

# SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENT

# McGill

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## NEWSLETTER

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A PUBLICATION FOR THE GRADUATES AND FRIENDS OF THE MCGILL SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENT

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## A Real M.E.S.S. of Activity

**S**itting on the couch in the student lounge of the MSE, Jenn Burt, Ashleigh Akalehiywot and Ray Holberger are settling in for the weekly McGill Environment



Ray Holberger, Jenn Burt, and Ashleigh Akalehiywot, MESS members

Students' Society meeting (M.E.S.S.). The agenda includes a debriefing on the recent excursion to Montreal's recycling facility, the possibility of winter camping next year and planning the year-end party. Leah Tivoli, MESS president for the past two years, will be along shortly.

Burt is responsible for the trip to the recycling plant and a later one to Montreal's water purification facility. She transferred to the MSE's health domain this year from physiology. It was the smallness of the school and the sense of community that appealed to her. "I like the interdisciplinary aspect. My courses now incorporate science and society," says the Vancouver native.

Akalehiywot, whose studies are concentrated in the earth sciences and economics, knew immediately from the interdisciplinary essence of the school that the MSE was for her when she was looking

at university environmental programs from her Toronto home. "This place is amazing; you have courses with a minimum of three professors. You don't find that elsewhere at McGill."

Holberger, who's from Massachusetts, will graduate this year in renewable resource management. He has found the MSE ideal for "someone interested in many things."

"We're being trained as generalists and we're also being trained to question the way things are." He's considering a career in teaching or politics.

As the threesome discuss their experience of the MSE, the arrival of Tivoli is accompanied by the very first delivery of organic food. It's a historic occasion, as the MSE Organic Food Cooperative, initiated by Tivoli, becomes a reality. Already, 40 customers have signed up; some are



Celia Kutz, Organic Food Co-Op Volunteer

students and a few are families looking for easy and reasonable access to additive-free produce. Box loads of carrots, beets, onions and potatoes — all locally grown — become the backdrop to the meeting. Imported broccoli, tomatoes, green pepper and spinach also figure in the order, as do numerous types of dry foods, such as flour, couscous, legumes, rice and quinoa, which, Tivoli explains, "is a nutritious and easily digested South American grain."

"We're thinking about putting together a book on different grains," says Tivoli, a final-year student from Massachusetts who's majoring in the health domain and getting credit for her work organizing the co-op through a mentorship program in management. "We" refers to the numerous volunteers who have over the past couple of weeks publicized the co-op, staffed the sign-up tables in the Leacock Building, and taken food orders. Today there are three helping with the distribution.

Ideas, enthusiasm and action seem to be as abundant as the food in these cozy basement quarters.

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**Editor**  
Sari LaBelle

**Editorial Advisor**  
Helen Dyer

**Research and Article Preparation**  
Bronwyn Chester

**Layout Design**  
Danielle Lefebvre

**Photography**  
Owen Egan



# A Place of Learning



**L**earning through the McGill School of Environment is very special, because it draws knowledge and perspective from many fields of study and tries to integrate them into a balanced, informed view of the environment and the environmental challenges that face humanity. This type of learning requires very special people; people who have a deep understanding of their own areas of expertise and a broad knowledge of other fields that permits communication among people with very different backgrounds. Above all, it requires a curiosity about the world and a respect for the knowledge of others. The professors, staff and students who join the School of Environment are, and are working to be, this kind of people.

In this edition of the *MSE News*, we have profiled our new professors who have joint appointments with the MSE and another department. Together, they are a remarkable group, each expert in their own specialties, but knowledgeable about many fields, and excited about the possibilities for interaction and learning in the School. Individually, and as a group, they have much to offer to students, the University and society. They form a solid core on which to build the School of Environment for the future. I am sure that you will enjoy reading their stories, and I hope that you will get the chance to meet them all, and to get to know them better in the future.

The School of Environment has been a busy place over the last few months. Visits from two world-class figures in the environmental debate were particular highlights: Buzz Holling, a leading thinker in systems analysis and sustainable natural resource management, and Herman Daly, a leader in the development of ecological economics. Both visitors gave public presentations and their exchanges with MSE students and faculty generated lively discussions on various topics. The McGill Urban Community Sustainment (MUCS) project, a student-led, MSE-supported initiative to explore the development of an environmentally advanced residence space, has been generating continuous discussion and activity at 3534 University. The development, by Prof. Colin Scott, of a new field research project in the James Bay region has many students in the Environmental Research course preparing for a wilderness learning experience and adventure. In the meantime, we are all looking forward to a fall term of interest, insight and challenge.

Jim Fyles, Acting Director

## Arun Agrawal



**T**o Political Science/MSE professor Arun Agrawal, none of the actors in environmental debates are inherently right or wrong. Environmental activists often idealize certain groups, such as indigenous peoples or “the community,” as being the agents of positive environmental change while governments or business tend to be viewed as working against the environment. Agrawal helps his students in his Society and Environment, and Environmental Research courses to examine just what it is about the “good” groups that appeals to many environmental activists.

“Their notions are often used by environmentalists to promote changes in people’s actions and lives, and in government policies,” says Agrawal, a recent arrival from Yale University who specializes in the social and political aspects of resource management and sustainable development, largely in South Asia. “Typically, these notions are shorthand or proxies for other more ambitious environmental goals that can suffer as a result of the focus on an appealing concept. For example, many environmentalists think that communities can accomplish conservation far better than any other actors. The desire to achieve community-based conservation is usually prompted by the sense that communities are small, harmonious social formations that, when given the opportunity, make environmental management decisions which lead to better outcomes.”

“But communities are also political entities, with many dissensions and factions. They do not necessarily produce better outcomes in comparison to ‘markets’ or ‘governments’ – themselves also shorthand ‘appealing concepts.’ It is necessary therefore to go under the surface of appealing concepts and assess the underlying aspirations that are supposed to be realized through them.”

This is precisely what Agrawal had his students do in last fall’s Environmental Research class, where they analyzed companies selling wood that is certified as being produced through sustainable practices. Impressed by the quality and usefulness of the students’ work and the commitment shown by the MSE to create critical thinkers and innovative researchers, he sees great potential in the school. “I would like the MSE to be the premier environment school in Canada and within the top 10 in the world.”

## Madhav Badami



In Madhav Badami's view, advocates of the sustainable environment must be passionate about both the environment and social justice. Otherwise, he says, "you lose credibility with half-baked solutions." He cited the example that environmental activists aren't popular among the East Coast seal hunters who lost their livelihood thanks to those advocating for an end to seal hunting.

Badami is a specialist in sustainable urban transportation, with appointments in the MSE and in the School of Urban Planning. He believes that solutions to environmental problems must consider the social and economic ramifications along with the environmental impact. His position on that nemesis of the environment, the automobile, might appear moderate to those who would like to see the polluting, space-gobbling, arable-land-wasting, resource-consumptive, global warming icon of the 20th century banned from the landscape.

"It's easy to say, 'Let's get out of cars,' but it's no good if there are no easy alternatives," he says, using the example of the North American suburban woman on her own with a child and, necessarily, many tasks to do involving transportation, or the Indian who, by necessity, uses a highly polluting scooter to get around.

But Badami, who trained initially as a mechanical engineer and worked for nine years at Ashok Leyland (the profitable Indian branch of the now-bankrupt British Leyland), believes "it's very hard to make change happen. So I try to show what's possible and move on." He elaborates further: "What's possible is a system catering to various needs."

Badami left his job 13 years ago, sold everything and moved with his wife and son to pursue graduate studies in environmental science and community and regional planning in Calgary and Vancouver. Now he resides in Notre Dame de Grace, cycles to work in the summer and takes public transportation in the winter. "We need to minimize the need for cars and make them as clean as possible," he says, adding that what he enjoys most about teaching is the part that "allows him to sit with students and help them think through issues." He adds, "One of the things I think I ought to be doing as a teacher is to help students think about issues in all their complexity, to help them explore the pros and cons of each alternative and its impact."

## Sylvie de Blois



Sylvie de Blois is one of a growing number of scientists working in an emerging area of research. Jointly appointed in both the MSE and Plant Science, de Blois is a landscape ecologist who specializes in studying the agricultural landscape. With recent trends moving towards planting larger and larger fields with fewer and fewer crops, there might seem to be little ecology for de Blois to understand, but the hedgerows between fields, the vegetation growing alongside drainage ditches, the wood lots and sugar bushes that remain from the original forest, and even rock piles and walls, provide refuge for a wide range of plants and animals to survive and move through the cultivated landscape.

De Blois studies the plant populations of these usually "linear habitats," noting the variety and dispersal of species from one woodlot to another along a hedgerow. Wild ginger, garlic and ginseng, and trillium are some of the forest herbs she tracks.

Using aerial photographs and satellite images, de Blois studies the pattern of mosaics and lines comprising the natural habitats in agricultural landscapes, often making historical comparisons of the patterns. While researching her doctoral thesis at Université de Montréal, de Blois became intimately acquainted with the landscape of Quebec's most south-westerly corner.

Biodiversity is a concern for de Blois and she's keen to understand and document the contribution to biodiversity and to agriculture made by species that reside in such marginal bits of land. She also wants her work to make a difference in the way agricultural land is used. In the past 50 years, for instance, the intensification of agriculture has resulted in a loss of natural habitats.

"Wild biodiversity," de Blois argues, "has practical value such as maintaining the essential balance of the earth's atmosphere, protecting watersheds, renewing soils, recycling nutrients and preventing soil erosion."

De Blois believes that being at the MSE and having contact with a variety of researchers working in diverse areas ranging from agronomy and anthropology to natural resource science and philosophy provides a great opportunity to "work together toward conserving biodiversity at the landscape scale while maintaining productivity in the fields!"

## Jaye Ellis



Jaye Ellis was among the first of the MSE's jointly appointed professors. Hired in 2000, the professor of law teaches in the areas of international legal theory and philosophy, and in international regimes for environmental protection.

When she was hired by McGill, Ellis was working on a doctoral thesis entitled "Soft, or non-binding law, in international environmental law." At the MSE, the native of Calgary teaches Environmental Research and International Environmental Law.

Ellis's interest in the environment stems from her interest in law that crosses geographical and academic borders. "The environment brings together a number of legal issues I'm interested in; environmental problems compel international law to make serious adjustments, much like human rights law."

What most inspired Ellis at the MSE was the multidisciplinary and collaborative nature of the courses. "It comes down to the people. We all come from different disciplines but with a similar interest in the environment. I've learned a lot through team teaching, and my contact with the other teachers has led to collaborative research."

Ellis cites her work with professor of management Steve McGuire. "He had followed the international negotiations on persistent organic pollutants, known as the Stockholm Convention. I'd done research on the precautionary principle (principle 15 of the Rio Declaration that a lack of scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponement of environmental protection). We have presented a number of papers together."

She likes to tell the story of being invited by the Dean of Law to the opening of a new interdisciplinary centre in peace studies. Walking into the room, Ellis found she knew a good half of the people. Why? Because her MSE colleagues are such an interdisciplinary lot.

"There's this remarkable network that you immediately plug into when you're at the MSE."

Where students are concerned, Ellis believes that the challenge for the MSE is to "train students who aren't like us — specialists — to ground them in a discipline while training them to be able to see across disciplines. That's what I want."

## Frédéric Fabry



On the eighth floor of Burnside Hall, home of the Department of Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences, there's a poster of planet Earth. The letters at the top read "Save the humans." Frédéric Fabry, whose office is just down the hall, refers to it while explaining why he cares about the environment.

"We live in this environment and we have to understand it and take care of it so that we will still be able to live in it."

Fabry is an atmospheric physicist who works with radar to try to understand how storms function in order to help farmers, hydrologists, aircraft controllers and communications technologists know better how and when to prepare for a storm.

People controlling dams, for instance, need to know if they should open the dam before a predicted storm, he explains. Telecommunications, especially now that we need more microwaves of higher frequencies, are very vulnerable to storms. The lower frequencies are already overloaded, he explained.

"The telecommunications companies are getting interested in rainfall and radar can be used to predict rainfall over large areas. Companies are beginning to design alternative routes for the microwaves and they need maps of precipitation in order to do so."

Whether teaching Research Methods or The Global Environment in the MSE, or Principles of Remote Sensing in the Department of Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences, Fabry tries to get across to the students that the atmosphere is a huge ocean in which we live. Climate has shaped evolution and civilizations," he explains. "All our infrastructure is geared for weather. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, the roofs aren't designed to keep out the rain. It's important to be conscious of the role weather plays because with climate change, the weather will change and we'll have to change with it."

Philosophizing on students and the nature of change, Fabry, in his mid 30s, makes the observation that with such phenomena as global warming, the nature of staying involved with an issue changes dramatically as compared with the issues of his day. "Earlier 'Armageddons,' such as the nuclear arms race, appear to have disappeared," he says. Acid rain and the damage to the ozone layer are history, for most.

"Things come and go. But for this generation, global warming may be their only doomsday scenario."



## Rebecca Hardin



In Rebecca Hardin's estimation, having an anthropologist on the team teaching the Knowledge, Ethics and Environment course gives "flesh and blood to philosophy, economics and ethics." Flesh and blood, in the form of "bush meat," as it turns out, are also components of her research.

Hardin researches the social, health and environmental consequences of the "extraction" industries of the Congo basin. Mining and logging in that resource-rich part of Africa attract thousands of migrant and immigrant workers who need food, roads and entertainment. "The result says Hardin, "is a massive over-hunting of wild animals. So, you have many animal rights activists involved with their western beliefs versus African beliefs regarding animal life."

The rapid social and economic change produced by the extraction economy also results in civil conflict and spread of disease. "There is a lot of desperation and few solutions," says Hardin, pointing out that every logger who migrates from the savannah in the north to the rainforest of the south brings 10-12 family members.

Still, she sees a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. "The knowledge base among Africans is up and you see more and more African activists bridging the gap between the Westerners and the Africans."

She hastens to add, however, that one of the reasons why there are relatively few local activists for the causes of conservation or human health is because so many have been lost to AIDS. During Hardin's first year in the Central African Republic, working in 1991 as a Peace Corps volunteer beekeeper (with a BA in literary theory, to boot), there were 10 forest reserve guards, she recalls. Now, three are dead from the virus.

In her work at McGill and the MSE, Hardin hopes to raise money so African students may come here to study at McGill, and to send McGill students to Africa. One of the attractions of McGill and Montreal was the French element. "I work in the francophone world, which makes it hard to teach in the US. I was commuting to Paris to teach and supervise dissertations. Here, I can do my supervising in French and English and there's no more commute."

## Greg Mikkelson



Ask Greg Mikkelson why he left Rice University in Texas for McGill and he'll tell you it was for the "change in the seasons," as well as the fact that the MSE "was the most interesting academic program I'd heard of." Mikkelson is a philosopher of science "with a strong interest in protecting and promoting biodiversity." He's also a labourer in the field of environmental ethics, an area "which hasn't realized its potential," he explains from his top-floor office at 3534 University, the roofscape of the city he adopted a scant 18 months ago stretching below.

"The assumptions of ethics are still economic," he laments. "We can only speak of satisfying preferences."

Through Environmental Thought, the course he has taught with MSE professor Peter Brown, Mikkelson has students explore a different ethic by reading three classics of American environmental literature: Thoreau's *Walden*, Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. The latter he considers an "amazing scientific synthesis," and exemplary of the fact that science doesn't have to be fragmented.

Using the three works, the students are asked to address an environmental problem that's close to home. In class discussions, students have the opportunity to speak of their particular motivation for studying the environment.

Mikkelson attributes the strong feelings he has for the natural world to the summers he spent "running around the woods" in northern Wisconsin, where his grandfather had built a cabin. "Nature is greatly threatened now by human consumption," he says, adding later that he is helping to protect biodiversity in six different parts of the world, including the forest of his youth and Lake Baikal, in Siberia, through the creation of land reserves.

Creating such protected areas and "getting away from the automobile" are two of his favoured ways of conserving or remediating the habitat necessary for biodiversity.

At the MSE, Mikkelson finds he has the opportunity to realize his aspirations, "both intellectual and activist," and he'd like to see the school "harness the formidable intellectual synergy in the service of environmental activism."

## Student Kudos



Congratulations to Kate Bergen, Suzanne Love, Myriam Broué, Julie Smith and Vanessa Dziarmaga, who were the recipients of Canada's Energy Efficiency Awards for 2003. The team of students won the award for their research into the barriers to energy efficiency conducted for "Union des consommateurs," as part of the requirements for Environmental Research Methods. To read more about the project, visit <http://oe.nrcan.gc.ca/ambassadors/home.cfm>.

## Anthony Ricciardi



**A**nthony Ricciardi is a man with a mission to wake up the Canadian government to biological pollution, an environmental scourge he considers almost as complicated as global warming. Referring to the expanding list of invasive exotic species such as the zebra mussels that plague the Great Lakes Basin, the Japanese seaweed now wreaking havoc on

the Eastern seaboard and the West Nile virus, Ricciardi says that unless Canada gets serious about bioprotection, we are vulnerable to major economic and ecological repercussions and threats to human health.

Mostly, however, Ricciardi, an aquatic ecologist jointly appointed in the MSE and the Redpath Museum, worries about threats to biodiversity. For the past three summers, for instance, 15,000 birds have died from botulism on the shores of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. The Great Lakes Basin is Ricciardi's territory and one of its invasive species, the zebra mussel, proved to be the source of the problem.

The tiny striped mussel is a hitchhiker in the ballast waters of European freighters. When it dies, it consumes massive quantities of oxygen at the bottom of the lake, creating ideal conditions for the development of the bacteria causing botulism. Then, a fellow exotic invader, the round goby fish, eats the mussel and, in turn, is consumed by various species of birds. At the top of the food chain, the birds themselves fall prey to botulism.

Ricciardi points out that such situations are not isolated and are becoming increasingly frequent as global trade increases. Roughly 95 percent of trade is carried out by ships, he says, and an estimated 10,000 species live in the ballast water discharged here. Most of the organisms don't survive, he notes, but the devastation from those that do can be widespread and unpredictable.

To the students in Global Environment and the Ecology of Species Invasions courses that he teaches, Ricciardi emphasizes the importance of understanding the mechanism of the invader. "Sometimes, you will hear people propose a natural predator for the invader," he says, "but it's got to be something that will eat the invader faster than it reproduces and the predator itself can't become a problem. You have to be able to say to the shipping industry, this is how to stop it. In order to have that sort of certainty, you have to be well-grounded in your science."

## Lisa Sideris



**L**isa Sideris is sensitive to apocalyptic visions. As a teenager at bible camp, she read the Book of Revelation and began to worry. "I was preoccupied with the world coming to an end," she recalls, sitting in her office in the Birks Building. While still in high school, long before the term global warming

had entered common parlance, Sideris wrote a paper on the subject. "I was probably reading about the greenhouse effect [the term used before global warming], in a book by Carl Sagan, or one of the other popular scientists I was reading at the time, and the subject alarmed me."

The trinity of environment, ethics and religion was already settling into Sideris's outlook on life and shaping her studies at Indiana University, in her home state. After her BA in anthropology and the history and philosophy of science, Sideris went on to do her MA and PhD in the area of ecological theology. Her doctoral thesis, now book, titled *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology and Natural Selection: Suffering and Responsibility*, examines the Christian notion that "we have the greatest obligation to the organisms that suffer the most. It's the extension of Jesus having healed the sick, the idea that we should do the same in nature. It's very interventionist," she says, "and doesn't take into account the complexity of nature."

After teaching philosophy and environmental studies for a year at Pace University in Manhattan — and having her apocalyptic fears nearly realized when the World Trade Center was attacked — Sideris was thrilled to be hired by the MSE and the Faculty of Religious Studies, where she has a joint appointment.

"I was eager to teach environmental ethics more frequently. In many ways, this is an ideal position for me because my greatest interest has always been in religion, ethics and environment," says Sideris, who teaches a course on the subject in religious studies as well as co-teaching the MSE core course, Environmental Thought.

Sideris is particularly interested in the Presbyterian spirituality of Rachel Carson, author of the seminal work in North American environmental thought, *Silent Spring*. "I think her reverence for life comes from her religion," says Sideris, who is editing a collection of essays on Carson to celebrate the 40th anniversary of her book. "The Calvinist concern is with humans taking over the role of God, that human arrogance is the cause of environmental devastation."

## Renée Sieber



It's the techno-activist side of Renée Sieber that got her involved in the MSE some five years ago. "I'm not an environmentalist per se; I'm interested in there being a level playing field, that people have the tools they need to improve their lives," says Sieber, who is appointed in the MSE and in the Department of Geography.

Her training in urban planning and specialization in Geographic Information Systems equips Sieber to teach others how to use the tools of geographic information-gathering and analysis to increase their chances of being heard above better-funded and well-informed opposition groups. Sieber's pupils might be citizens of a neglected neighbourhood wanting the city to make improvements, or tree activists wanting to locate old-growth trees in a particular area. They could also just as easily be a group of conservationists needing maps, for example, of the relationship between elephant habitat and human settlements in Kenya.

Sieber cut her teeth on the use of geographical information while a student living in a run-down neighbourhood of Kalamazoo, Michigan. Making maps by hand, she, along with other students and residents of the neighbourhood, documented the location of the drug-dealers, abandoned buildings and vacant lots and translated it all into maps. The residents used the information to present their case for neighbourhood improvement to the local police and city hall.

With her MSE students in Environmental Research, Sieber tries to drive home the message that GIS, which allows the electronic mapping of different variables and the layering of one map over another, can be a powerful tool for environmentalists. "I'd like all the students to understand about the technology and to know what sorts of questions you can and cannot ask with it," says Sieber. One of her students, for instance, is using GIS to map all the sports utility vehicles in the West Island area of Montreal in order to show its residents the size of their "ecological footprint."

To broaden the MSE students' understanding of the relationship between computer technology and the environment, Sieber has developed the course Computer, Society and Nature, to be offered next year, and is advocating for a domain in technology and environment. "Some students have the attitude that technology, collecting data, doing cost-benefit analyses and so on, is the work of the 'enemy.' I've been an activist myself, so I know the conflict. But what I tell the students is, 'At least you have to know your enemy.'"

## Joann Whalen



The decision to leave her position as soil science researcher for Agriculture and Agrifood Canada, in Lethbridge, Alberta, for a teaching job at McGill was an easy one for Joann Whalen. She knew of McGill's strong reputation in soil science research, and relished the opportunity to interact with people from other disciplines.

Teaching as part of the team in the Society and Environment course, with agricultural economics professors Joan Marshall and Paul Thomassin, Whalen is impressed by her students' drive and intelligence. "They want to make a difference in the world," she says. At the same time, some students come to the course with preconceived ideas about agriculture's record in relation to the environment and the security of our food supply. "The students come in with some simplistic views and the idea that the solutions are easy. All we try to do is show the shades of grey and all the stakeholders to be considered."

Whalen, whose grandparents farmed in her native New Brunswick, understands that many students are unaware of the reality of farm life in Canada. This is hardly surprising, she notes, since only 3 percent of Canadians live on farms. "People are always interested in knowing about agriculture and I try to bring a balanced perspective. My attitude is, this is the way the world works and you should understand it before you criticize," says Whalen, who teaches in the MSE and in the Department of Natural Resource Sciences on Macdonald Campus.

"In Society and Environment, I teach about sustainable development and I use agriculture as an example." In her own area of specialization, for instance, Whalen researches the benefits of low-tilling and no-tilling farming, a practice that reduces the expenditure of both energy and fertilizer in the fields. She also studies the behaviour of earthworms and was recently awarded a Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council grant to track these highly efficient soil fertilizers so that farmers may know how to gauge the contribution of their underground allies in terms of their fertility management plans.

## Development Office News

This edition of the *MSE News* is a snapshot of the tremendous amount of enthusiasm and diversity that has made the School of Environment such a unique and successful learning community. Many alumni and friends were able to hear about the important difference their support makes to sustaining this learning environment, first hand, during the School's first student phonathon to thank those who had made an annual gift to the School this year.

As the School completes its 5th year of existence more and more people continue to be drawn to the School's vision and programs. We are thrilled to report that the number of gifts to the School increased by 40 percent this year. This incredible growth is testimony to both the growing concern the public has for the environment as well as the tremendous level of generosity and loyalty of our alumni and friends.

Annual gifts to the School are used to support initiatives that inspire students and faculty beyond the capabilities of our annual operating budget. A wonderful example to highlight is the McGill Urban Community Sustainment (MUCS) project. This groundbreaking project has brought together faculty, students and staff from across the University to build support to develop an ecologically sustainable residence, community centre and educational facility on the downtown campus. Thank you for helping to make this initiative and many others possible.

For more information on gifts to the MSE please contact Sari LaBelle at [sari.labelle@mcgill.ca](mailto:sari.labelle@mcgill.ca).

or (514) 398-8977.



Stacey Byers and Stephan Becker, MSE Student Phonathon Volunteers

## Life After Graduation

**B**enjamin Desurmont has found his McGill Diploma in Environment extremely useful in his work at the European Commission. "It helps me understand the experts," he says on the phone from his office in the Department of Animal Health and Welfare in Brussels. At the moment, for instance, the EC is drafting legislation regarding major animal diseases, like hoof and mouth disease, and one of Desurmont's tasks is to communicate the experts' opinions in language understandable to the public among the 15 member countries and the 10 from Central Europe soon to join.



Benjamin particularly enjoys his work because it contributes to the creation of a European political union, a concept he strongly believes in. In fact, it was Desurmont's interest in the process of European unification that brought him to McGill in 1994 to study comparative politics. While doing his BA, Desurmont learned that it would be possible for him, an arts student with a long-time interest in the environment, to also study for a Diploma in Environment.

"I suffered in the science courses," he laughs. "But I was so much prouder of my B's in science than my A's in political science."

Upon returning to Europe, Desurmont completed an MA in Science, Society and Technology at Maastricht University in Holland, where he did an internship at the EC. Then, unable to find an immediate position at the EC, he worked for the European Road Federation, a truck transportation lobby group. "Yes, I worked for the 'bad guys,'" he jokes, adding that he wrote their papers against the "liability regime," better known as the "polluter pays principle."

"So, I know their arguments and tactics," says Desurmont, adding that is knowledge may come in handy once he passes the competition to get into the Environment Directorate General, the unit of the EC that most interests him. "I would like to work on transportation," says the 28-year-old, who believes that Europe will have to become far more ambitious in making public transportation the logical — fastest, cheapest and least stressful — choice.

"Public transportation ought to be the logical choice, not simply the moral choice for those already concerned with the environment," says Desurmont.

## Upcoming Events:

**Open Meeting** of the Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change Research Community, **October 16-18, 2003**, in Montreal, Canada. For information, visit: <http://sedac.ciesin.columbia.edu/openmeeting/>.

**August 25 to September 2, 2003** - "Discover Mac" - Faculty orientation for all new undergraduate Agricultural and Environmental Sciences students studying on the Macdonald Campus.

**August 26, 2003** - "Discover McGill" - University and Faculty orientation for all new undergraduate students.

**Homecoming Open House:** Downtown, **October 16**, 3:00-5:00 pm. Mac Campus, **October 17**, 2:00-5:00 pm.

For information on more upcoming events, please visit our website: [www.mcgill.ca/mse/](http://www.mcgill.ca/mse/)

