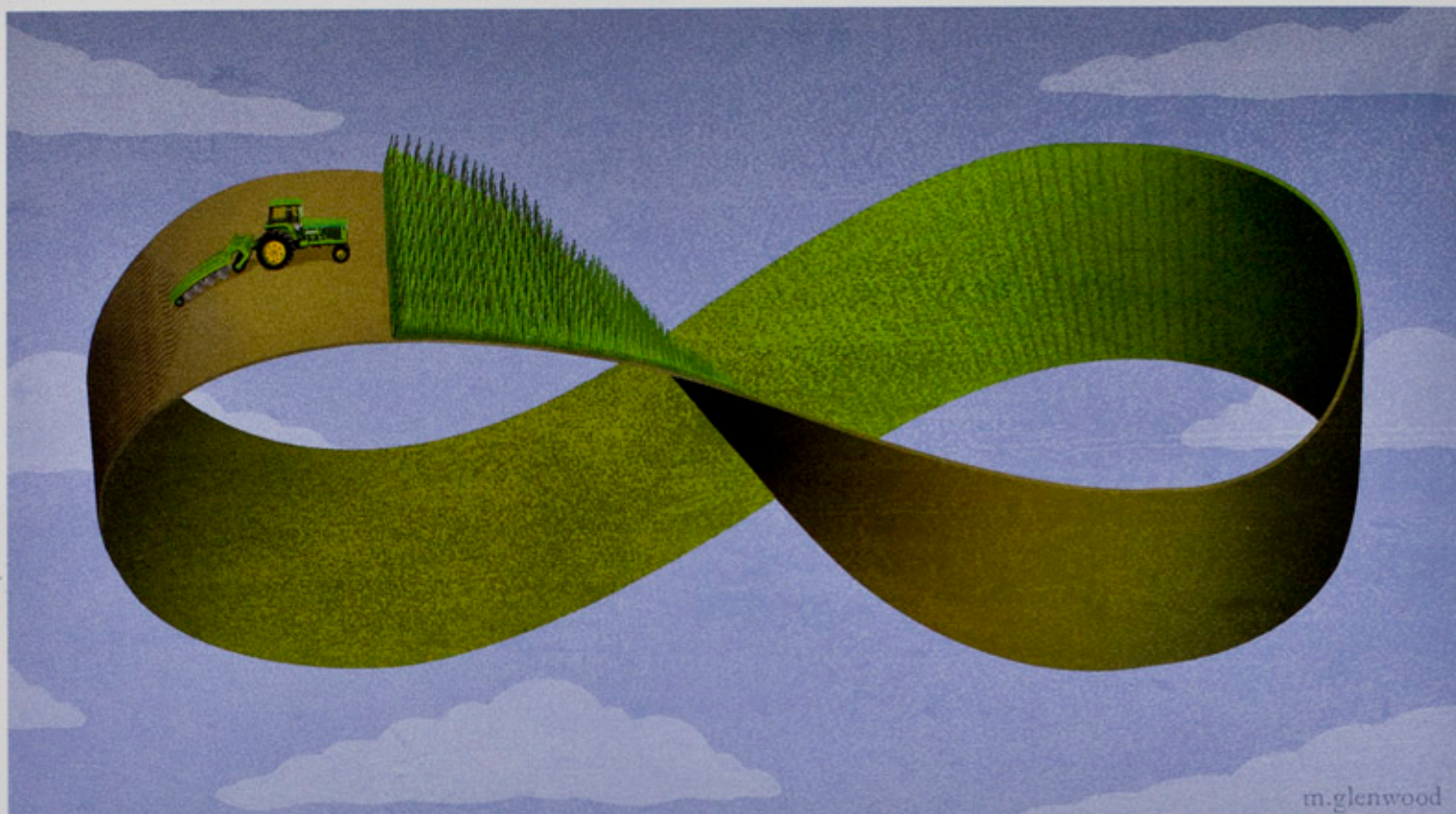
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Shi Center for Sustainability



MICHAEL GLENWOOD

The infinite significance of sustainability

Center matures as academic hub for disciplinary collaboration

In the 2013-14 academic year, the David E. Shi Center for Sustainability celebrated its fifth anniversary since its founding. The center is now firmly established as a national model for teaching and research across a range of academic disciplines, cultivating meaningful community partnerships and innovation in sustainable practice.

The Shi Center is named for Furman's 10th President, David E. Shi '73, who in the mid-2000s recognized the University's interdisciplinary strengths and leveraged them into a pathbreaking approach for the burgeoning study of sustainability.

"Furman's faculty and administration knew that science, public policy, public health, even literature, history and music—all had elements of interest and discrete insights that helped us define a distinctive approach to sustainability," said Political Science and Earth and Environmental Sciences Professor Angela Halfacre, Ph.D., director of the Shi Center. "Shi's insight, and the faculty's conta-

gious energy around sustainability, moved us to the forefront and has fostered a culture of imagination and pragmatic applications that have cascading benefits for Furman and the greater community."

The Center, housed in a cutting-edge eco-building beside the Furman Lake that once was a *Southern Living* showcase home (and supported by \$3.2 million in funding through the capital campaign), connects students, faculty, staff and the greater community through its teaching, research, and the initiatives envisioned in *Sustainable Furman*, a long-range master plan unanimously approved by the Trustees in 2009 outlining the University's sustainability goals.

One of the key efforts in the plan was the completion of a campus-wide sustainability assessment through the nationally recognized Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System (STARS). The initial assessment provided a bellwether that confirmed Furman's multi-pronged approach was viable.

It also provided a baseline for measuring progress: in 2013 the center realized a 17 percent improvement on its overall STARS score.

Beyond Furman's gates, the center's contributions can be found in faculty-student research into areas that include, among others, water quality and sustainable farming (see sidebar), as well as the Community Conservation Corps program to weatherize low-income homes in Greenville. By early 2014, 50 homes had been weatherized through some 1,500 volunteer hours; the program is supported by a significant grant from Piedmont Natural Gas.

"I wouldn't say we are restive about the work we see before us," Dr. Halfacre said, "but we are certainly ambitious. We've accomplished a lot in helping people to see sustainability in broader terms, and as we have matured we continue to see new opportunities that have been afforded by the University vision and successes."

\$900,000

Duke Endowment grant to support sustainable agriculture collaboration on campuses

\$250,000

funds dedicated to faculty development over five years

\$7.87 million

funds raised for Shi Center initiatives

108

Student Fellows engaged since 2009

124

fellowship opportunities provided (\$3,500 per student)

Farming useful information

Throughout 2013, 11 faculty members and 12 students worked collaboratively to understand the far-flung dynamics of the various South Carolina farming regions to help create a more sustainable ecosystem. The resulting research from this project, funded mainly by The Duke Endowment, is intended to be used by policy makers and residents as they make future agricultural decisions.

The Shi Center for Sustainability, known for its cross-disciplinary approach to understanding systems and building solutions, aims to use this project to help people understand the holistic nature of sustainability. The project comprises 14 research projects representing the following disciplines:

- Biology
- Earth and Environmental Sciences
- Shi Center for Sustainability
- Health Sciences
- Business and Accounting

Fine Arts Initiative

New life for a life's work

It is not every day that a student has the chance to participate in the cataloging and digitizing of a famous artist's life's work—to hold and photograph a Trojan helmet worn on the Metropolitan Opera's stage,

to scan sketches for a Broadway set design, or to examine a miniature replica of the ceiling of Symphony Hall in Boston. But thanks to an interdisciplinary partnership and a willing artist, Furman students are doing just that.

Peter Wexler is an acclaimed designer of scenery, costumes, lighting, and performance spaces, as well as a producer and studio artist. He has lent a creative hand to hundreds of productions of every genre since the early 1950s, and his impact stretches from theatre to opera, music, and film. And Furman is taking the lead in transforming the largest representation of his life's work into The Peter Wexler Digital Museum at Furman University, expected to be accessible by December 2014.

The project officially launched during the first semester of the 2012–13 school year thanks to the generosity of Furman Trustee Todd Ruppert and his wife Karen (parents of Kierstin '11), who gave the lead gift to fund the project's efforts. Furman first became acquainted with Wexler when he served as a consultant to the University's burgeoning Fine Arts Initiative, a multi-faceted project supported by The Duke Endowment to strengthen the fine arts curriculum while also extending Furman's visual and performing arts presence into the greater Greenville community.

Art Department Chair Ross McClain, M.F.A., quickly saw the potential for collaboration with Wexler when visiting his studio in New York. "I am always working to show the value of majoring in art. I want to teach our students to think differently and be fearless, so this proved to be an incredible opportunity," McClain said.

With financial support and a partnership with Wexler in place, the challenge became relocation of the collection to Furman—and transporting a life's work of delicate sculptures, decades-old drawings, and intricately crafted models from bustling New York to Furman's James B. Duke Library was no easy task.

Once at Furman, the pieces were placed in the care of Rick Jones, manager of the library's Digital Collections Center. "Wexler is a living master of his craft," said Jones, who is leading the process of photographing, scanning, and cataloging over 8,000 pieces of Wexler's work.

Wexler wants the work to be available in the digital age. "I wanted to digitize my work for 10 years and had several offers to assist, but Furman had the focus, energy, intent and real desire," Wexler said.

Through Furman's partnership, students had the opportunity to interact with Wexler throughout the year. Jones, and the team involved, celebrated the digitization and partnership with an exhibition of Wexler's work in October 2013, funded in part by The Duke Endowment.



This helmet from Les Troyens, a New York Metropolitan Opera production, is part of the Wexler collection