

Camille Erickson '14 on life in the Ecohouse

By Karen Weldon

While the solar hot water heater and the dual flush toilets are permanent structures that make the EcoHouse sustainable in and of itself, each year a new community of students bring their own ideas of what it means to live sustainability to the home. This year Camille Erickson '14, along with six other juniors—three each semester—have been, and will be, bringing their ideas of sustainable communal living to the EcoHouse. “I’ll be the connecting point, if you will, between two groups of people,” Erickson said. Erickson finds this changing make-up of the community an asset, as she reflects on the accomplishments and challenges of the past semester, and looks forward to the spring. This past semester, Erickson and her three housemates—Nadia Fou Kune, Kyle Gename and Stephen Peyton—have started several new projects to connect the EcoHouse to the rest of the Macalester community. Along with hosting outreach programs such as movie nights and skill shares, they also spearheaded a waste report in conjunction with the Environmental Studies Department. Since the beginning of the semester, the group has been sorting and weighing all their trash in order to collect data for future projects in Environmental Studies. Erickson, however, has found buying produce at the St. Paul’s Farmer’s Market the most rewarding commitment that they’ve made. Through this commitment, Erickson and her housemates have connected with each other and the greater Twin Cities area. The forty-five minute bike ride to and from the market, no matter the wind or the rain, has been a time for Erickson to bond with her housemates. Moreover, buying at the farmer’s market allowed them to meet farmers in the area. “Sellers started recognizing us because we’d come each week...These personal connections kept us coming back,” Erickson said. Along with these successes, Erickson and her housemates have also faced challenges as they try to find common ground on their differing perspectives on environmentalism. “I felt like [the EcoHouse] was not this exclusive house for top-notch environmentalists,” Erickson said, reflecting on how the group members have learned from each other. While Erickson and Gename grew up in the Midwest, Peyton and Fou Kune grew up in Japan and Mauritius, respectively. Additionally while Erickson has approached environmentalism as an activist and lifestyle choice, some of her housemates have come to sustainability from an academic perspective. These differing backgrounds have played a crucial role as Erickson and her housemates made choices about things like types of personal care products and purchasing food in bulk. In particular, their different perspectives contributed to their decision to set their thermostat at 60 degrees. “While I’ve grown up with my thermostat always set at 58 degrees, Nadia is from Mauritius where it’s always like 100 degrees out... I think deciding what temperature to set our thermostat at is the only time we’ve gotten into an argument,” Erickson said. As Erickson, explains, living sustainability requires some sacrifices like being a little cold. However, perhaps for Erickson, one of the biggest challenges was realizing that she had to sacrifice some of her own expectations, because each member of the household had a different level of commitment to creating a sustainable community. In particular, Erickson wishes the group had spent more time to build community. “[Out of my housemates] I probably love communal living the most,” Erickson explains. While in the beginning of the year, Erickson and her housemates were meeting two or three times a week to discuss and reflect on the projects they were working on, as the semester got busier, their meetings dwindled to once a week. “Next semester, I hope to spend more time having communal time, and more reflection time,” Erickson said. As Gename, Peyton and Fou Kune prepare to move out and the group evaluates what they’ve accomplished, Erickson has the chance to make community a higher priority, as the one Ecohouse dweller connecting this semester residence with those next spring.