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Professor Little

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Problem Set 2 Additional Essay:

The College on the Hill

The College of the Holy Cross is situated on Mount Saint James which overlooks the city of Worcester. When Holy Cross was founded in 1843 the campus was composed of one lone building. Fenwick hall functioned as the dormitory, library, dining hall and the academic building. With the expansion of the college, Holy Cross’s campus began to spread over the hill. The spread however led to many problems for the college in their attempt to meet student needs yet allow for Holy Cross to maintain a state of tranquility that came with the natural world around the college. The biggest problems were faced by the various architects that designed the many buildings on campus. The steep slope of Mount Saint James forced the college to make a tough decision in their attempt to maintain the natural world that surrounded the college yet provide adequate housing and safety for the students. In the eyes of the college presidents the natural world they were trying to maintain was the hill and the surrounding community. The designs and construction of the buildings was a reflection of the effort they put forward and today’s campus is still trying to maintain that natural space.

When the first building was built the Mount Saint James was mostly an apple orchard, a farm and at the bottom of the hill, a swamp. The early architects built Fenwick hall in between the farm and the orchard. Holy Cross quickly incorporated the orchard and farm into the college. By using the produce generated by each, the college was self sustained for many years. The integration of pre-existing properties into the Holy Cross facility exemplifies the college’s attempt to maintain the natural environment. With the increase in enrollment came a demand for more dormitories. In order to meet the growing needs however the college was forced to make a decision about how they were going to construct the buildings on the steep pitch. The easy option was to dig into the hill and create a flat surface to build on. The college however refused to do so in an attempt to preserve the natural landscape and maintain the hill which became the trademark of the school. This resulted in the architects designing the buildings in an I-shape to offer maximum dorm space while ensuring structural stability. The I-shape also served as symbol for the Jesuit principle of Magis. The design of the I-buildings is a reflection of how each student is in control of their own future and how it is up to them alone to continually strive for more.

 The additions to the campus were also a reflection of an underlying symbolism that accompanied the development of the campus. As new technology emerged and the times changed so did the college. The college spread slowly and each building represents a different time period. When electricity was made available Holy Cross built a dorm that was fully wired and made the Jesuit priests stand and awe of the building. The college was also very independent in the design of the buildings. The major architect who designed the majority of the older buildings refused to follow the current architectural style and designed what he thought would make the college impressive. The college also refused to make changes that were deemed necessary by the chapter of Jesuits who had final approval on all building plans. The independence of the college further supports the principle of Magis, the college strived for more in their attempt to develop a college campus that was aesthetically pleasing yet preserved the natural environment. The only drastic change that was made to the environment was when the college filled in the swamp with ash to make the playing fields, and even this was a benefit to the surrounding community. The college purchased the ash from a local barb *(should be barbed)* wire plant stimulating the Worcester economy. The involvement with the community has been a cornerstone for the college, with their encouragement of community service.

The campus today is still an example of environmental preservation; although the college has now taken up the entire hill it has made it a priority to preserve the historic landscape that once dominated the mountain. The main way to complete the goal was to make the college a registered arboretum resulting in the pristine preservation of the landscape. When walking by Hogan you can see an apple tree, a reminder of what the hill once was. The college on the hill has adapted to the changing times and yet was able to maintain a close knit community with the city of Worcester, the class body and also the natural world.

*Patrick,*

*Your essay is well-written and a very good summary of Father Kuzniewski’s talk on the history of the campus. The main comment I have is that I think it is very questionable that the current campus is really a “pristine preservation” of the landscape. The arboretum trees have very little to do with the trees you would see in an untouched forest, for instance. Our campus trees are memorials to people connected with Holy Cross. They are arranged and carefully tended to ensure their health. In a natural forest, the trees have to compete with each other and the undergrowth for space and sunlight. So while there are “natural things” for us to contemplate on the campus, I think it is more accurate to say that the space has been molded by humans for human purposes.*