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The independent student newspaper at the University of Illinois

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Future of sustainability on campus appears positive



BEN TSCHETTER

The University of Illinois Solar Farm on Mar. 30, 2018.

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Students have access to recycling bins all around campus on a daily basis but may not realize the bigger picture. This includes recycling and campus sustainability as a whole.

Various sustainability strategies have been implemented on campus, including using solar energy and promoting biking. As a gold-level sustainability campus, the University follows sustainability plans which were first established in 2010, known as the Illinois Climate Action Plan.

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Goals such as becoming a carbon-neutral campus are established by iCAP and implemented throughout various departments on campus as well as various committees, which include both students and faculty.

“My perspective on sustainability is we have to support human development with infrastructure development,” Ximing Cai, associate director for the Institute for Sustainability, Energy and Environment said. “Meanwhile, we really want to reduce the interference with the environment and to use the resources more efficiently,” Cai said.

Cai added that the goal of sustainability is to leave future generations with more opportunities and fewer problems.

Research and education are an important part of sustainability on campus. Cai said that the University wants students to leave with an understanding of how sustainability efforts, such as renewable energy, work.

Morgan White, the associate director at Facilities and Services for Sustainability, said that the idea of sustainability on college campuses arose from higher education officials who realized that although universities do not cause as much environmental damage as manufacturing plants or power companies, they still had reasons for implementing sustainable practices.

“Really, it’s about finding solutions, using the resources here that can be implemented and trying to spread that awareness not only to neighbor organizations, but also to the students and instill in our graduates the understanding of how this is important,” White said.

White said she hopes University graduates who go all over the world will be able to use their sustainability knowledge to make global differences.

Sustainability efforts on campus are extensive and happen daily. iCAP includes multiple objectives specifically focusing on aspects of sustainability implementation such as water management, transportation, agricultural and land use, carbon offset and waste and recycling.

Objectives are supported by SWAT (Sustainable Working and Advisory) Teams which are made of two students, two faculty and two staff members. Teams work weekly to create recommendations which go to higher sustainability committees on campus.

SWATeams are not the only way for students to get involved in sustainability on campus. The Student Sustainability Committee works with SWATeams but allocates money to various projects.

Nick Heyek, junior in Engineering and the chair of SSC, said the committee receives applications for funding from students, faculty and staff but they normally prioritize student applications in order to allocate over \$1.1 million annually.

“Our funding comes from two annual student fees, which total to just over \$14 per student,” Heyek said. “Specifically, the fees are the Sustainable Campus Environmental Fee and the Cleaner Energies Technology Fee.”

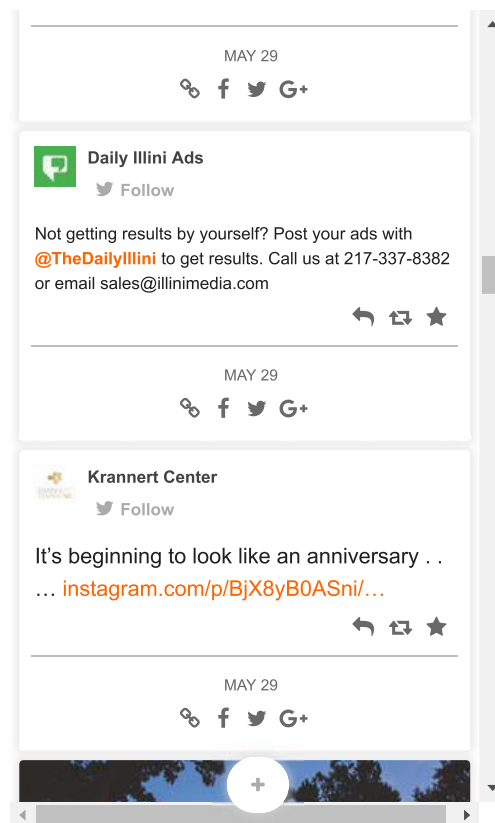
Projects that fall under iCAP initiatives, funded by the SSC, include the campus solar farm, Illini Solar Car, the Sustainable Student Farm and the Illinois Biodiesel



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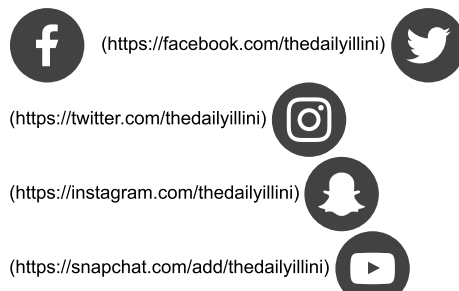
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White said that other than SSC, there are multiple RSOs and volunteer opportunities that students can participate in to make an impact on campus sustainability. Bike Month events, Illini Lights Out and Red Bison all work on various sustainability initiatives around campus and are open for students to join. To promote education, there is also a Sustainability minor open to undergraduate students.

White said that implementing sustainability on a large campus can be difficult because of the de-centralization that occurs from the various University departments. Campus-wide policies are difficult to create and implement, but sustainability groups are hoping to have one made.

“I want people across campus to be aware of what we’re doing with sustainability. We get at least 10,000 new people every year. How do we get people to know about it (sustainability) and to recognize it?” White said.

The University has received multiple awards acknowledging its sustainability efforts. Awards include being gold-level sustainable, an EPA Green Power Partner, a bicycle-friendly designation and a tree campus designation.

Implementing sustainability on campus has a positive impact on students, who have more learning opportunities and the community as a whole.

“The world faces very serious challenges in the way of sustainability, and the world will have to evolve in many ways to address those challenges. Furthermore, graduates of this university hold leadership positions in countless fields all around the world,” Heyek wrote. “By making sustainability a part of students’ experience at this school, it may be considered in the influential decisions that they make in their professional life. In this way, the University can foster long-term change.”

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