

Spotlight: IDS

Finding Solutions for Inequity

There are no simple answers to complex problems. The International Development Studies program at Saint Mary's University has led the way in facing this truth with an interdisciplinary approach that includes political science, economics, social analysis and religious studies.

"The massive global problems on a world scale that we're dealing with will require an integration of disciplinary approaches due to the nature, scope and scale of the problem," explains IDS Co-ordinator Dr. Anthony O'Malley.

Dr. O'Malley says Saint Mary's offered the first graduate interdisciplinary IDS program in Canada. The master's program may soon be joined by another leading program, an interdisciplinary PhD. The doctoral proposal is being reviewed by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission.

Undergraduate students are also benefiting from IDS. Since 1988, from 1,200 to 1,500 students have majored in the program. At both the undergraduate and graduate level, students engage in rigorous research surrounding the "development dilemma."

"The central problem of all development is poverty," Dr. O'Malley says. "The second problem is the deeply offensive situation where a portion of the world, usually the smaller portion, lives in what might be termed unimaginable luxury, and the majority of the world lives in various stages of deprivation."

IDS faculty and students' research on the causes of this inequality can be used by policy-makers at home and abroad to develop informed solutions. International faculty collaborations and field research in Latin America, Southeast Asia, India, Africa, and other places provide invaluable perspectives. Students have the opportunity to embrace this experience beginning at the undergraduate level.

"Students can't fully understand the nature and scope of development problems without actually getting into the real world," Dr. O'Malley says. "So we created courses whereby they can get credit for an overseas posting with an NGO, say in Africa or Latin America."

In this edition of *Maroon and White* we look at their adventures and the impact some of those grads are having on the world.

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MAKING Renewable Energy A REALITY

By Cathy Von Kintzel



above: Brennan Vogel advocates for changes in provincial policies related to energy and the environment. photo: Paul Darrow

In Brennan Vogel's ideal world, he would flip a light switch knowing the power was coming from renewable sources such as wind, sun and water.

This is not just a daydream for the holder of a master's in International Development Studies from Saint Mary's University (2010). It's an opportunity and a daily goal in his work as energy and climate change co-ordinator at the Ecology Action Centre in Halifax.

"Every day, I work towards making renewable energy more of a reality right here in Nova Scotia," says Vogel.

"The potential for sustainable economic development and domestic energy security from renewable energy is really inspiring."

Now in its 40th year, the Ecology Action Centre is an environmental non-governmental organization, often

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viewed as the go-to voice on environmental issues in Nova Scotia.

Vogel, who has worked with the centre since April 2010, takes pride in its history and feels a great responsibility to continue its work — not only on the job but in his own life.

He takes the bus or rides his bike to work at the centre's eco-friendly head office at 2705 Fern Lane in the heart of Halifax. His work surroundings are a daily reminder of his goals. The building is a refurbished home, built in the 1800s. Local products, including sustainably harvested wood and recycled and non-toxic products, were used wherever possible.

For this 31-year-old father of two young children, it's about placing the needs of future generations in the forefront, while also meeting today's need to ensure domestic energy and food security and prosperity.

He has hope that Nova Scotia is on the right path and believes in celebrating successes.

Regionally, Vogel is inspired by Halifax Regional Municipality's leadership with its community solar project. The \$5-million proposed pilot program would encourage individual homeowners to install solar panels for heating hot water.

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Solar panels on the roof heat water and supply in-floor radiant heating. Overhead lighting is seldom used during the day because extra time and research went into the best use of daylight.

Vogel's work includes advocating for changes in provincial policies related to energy and the environment. His three key focuses are energy efficiency and conservation; renewable energy and electricity; and greenhouse gas reduction, particularly in the electricity sector.

Fittingly, his master's thesis analyzed Canada's international development policies through a climate-change lens.

“That ties in pretty nicely with my work now,” says Vogel, who also holds a bachelor's degree in environmental studies from University of Waterloo in Ontario.

“I think it's important to recognize that the decisions we make here in Canada today are laying the future foundations for the kind of world we as a global society will live in tomorrow.”

Vogel, who grew up in a rural community near London, Ont., says there are incredible opportunities to build a low-carbon society that is less reliant on coal and oil.

Locally, provincially and beyond, Vogel says, “a lot of policies exist in principle. The hard part is to make them reality. That takes moving beyond the business-as-usual status quo.”

For example, the province of Nova Scotia has set a target of generating 25 per cent of its power from renewable sources by 2015, and 40 per cent by 2020.

Vogel has called on the provincial government to better articulate how it intends to meet those goals. He's also weighed in on other hot-button issues such as the biomass debate, urging the province to re-examine the sustainability of using large-scale forest biomass as a way to reach short-term renewable energy targets.

For him, it comes down to acting or reacting.

“Hopefully, we can be proactive in transforming to a low-carbon society. By making those choices now and by moving society in that direction, we will save ourselves a lot of heartache,” he said, noting the potential for rolling blackouts and \$5-per-litre fuel as a result of peak oil and growing global competition for energy resources.

“Hopefully, we can get it right, starting today.” □