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# For GISP, the grass is greener on the roof

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Brown is turning green. As activists and administrators alike embrace high-profile environmental causes, though, there is one project that is a bit more under the radar - and over the heads of a few Brown students. Six upperclassmen are installing a green roof - a roof covered with vegetation to reduce a building's environmental impact - for a Group Independent Study Project this semester.

Michelle Beaulieu '08, Louisa Bukiet '08, Anna Duncan '08, Julie Flynn '08, Nicole Poepping '08 and Eric Rudisaile '09 came up with the idea for this GISP while driving and talking about their common interests.

Though they concentrated in a variety of subjects, from urban studies to environmental science to engineering, they all were intrigued by green architecture. They then decided to create "the first green roof on College Hill," their Web site's slogan reads.

"Green roofs send an important message - small gardens can have an impact and make cities more livable," Flynn said. "People love green spaces. They increase the quality of life."

In green roofs, vegetation replaces traditional roofing materials. Green roofs "provide insulation for the building," among other benefits, Duncan said. Green roofs reduce heating and cooling costs, increase the life expectancy of the roof and reduce the carbon footprint of the building. They also improve the surrounding aesthetic environment and reduce water runoff, according to the GISP's Web site.

The group wanted the green roof to provide an educational opportunity and increase awareness of environmental issues at Brown. They also "hoped to work with the Sustainable Food Initiative and add to what they do at the community garden," Beaulieu said.

With the guidance and permission of Michael McGarty, scenic designer for the Department of Theatre, Speech and Dance and the GISP's adviser, the group selected the University-owned building at 50 John St. as the site for their roof. McGarty said the department asked him to "create a multi-disciplinary design center" in the building, currently the home of a set-building workshop.

But after organizing the proper paperwork for the designated site, the group's plans were sidelined by Facilities Management during spring break. Facilities Management told the students that "it was too much too soon," and the liabilities were too great, Flynn said.

Representatives from Facilities Management did not return calls for comment.

Because they could no longer build the roof on the Brown campus, the GISP members decided to install the roof on a New York brownstone owned by one student's family. Duncan said he would have liked to have had "more of an impact on the Brown campus."

"The community, city and state should look to Brown for leadership in environmental projects," McGarty said.

Green roofs come in two varieties: extensive and intensive. In an extensive green roof, vegetation provides an "alternative to roof materials," Beaulieu said.

The soil is normally six inches deep and the plants used are often grasses or ones that are low to the ground and require low levels of maintenance.

Intensive green roofs are heavier than extensive green roofs and are considered to be more like gardens - designed so that people can walk and enjoy themselves there.

The intensive green roofs provide more aesthetic appeal, while the extensive green roofs are more functional.

One major disadvantage of green roofs is the cost of installation. "Retrofitting can be expensive," Flynn said, but he added that in the long run, the amount saved on energy consumption will displace the costs of installation.

Also, green roofs are "very heavy additions," Beaulieu said. But the group said weight was not the reason why the project could not be completed. A structural engineer from the Rhode Island School of Design's Department of Architecture found the structures of 50 John St. to be very strong, according to the GISP's Web site.

Gretchen Peterson, manager of the Curricular Resources and Academic Support Center, said she finds that green projects are very popular among GISP applications. "Green architecture is really a popular theme every year," Peterson said.

Though there are a number of courses at Brown on green architecture - such as ENVS 0410: "Environmental Stewardship and Sustainable Design" and ENVS 1400: "Sustainable Design in the Built Environment" - Flynn said she would like to see the University match student interest in the topic.

"There are not enough professors to teach it," Flynn said. The two environmental studies courses are both taught by the same professor.

Though the GISP members won't be the ones to build it, Brown's first green roof is on the way. The University is planning to install a green roof on the new Creative Arts Center, scheduled to be completed in 2010.

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