

## **Paying to Pollute And Finding a Job**

On Friday, March 07, 2008, the Press Democrat newspaper carried an editorial that may be useful to those folks in the college enmeshed in environmental issues:

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Press Democrat Editorial Article published - Mar 7, 2008

### **Watts up?**

#### **The problem with calculating energy and carbon consumption**

You might say a light went off in Saul Griffith's head: The inventor wants to make it simple for people to calculate their energy consumption, so they understand what they must do to reduce their carbon footprints.

Griffith came to this conclusion after spending three weeks calculating in kilowatts the amount of energy he uses to "power" his life (25,000 watts a day) -- and he's the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship. Clearly, average people don't have the time or resources to do their own calculations.

His solution (discussed at a conference hosted by Sebastopol publisher O'Reilly Media): Require companies to disclose how much energy goes into their products.

Griffith isn't the only one looking at labels as a way to help people reduce their carbon footprint. The CEO of the giant Tesco chain of supermarkets recently announced that the company would place carbon labels on 70,000 items.

But labeling can be misleading.

As journalist Michael Specter points out in a recent New Yorker article ("Big Foot"), labeling may make consumers feel virtuous about buying grass-fed, locally raised steak -- but if they grill the beef on a carbon-spewing open barbecue, they've wiped out much of the benefit.

Another problem is the complexity of calculating the labels. Manufacturers would need to determine the carbon emissions of (1) producing each ingredient (the flour, leavening and water in a loaf of bread, for example), (2) getting the ingredients to the factory, (3) mixing and baking the bread and (4) disposing of the plastic wrapper.

A third problem is that labeling can't take into account the miles used to transport goods to market because every market is in a different location. Specter notes that for anyone living east of Columbus, Ohio, it is a better choice (carbon-wise) to buy wine from France that has been shipped via fuel-efficient boats rather than wine from California, which is delivered across country by trucks.

Yes, labeling can be a wake-up call to consumers, and can be a useful tool in

some circumstances. But ultimately, it may be more effective for people to eat simply (an apple is better, carbon-wise, than a McDonald's apple pie) and to push policymakers to create better public transportation systems, make it easier to walk and ride bikes and approve tougher emission standards for cars and factories.

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In his New Yorker article about carbon emissions, morality, and science, Michael Specter makes a case for utilizing market-based forces to control carbon emissions. A recent piece in Economist.com asserts that prohibitions against trade in wildlife may actually contribute to the demise of species and that controlled, market-driven trade may be more effective at protecting endangered species worldwide.

The economics of environmental issues contain lots of variables and surprises. The pieces in the New Yorker and Economist.com propose innovative solutions to some seemingly intractable environmental challenges. Each piece is somewhat lengthy; below you will find links to each. I can't guarantee how long the pieces will stay on the magazines' websites, so, if you're interested, I suggest you read them soon.

Economist.com: [http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=10807694](http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id=10807694)

New Yorker.com: [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/02/25/080225fa\\_fact\\_specter](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/02/25/080225fa_fact_specter)

As most folks are aware, the environment is the object of intense interest these days, drawing the attention of venture capitalists, conservationists, charlatans, politicians, and just plain folks. Since economic issues are inextricably linked with discussions about environmental topics, this mailing to you highlights a number of different economic reports that we hope might provide insights to support faculty and staff in their planning.

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In recent years, many observers have bemoaned the high cost of living in Sonoma County, noting that expensive real estate in particular makes current county homeowners wealthier but also compounds the challenges facing people who would like to move into the area. A recent Press Democrat piece, "County homes rank 5<sup>th</sup>-least affordable," encapsulated the issue:

Despite falling home prices, Sonoma County still ranks as the nation's fifth-least affordable metropolitan area to buy a house, according to a study released Thursday by a housing advocacy group....

Ten of the 20 least affordable communities are in California; only San Francisco, Los Angeles, Orange County and San Jose are less affordable than Santa Rosa....

The affordability gap widened dramatically during the housing boom, as home prices rose much faster than incomes. While home prices tripled in Sonoma County from 1996 to 2005, the average resident's income grew just 46 percent during the same period...."

The Press Democrat  
February 1, 2008

Carol Lloyd, writing about real estate in the San Francisco Chronicle, highlighted a recent book by Richard Florida entitled “Who’s Your City,” a “hybrid of number-crunching meta-theory and self-help manual” that attempts to explain the economic geography of the future.

“Florida argues (with ample hard evidence from myriad sources) that despite all the predictions about virtual offices and globalization rendering geography irrelevant, where you live still largely determines your destiny.... ‘The world is becoming more global, but it’s also becoming more local.’ These mega-regions are not only siphoning off productivity and talent from other nearby regions but from around the world. What he calls global sorting makes the productive output between the superstar cities and the rest of the world more extreme than ever.

“These superstar cities include obvious choices such as Washington, New York and Boston as well as London, Tokyo, Seoul, and Shanghai. Not surprisingly, the Bay Area fares quite well as a mega-region, too.

“San Francisco made Florida’s Top Five cities lists for all recent college grads, gay and lesbian midcareer professionals, all retirees, as well as empty nesters.... Santa Rosa (meaning the whole metropolitan area) ended up on best lists for gay retirees, singles and gay and lesbian singles, all empty nesters, and families with children.”

San Francisco Chronicle  
March 9, 2008

Florida’s website: [www.creativeclass.com](http://www.creativeclass.com)

Discussion about affordability tends eventually to raise questions regarding the types of jobs available in the Bay Area and the education required for those jobs. Commentators often cite the positive link between college education and salary to buttress arguments for earning a bachelor’s degree.

The New York Times recently carried a piece entitled, “Higher Education Gap May Slow Economic Mobility.” The author, Erk Eckholm, summarized a study made by the Brookings Institute and sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts. He led the article by noting that “...widening gaps in higher education between rich and poor, whites and minorities, could soon lead to a downturn in opportunities for the poorest families.” Other points in the piece:

- Someone born into a family in the lowest fifth of earners who graduates from college has a 19 percent chance of joining the highest fifth of earners in adulthood and a 62 percent chance of joining the middle class or better
- In recent years, 11 percent of children from the poorest families have earned college degrees, compared with 53 percent of children from the top fifth
- “The American dream of opportunity is alive, but frayed,” said Isabel Sawhill, another author of the report. “It’s still alive for immigrants but badly tattered for African-Americans. It’s more alive for people in the middle class than for people at the very bottom.”
- Stuart Butler, vice president for economic studies at the Heritage Foundation, said, “It does seem in America now that for people at the very bottom it’s more difficult to move up than we might have thought or might have been true in the past.” Conservative scholars are more apt to fault cultural norms and the breakdown of families while liberals

put more emphasis on the changing structure of the economy and the need for government to provide safety nets and aid for poor families.

- "...studies show that many poor but bright children do not receive good advice about applying for college and scholarships, or do not receive help after starting college. If we did more to help them complete college, ...there's no question it would improve mobility."

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching is also studying the relationship between college and workplace success. In the Foundation's online publication "Change" (January/February 2008), Paul Barton addresses some of the issues in his piece, "How Many College Graduates Does the U.S. Labor Force Really Need?"

"Conventional wisdom has it that the demand for workers with college degrees is growing rapidly in the United States and will escalate. But the issue of what job qualifications will be important in the future and for whom is complex, with several threads of argument intertwined. First comes the very important question of how an individual can best prepare educationally to do well in the future labor market. Coupled with that question is the need for citizens to have an equal opportunity to attend and complete college, such access being key to the nation's major problem of income inequality among racial and ethnic groups. Second is the question of how many college graduates the nation needs to produce, and with what skills, to ensure our national prosperity in an age of rapid technological change, globalization, and strong international competition."

Barton's piece is fairly long; I've highlighted some of his points:

- "While jobs requiring advanced education might be expanding rapidly, they still accounted for too small a share of the workforce to affect the average level of education needed for all jobs."
- After analyzing data from the early years of this decade, Barton observed that, "the occupations with the fastest rate of growth had the highest literacy requirements, but the average requirements for all jobs were almost identical in the prose, document, and quantitative literacy required in 1986, 1996, and projections for 2006."
- "When professional jobs and long-tenure, high-paying jobs are included as a percentage of all jobs in some future period, the high-paying jobs requiring advanced education are overstated as a proportion of the total employment opportunities actually available."
- "While over 60 percent of people in existing jobs have 'some college' or a post-secondary credential, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Standards only about 3 in 10 jobs *require* a postsecondary certification of some sort."
- Quoting from a study by the National Center for Education Statistics and other studies, Barton noted that while a baccalaureate or associate degree was shown to contribute significantly to earnings ... the economic returns of some college credits ... were negligible—irrespective of the number of credits completed.
- "We must also recognize the fact that higher education makes a very important non-financial contribution to individual and societal enrichment. Its personal benefits, documented through the extensive research ... were perhaps best captured by the late Stephen K. Bailey when he said, 'I get an education so that later in life when I knock on me, somebody answers.' The societal benefits of a better-educated population are also

significant and deep, from a healthier population to one that is better able to carry out its civic responsibilities.”

- “But we should not just accept—and repeat—the now-conventional wisdom that there is an accelerating economic demand for workers with college degrees and that our standing in the global economy is threatened if we do not meet it.”

And since we’ve mentioned jobs and the environment, the San Francisco Bay and Greater Silicon Valley Centers of Excellence, have produced a Solar Industry Workforce Study. They note:

- Solar firms in the Bay Area employ between 6,900 and 8,000 workers. The majority of Bay Area solar firms are non-manufacturing (90 – 95%)
- Three out of four firms are increasing their hiring in the next 12 months
- Solar firms in the Bay Area are expecting to increase employment by up to 17% in the next year resulting in about 1,200 new jobs
- Three out of four employers indicate difficulty finding entry-level employees
- Four out of five employers indicate difficulty finding experienced employees
- Five solar occupations show significant growth over the next 12 months: PV (photovoltaic) installer; Solar Thermal Installer; Sales Representative; Solar Designer/Engineer; Installation Manager/Project Foreman, Employers indicate difficulty in hiring for all five occupations

And finally, a reminder that the SRJC Spring Forum is Friday, April 18, 2008, Shone Farm:

- Topic: Environmental & Sustainable Technology
- Five hours of faculty flex credit
- SWAG
- 20 exhibitors
- Courtesy rides in electric vehicles
- Tour of SRJC’s sustainable gardens, plus chance to win gift basket of farm produce
- Choice of two entrees and two desserts
- Keynote speaker, panelists, information
- Opportunities to chat and work with SRJC faculty from many disciplines

For reservations (seating is limited) or information, please contact:

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Spring 2008