2014 Elections: EPC Student Representative Board of Directors

Statements of Candidacy
(9 peer nominations for 7 available elected positions)

Lyle Birkey

For those of you who are learning of this initiative for the first time, the purpose is to be a bottom-up mode by which the student body of the Energy Policy and Climate program can communicate with the larger Hopkins Administration on matters of importance to the student body at large. It began back in January when a few of us EPC students got together, had a conference call, and set up a strategy for how we can help strengthen our student body and help mature the program of which we will eventually be alumni. Since then, we have drafted a memorandum, set up rough timeline of deliverables, retrieved some basic student demographics information, and garnered the support of key JHU faculty. The initiative has received consistently positive feedback from all involved parties and would not have gotten to this stage without the widespread support of our fellow students. That said, there’s a lot of work left to be done!

As the initial conceiver of this initiative, I am pleased to see it taking shape. Our professional program faces three substantial barriers: 1) being a relatively young program, 2) being located outside of Baltimore, and 3) conducting many of our classes online. These barriers can compound to separate our program from the larger Johns Hopkins institution, but can be overcome by forming a dedicated conduit by which student needs are evaluated and reported. What is the program doing well and, for areas of improvement, what would we recommend as attainable solutions?

I would be honored to serve you all as a member of the Board and I humbly ask for your vote. If elected, I will follow through on the initial goal of creating a student-wide survey that will ask substantive questions pertaining to the technical rigor of our curricula, the level to which student opportunities and services are provided and accessible, and allow the means for additional thoughts from you to be communicated and considered. Quantifying and evaluating the input from this survey will be a critical deliverable to the Hopkins
Administration and will elevate the profile of our program from the inside out.

**Travis Cutler**

One of the greatest challenges we face as a nation is the lack of a comprehensive, sustainable energy policy. Energy policy affects every level of society, from the economy to the environment; yet we’ve been unable to develop a national energy framework that will address the litany of issues we have been confronted with for decades. The creation of the JHU Energy Policy and Climate program affirms the importance of this issue, and establishes a platform to help shape emerging leaders in the field of energy and environmental policy. I want to do everything possible to see that our program is equipping students with tools that can enable them to develop viable, long-term solutions to our policy dilemmas.

In order for a new program like this to successfully mature, it is essential that we establish strong lines of communication between the student body and the faculty. For students who attend class part-time at a satellite campus or online, it can be difficult to correspond regularly with administrators. A Board of Directors will help establish a formal channel for productive exchanges between students and faculty that can help strengthen our program. The EPC program is helping to fill a critical vacuum in the policy world. Likewise, a Board of Directors will help fill a vacuum that can potentially form during distance or post-graduate learning experiences.

For the last five years, I have had the opportunity to work within the realm of public policy. My job with a Virginia based energy firm has given me the ability to participate in policy development, and interact with policymakers at the State and Local level. I enrolled in the EPC program in 2012 to better learn the subtle intricacies of energy and environmental policy, and to gain a better academic understanding of their broader implications. The knowledge I’ve gained thus far at JHU has been a perfect complement to my professional experience. The ability to evaluate the principles of meaningful energy policy on both a scholastic and practical level has provided me with a unique perspective that can be used to help strengthen the EPC program.

**Andrew Fishbein**
I am honored to have been nominated by fellow Energy Policy & Climate (EPC) students to serve on the first Student Representative Board of its kind at Johns Hopkins University (JHU). As a relatively new division within the larger Environmental Sciences & Policy department, I believe EPC has much room to grow into an even more well-known and highly-regarded program. I hold the strong conviction that the involvement of the student body in helping to shape the future of EPC will benefit the program’s internal standing within JHU, its external reputation, and, most importantly, the students themselves. For these reasons, I was very happy to contribute to the initiative to create the Student Board along with some of my most thoughtful and outstanding classmates.

For the past seven years I have been employed at the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF), an American nonprofit non-lobbying institution dedicated to promoting transatlantic cooperation on a broad range of policy issues. My specific job is in legislative affairs, a field that requires me to understand complex sets of interests that shape policymakers’ and stakeholders’ perspectives. This has provided me experience relevant to the endeavor of representing our diverse student body.

I believe that effectively voicing student concerns and empowering the student body to take a role in the future of their graduate education is of primary concern to all of us in EPC. I believe that I can make a substantial contribution to this effort as a member of the Student Representative Board of Directors. I respectfully ask for your support.

Jessica Harris

I am Jessica Harris, an engineer and environmental project manager at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). I conduct National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) reviews for interstate natural gas infrastructure. In this role I interact with the public, industry, and government officials to ensure a full review of environmental issues. My time at FERC has inspired my interest in understanding the balance between environmental protection and energy. As an EPC student, I’m grateful to have exposure to a network of professionals that share my interests.

My time in the EPC program has been very valuable, which is why it would be a privilege for me to join the EPC Student Board and ensure that the needs of EPC student are met. The EPC program is young and has enormous potential. With 85% of EPC students currently employed
and courses offered online or at the satellite campus in Washington, D.C., it can make for a fragmented program unless we take an active role in engaging the Johns Hopkins University administration. I welcome the opportunity to be a voice for EPC students and play a part in strengthening our program.

**Seth Heald**

I started in the EPC Program in the fall of 2013, and am currently taking my third class. I graduated from Haverford College in 1975 with a B.A. in economics and received my law degree in 1978 from Georgetown University Law Center. I practiced law for 35 years with the U.S. Justice Department, retiring last fall a few weeks after starting in the EPC Program.

I currently serve as vice chair of the Sierra Club’s Virginia chapter (a volunteer position), working on a variety of climate-related issues. The Club is the nation’s oldest, largest grassroots environmental organization and is actively engaged in working to alleviate climate change.

I’m a bit older than the average EPC student, which perhaps gives me a different perspective on the program. I want to learn as much as I can about climate change and what we can do to address it, and I’d like to see the EPC Program flourish and produce graduates who have successful careers that allow them to play an active role in working on climate change and related energy issues.

**Taylor Jordan**

The Energy Policy and Climate program at Johns Hopkins is a wonderful experience that has lasting effects on our lives. This program meets at a unique intersection of energy and environmental issues and policy analysis. Students of the program gain a deep understanding of current policy issues while also developing the skill set needed to help lead our country forward. With this in mind, nurturing this relatively new program is my number one goal. Seeking professors of the highest caliber to teach students, as well as developing new and pertinent course topics will allow EPC to develop into a competitive program that benefits us all. Although EPC is one of the lesser known degree choices at Johns Hopkins, we can always strive to better the program and coursework, and in doing so, also better ourselves.
We as students chose to attend Johns Hopkins University because of its high standards of excellence and ability to cultivate our interests. The EPC program continues this legacy of excellence. We have the privilege of continuing our education with top notch professors and pertinent coursework. Just like a changing climate, however, our coursework and standards are always changing. We must meet these changes with evaluations of the status quo and seek to expand our knowledge and abilities. Through this, we will position ourselves for a brighter future, where we are sought out as leaders in our field. So with that, I ask you to elect me so that I may speak on behalf of our student program in order to expand our curriculum, seek out the best professors to increase our knowledge, and continue our history of success and excellence. Thank you for your consideration.

Meegan Kelly

It is an honor to have been nominated for the EPC Student Representative Board of Directors. Personally, I am supportive of any effort to strengthen the EPC program and make it a more rewarding experience for current and future students, so I would be glad to serve in this capacity.

I especially identify with “career transitioning” students in both Baltimore and Washington. I began the EPC program in 2012 while living in Baltimore and after working for many years as a fundraiser for environmental NGOs (Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, National Aquarium, Ocean Renewable Energy Coalition). Currently, I am employed part-time as Associate Director of Development at the Washington Animal Rescue League and as Federal Policy Intern at American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE) in Washington, DC.

I have always enjoyed being involved in my community and have actively served on nonprofit boards in the past. I graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Journalism and Philosophy from the University of Miami in 2006 and I expect to complete the EPC degree requirements and finish my capstone in August 2014.

Dustin Thaler

My name is Dustin Thaler, and I’d love your vote for my election as an EPC Student Representative. Now on my seventh course, I consider myself a veteran of the program, a program in which I’ve learned a tremendous amount from every dimension and angle. I’ve learned about the technology, the physics, the law, the finance, the chemistry,
the economics, the natural systems, the politics, and the national security-considerations of climate and energy policy. I’ve taken every format of class: in-person, online, out-of-program. And all of that schooling has been reinforced and fed back into by my position with the Energy Future Coalition, an energy policy think tank. Quite simply, I freakin’ love to learn, and I freakin’ love energy policy. It is that same enthusiasm that I’d bring as a Student Representative.

The bottom-line goal I would pursue is crystal clear: to help raise the prestige and caliber of the program. This, not only so that the next generations of EPCers will go through a program even better than the one we did, but also because success in achieving that goal would benefit current and former students, too. Better classes now, while they still can be had for many of us, is very important. Meanwhile, a robust alumni base and increased program prestige are positive accruals to the hard work and financial resources former students and soon-to-be graduated students have already put in. I have some ideas in mind for ways to accomplish this—first and foremost is resolving dissatisfaction with professors and courses—but I want to listen to your ideas and concerns, too. All I’d ask is that you grab a beer with me sometime.

**Cory Vezina**

This past February I submitted my capstone and turned in the final assignment towards earning my Masters of Energy Policy and Climate degree. I started this program in the spring of 2011 by taking the pre-requisite Chemistry class. Odd as it sounds, that pre-requisite class was one of my favorite and most rewarding classes I took during the program. That class set me up with the mindset that I was entering into a well-developed, enlightening program where I would truly gain a wealth of knowledge and experience. It didn’t exactly turn out that way.

I have no regrets and have been very thankful for this program at JHU. Without it, I probably would not have landed my previous job at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and definitely would not have gotten my current job as a contractor at the Department of Energy working with energy efficiency data. It is also important to mention that I have made some fantastic new friends in the energy industry who are driven, intelligent, excited about energy, and all-around great people. In addition, I think one of the best things about this program is that it seems that everyone enrolled is either already in the energy industry or in someway connected to it. The
networking opportunities have been excellent. The classes on the other hand could use some work. As I alluded to earlier, my hopes for a fully developed program fell a bit short of the mark, but I am confident in saying that we have some extremely talented and educated professors teaching our courses. We also have some less than ideal professors and less than ideal courses. I hope that this Board can help bolster our current selection of talented educators, enriching classes, and maintain the high level of networking opportunities that I have experienced.