Summary:

I collected used running shoes from the student body and faculty at Luther College to send them to the organization, Soles4Souls, located in Sheldon, Iowa. There, the shoes will be distributed to people in need of footwear in the U.S. and around the world – especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.

What I did:

For my Environmental Philosophy Action Project, I took on the idea of organizing a shoe drive that is going to be donated to the organization, Soles4Souls, a group whose mission is to collect used running shoes and cleats and send them to all corners of the world to people in need of shoes. As Fall Break was approaching and students were getting ready to go back home, I figured the sooner I got the word out, the better the turnout would be for students to bring their shoes from their homes to donate. When getting started, I had to present a flyer and some information of the organization to the SAC Director, Trish Neubauer, and the Facilities Director, Roger Jaeger, in order to get permission to place boxes in the Regents Center and the Dahl Centennial Union.

After receiving the necessary signatures, I collected four cardboard boxes from the Luther Bookshop, decorated them with facts about the organization, and placed them in the Union and Regents Center, two boxes per building. I placed one box in the entrance of the Union, one in the Marty’s lobby, one by the Legends Center entrance, and one by the laundry pick-up in Regents. I strategically placed the boxes in these areas so that the majority of students and athletes passing by would see them.

With about three days to go before Fall Break, I created small bright green flyers mentioning the program and box locations, which I then placed on every table in the cafeteria, as well as doors on buildings and bulletin boards in the dorms. I figured that advertising would be the best way to get as much attention from the student body as possible. As students returned from Fall Break, so did the running shoes. All four of the boxes I had set out were overflowing with shoes, so much that I had to empty them in my house’s garage and set out the boxes again. People who may have forgotten them during Fall Break donated more shoes after Thanksgiving Break. After counting them up, I had collected over 200 pairs of shoes.

I contacted the Soles4Souls organization via e-mail, asking the best and cheapest way to get the shoes to them. Mehgan Heaton contacted me back a day later, giving me the contact information of Unishippers, since they give discounts to any shipping that is sent to Soles4Souls. Once I had contacted Unishippers, it was confirmed that they would give me a discount and that the price for shipping
between 200-500lbs of shoes would be $97.70. Jon Jensen, Head of the Environmental Department, was willing to cover half of the shipping costs for my project while Greg Lonning, Head of Luther’s Wellness Department, said the Wellness Department would agree to pay the other half of the cost.

Finally, in order to keep this simple – but effective – shoe donation going, I had to connect with other groups and organizations at Luther that would be willing to take ownership of the project. I contacted Joe Thompson, Head of Luther’s Physical Education/Health Department, to ask if the LASO (Luther Athletes Serving Others) club would like to inherit the boxes and raise money for future shipments. He did not respond to my e-mail requests. I also asked the same of Luther’s ECO club, but got no response. Then I contacted Steve and Yarrow Pasche, Coaches of the Luther Men’s and Women’s Cross Country teams, in hopes of the Cross Country teams raising money for the project and taking ownership of it. A few days later I received enthusiastic confirmation from Steve Pasche that the teams would be happy to be in charge of this project and raise money for a couple (2-3) shipments of shoes to be sent out each year. This way, people can continue to bring back shoes from their houses or their athletic shoes after the season is over for years to come.

**Background:**

Footwear is a basic need that most of us take for granted every day. While most of the world does not have one adequate pair of shoes, Americans have an abundance of footwear sitting idle in our closets. It is estimated that Americans have 1.5 billion pairs of unworn shoes lying in their closets, shoes that are rarely worn. Last year alone, Americans discarded more than 300 million pairs of shoes. When these shoes break down in the landfills, the toxic glue that holds the shoes together can leak into our water supply and the atmosphere. For us, comfort and style are the primary reasons for the footwear we select. However, for those without shoes the healthcare benefit is the most urgent reason footwear is so desperately needed. A quality pair of shoes protects one’s feet from scrapes, cuts, and contaminants that lead to potentially serious healthcare issues, such as the common Hookworm disease in Africa. Soles4Souls can save these millions of shoes from the landfills by cleaning and shipping them to needy people around the world, regardless of race, religion, class, or any other criteria, who will treasure the gift for years to come and prevent them from disease. This way our water and air quality can be relieved from toxins, and at the same time, those whose lives are in danger and in need of footwear can be helped.

**Why support this?**

Luther students and faculty should support and contribute to this shoe drive because it is necessary for us to know that there are people around the world in need of basic essentials such as footwear – things we take for granted. By giving shoes away, one is doing a deed for the environment because the shoes that they aren’t using anymore will not take up any landfill space or releasing toxins into the environment. Instead, the used shoes will be used by someone else in need of them,
and the shoes that are not fit for reuse (shoes that are ripped or have holes in them) will be sent to one of the several Nike factories where they will be ground up and used to make tracks and tennis courts – saving space and resources.

**Project Changes:**

At first my action project was aimed at collecting used running shoes and donating them to the organization, One World Running, located in Boulder, CO. Having lived in Colorado, I had been aware of this group and their mission. However, when it came to discussing shipping options, it would have been very expensive to send the shoes to Boulder. So after searching for other shoe collecting groups, I decided to send my shoes to the organization, Soles4Souls, a group whose mission is almost an exact duplication of One World Running’s mission. My reasoning behind this change was that Soles4Souls has four “main” drop-off locations in the U.S., one being in Sheldon, IA. This means that I would only be shipping the shoes less than 250 miles, as opposed to the 800+ miles they would have gone had I shipped them to Boulder, CO. This made more sense both economically and for carbon efficiency, helping save money and the environment.

Besides changing the location and organization of where I was going to ship the shoes, a few other changes occurred in the final days of my project. One was that Steve and Yarrow Pasche (Cross Country coaches) agreed to have the Men’s and Women’s Cross Country teams take ownership of the project after the first shipment was sent out, in order to keep the shoe-drive going at Luther. Another change, when it came to the shipping cost, was that the Environmental Department (Headed by Jon Jensen) and the Wellness Department (Headed by Greg Lonning) would split the shipping costs for my first shipment, each department paying $48.85. Thankfully, this saved me from paying for the project from my pocket.