



Any one of Peter Schlosser's three jobs could be a full-time undertaking. First, he studies Earth's hydrosphere as Vinton Professor of Earth and Environmental Engineering and professor of earth and environmental sciences. Second, as senior staff scientist at Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, he is involved in an array of large scientific programs. Finally, he is the associate director and director of research at the Earth Institute.

Rather than keeping them separate in his mind, he tackles all three together. "They all retain some distinct character," said Schlosser. "But in my daily life, they are all intertwined." Not only are they intertwined, but they also speak to the way Schlosser has always approached his work.

As an undergraduate student in his native Germany, he chose to study physics at a university with a long tradition and broadly-based research and teaching, because, he said, he wanted to see science as a holistic part of the entire university. Physics, he felt, gave him the opportunity to acquire a set of skills that would be useful for studying a wide range of scientific problems with societal relevance.

He eventually ended up in environmental physics, in part because of a natural curiosity in the world around him. Since arriving at Columbia in 1989, Schlosser has continued to feed his omnivorous curiosity about his surroundings by fostering connections with faculty members from departments across campus.

That broad perspective has helped him become a key part of efforts to establish and expand the Earth Institute. Schlosser has been integral in guiding the Institute's research agenda, which focuses on developing practical solutions to the problems that humankind faces in designing a sustainable future. At the same time, he recently founded the Columbia Climate Center, a part of the Earth Institute that specifically addresses society's needs for strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

"Whether we can turn the world from a non-sustainable to a sustainable path has been on my mind a lot," said Schlosser. "I don't think we have a real answer yet, but the important thing is that we can see a path forward that is supported by technological innovation."

Schlosser emphasizes the need for communicating the messages of science clearly and accurately to a public that is often charged with deciding how to allocate resources to achieve a sustainable future. Exactly how to do that is a difficult question, but he feels it is possible with involvement from many different fields across campus.

"That, to me, is enough motivation to continue working and to look for solutions," he said.

B.S., Heidelberg University (Germany), 1981; M.S., Heidelberg University, 1981; Ph.D., Heidelberg University, 1985

Sustaining the Environment

PETER SCHLOSSER

Vinton Professor of Earth and Environmental Engineering and Professor of Earth and Environmental Sciences