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# GWU's Earth Week Offers Opportunity to Make Lasting Changes



Office of University Communications

April 11, 2013

*By: Stephanie Capps, GWU Community Engagement Coordinator*

I remember a few years ago walking into a retail department superstore and noticing that they had this huge campaign about how their company was “going green” around Earth Day. The only thing the retail consumer could notice was the specialty items available for sale. They had t-shirts made from organic cotton, recycled stationery, and other eco-friendly products available. Upon seeing this campaign, I was actually quite impressed with the superstore. My positive feelings were quickly replaced by disappointment when just a few weeks after Earth Day had passed, the signs came down and the products went on clearance. I felt that I was tricked into believing that this company actually cared about changing their corporate identity, when the reality was that it was simply a tool used for marketing.

This experience at this superstore has left a lasting impact on me. I feel that people are much like this superstore, caring about Earth Day when it is popular and celebrated, only to leave the eco-friendly practices after the holiday is over. This kind of practice is not what those holidays are for. The intention is not to celebrate only on that day, but to incorporate those practices into our everyday lives.

At Gardner-Webb University, we have an annual Earth Week celebration on campus. There are various activities planned to encourage students to become educated about ways they can make a positive impact on the environment. Many students think that Earth Week is solely about recycling their plastic bottles, but we are trying to teach them that environmental issues are much more than plastic bottles. Lauren Mooney (of Nature's Barn in Shelby) is a local soap maker who is coming to explain to the students how the commercial products we put on our skin, even if claiming to be all natural, are mostly chemicals that do more harm than good. We will also have a shoe collecting drive, reminding the students that donating their gently used items is a great form of repurposing and reusing them—and it is for a great cause! *(story continues below)*

Students will get a chance to share their personal environmental cause at the Earth Day Fair on Thursday, then will have an opportunity to learn how the food they eat affects the environment they live in with a screening of the film *FRESH* that evening. We will have a chance for students to give back to the community through serving at the Campus Garden on Friday, and then provide transportation to the Foothills Farmers' Market in Shelby on Saturday.

These events are meant to show students that taking care of the planet is not limited to Earth Day itself, but that small changes incorporated into our everyday lives can really make a difference. From soap to gardening to local food to recycling, we hope that these events will give students a well-rounded idea of environmental issues. Earth Day might be a marketing tool for retail stores, but at Gardner-Webb, Earth Day is everyday, and we hope our students will begin to take steps to reflect that.

*Stephanie Capps is the Community Engagement Coordinator and Director of Student Leadership at Gardner-Webb University. The Office of Community Engagement works to create opportunities for students and faculty to get involved in the surrounding community through meaningful service.*