The Illinois Student Senate Environmental Sustainability Subcommittee has a vested interest in promoting environmentally responsible campus policies and projects in an effort to encourage responsible and sustainable practices at the University of Illinois. One of the projects which our committee has been discussing since the beginning of the semester has been encouraging the student body to wean off of disposable water bottles and promoting reusable water bottles, with the greater goal of curbing litter and wasteful discarding of recyclable bottling materials. Through primary surveying, we have all heard many students state that they would be in favor of more trouble-free water bottle filling stations. Our first goal in this process is to encourage the use of reusable water bottles or thermoses, et.al., thereby relieving the dependency on disposable bottled water sold on shelves and in vending machines across campus. With this in mind, we propose to retrofit campus water fountains with water filling stations, in the form of glass filler attachments by which users can easily fill reusable water containers. Through our primary surveying as a committee, we have heard much in the way of student support for a greater number of water bottle filling stations in main buildings on campus. Reaching the primary goal of providing students with an easier alternative to purchasing bottled water will represent the first step in our effort to address the educational, financial, and ethical issues that concern the disconcerting use and waste of disposable water bottles on campus.

Reducing overall campus body regular purchase of bottled water significantly reduces our output of non-degradable plastic waste. This is without explanation, and not only has a positive impact on the environment, but also the university’s role as an academic institution. As a Tier-1 research facility, the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign should have every resource available to pursue a progressive, tangible, and short-term action such as this. With the vast majority of campus water fountains not equipped with glass filler applications, campus is arguably under-equipped for students willing to abandon disposable water bottles for an easier and less costly solution. Campus is also under-equipped for students seeking to conveniently refill their reusable water containers. It stands to reason that inconvenience is a decisive factor in encouraging people to change their behaviors or habits. This project certainly goes beyond campus standards, as glass filler-fitted water fountains are not currently required by building codes, even for new constructions. The Business Instructional Facility, itself a LEED-Platinum structure, does not feature a single glass filler upon any of its water fountains. Diverse and determined faculty members and students are constantly engaged with one another to pursue higher goals, and this project should be no exception. Ultimately, because of the the university’s standing among other institutions, we have a unique responsibility to adopt this project. Our success would be example of how principle and pragmatism can rise above any profit motive or intellectual paralysis. This serves as inspiration to others to take equally if not bolder initiatives in a similar direction.

The water filling station locations are determined by where the most student and faculty traffic is, and where such devices are absent. Our committee task force surveyed a number of campus buildings in the immediate vicinity of all three Quads, along with a number of campus libraries in which many students also spend a significant portion of their time. UIUC Facilities & Services will be responsible for conducting the physical aspect of the project, as well as the communication between water fountain manufacturers for retrofitting parts.

This project, in its conception and much of its execution, is by a committee of students who use their individual and distinct strengths to advance a single mission. The following point is that this project also serves and engages a student body. The committee must account for general opinion and needs, while students must be receptive of the solutions that are provided. What can be said about this project’s relation to other sustainability efforts is that it is uniquely inclusive of a demographic that is often neglected. Organic foods, alternative fuel powered cars, and so forth, are often abstract concepts and at best, accessible to society’s wealthier members. This project on the other hand, allows all to participate.

This project also includes the participation of the Students for Environmental Concerns (SECS) RSO. This student organization has taken on a “Ban the Bottle” campaign. They will be engaging students in water taste testing events on the quad during the end of the Spring 2013 semester and Fall 2013 semester. SECS will push for students to use a reusable water bottle with the glass fillers already in place and the new ones installed by SSC.

Once again this project was created by students of the Student Senate Environmental Sustainability Committee (ESC) and this project was made for the students on campus. Interactive educational water taste testing events put on by the ESC and SECS will directly impact UIUC students and they will benefit by the installation of the glass fillers in their use.

If the project is funded the only possible ongoing funding would be related to the maintenance of the glass fillers. Such maintenance would be used to repair or replace damaged a glass filler. Dean Henson, superintendent of Building Maintenance, has agreed to handle any costs associated with these specific glass fillers after the SSC funding installs them.

No other sources of funding have been obtained or applied for at the moment. The Student Senate Environmental Sustainability Committee is working towards applying for funding from the Student Senate to install additional glass fillers on campus. This application will be submitted either by the end of the Spring 2013 semester or the beginning of the Fall 2013 semester.

This project will inform students and faculty on the cleanliness of the water on our campus. The Mahomet Reservoir that our University’s tap water comes from is very safe and clean drinking water. We want to educate all students on the purity of the tap water on campus. This will be done through our water taste testing events, educational posters and media outreach. Our project will also encourage the use of reusable water bottles, which in turn will decrease the amount of water bottles used on campus and decrease the waste that accumulates from them. Although plastic water bottles are recyclable, not all of them are recycled and even recycling requires energy. The project goes beyond current standards and policies by promoting the use of tap water over plastic water bottles that can potentially harm the environment.

Publicizing info: Articles in the Daily Illini, information up on the iCAP Portal, post on the F&S facebook page, send out information via the SECS/ISS newsletters, and with the second survey we will also have an e-week message that goes to most campus employees - which uses the iCAP portal page as the first link - and promotes the overall goal, not just the survey. Lastly, we will put informational posters above the water fountains to increase publicity and education.

We will survey students on the quad prior to the taste test (and count the number of people who do it). There will be a question asked about how often they drink bottled water and a question on why they do. There will then be a follow up survey after the glass fillers are installed to see if their opinions or behavior have changed.