

Students warned of the evils of over-consumption

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Few authors can honestly say they don't care whether you borrow or buy their book.

Vicki Robin, president of New Road Map Foundation and co-author of "Your Money or Your Life," however, told an audience of 50 last Friday that consumption is, in fact, not adding to our lives.

To those who gathered at Parrington Hall for the forum, Robin expressed her less-than-controversial opinion that Americans consume too much and, more interestingly, that all of the country's material wealth has delivered little in terms of happiness.

At the beginning of the lecture Robin spoke about "consumption as the most pressing issue in America," saying that the problem is not only the amount we consume, but the manner in which we do it.

According to Robin, the average American believes in the right to consume and is not concerned about the morality of it.

"We don't see the effect of our over-consumption because it's happening in someone else's backyard," Robin said.

Robin told the audience that the one thing Americans have failed to purchase in all of their consumption is happiness. She said in the last 20 years "we have doubled the size of our houses and halved the time that we spend with our children."

In a continuing series of

talks that has included speaking to the President's Commission on Sustainable Development and appearing on the Oprah Winfrey show, Robin is working to combat the idea that a successful economy is based on continual growth.

And it looks like people are listening. Currently the best-selling book, co-authored by Robin and Joe Dominguez, "Your Money or Your Life" has sold more than 300,000 copies. An additional 30,000 consumers have purchased the authors' tape course.

The success of the book is strongly linked to the non-profit corporation that Robin presides over. The New Road Map Foundation exists to provide support to the many burgeoning explorers of reduced consumption and financial security.

So far, the support is strong. All proceeds from their book and speaking engagements are donated to the foundation because, simply speaking, they don't need it.

Robin mentioned that while many figures in government have been less than responsive to her ideas, this didn't worry her. She told those gathered that basic changes come from people first, later commenting that "government is the trailing edge of society" and that "it only exists to rubber-stamp what the grassroots does."

And what can we do to reduce consumption?

Robin suggested writing

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down all expenditures and then tabulating them at the end of the month. It is certainly not coincidental that these happen to be steps one and two of her nine-step plan.

The end product sought by the New Road Map Foundation is a 20 percent decrease in consumption. This, however, as noted by one questioner, would probably not be enough. More than a 4-to-1 disparity between the median income of

U.S. citizens and that of the rest of the world's citizens exists. But as Robin replied, she wanted to appear practical as compared to those advocating a 60 to 80 percent reduction that would likely be needed for a sustainable economy.

Although you might want to save some money by borrowing "Your Money or Your Life," don't bother looking for it at the UW libraries — they don't have it. However, if you do run out and purchase a copy, try to lend it out after reading it. Robin thinks it might make you feel better. ♦