

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Sustainability Internship Program
ENVS 491: Campus Sustainability Intern
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1. Introduction

Since 2010, The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has been following The Illinois Climate Action Plan (iCAP), which is the “strategic framework for meeting the Climate Leadership Commitments to be carbon-neutral by 2050 and build resilience with the local community”¹. The plan includes 56 objectives organized into eight categories: Energy, Transportation, Land & Water, Zero Waste, Education, Engagement, Resilience, and Implementation.

1.1 Background

As part of my minor, Sustainability, Energy, and Environment Fellows Program (SEE FP), I’m required to take a capstone course. This semester, I fulfilled this course requirement through an independent study, working one-on-one with my instructor, Eric Green, to collaborate on the next step of the iCAP. The focus was on the education aspect of this plan, specifically Section 6.4, which is about designing a sustainability internship program.

1.2 Goals

My overall goal was to “develop a sustainability internship program by partnering with businesses, nonprofits, local governments, and cultural institutions in Central Illinois”². I aimed to learn as much as I could about current sustainability programs and begin building relationships with sustainability-minded organizations in the community.

1.3 Objectives

- Research current opportunities which connect students with private and public internships that focus on any aspect of sustainability
- Contact programs that are the most applicable to the goals for the program
- Recommend how the university’s sustainability internship program should be set up
- Present my process, findings, and recommendation to the iCAP team

2. Methods

This section will explain all of the steps I took to learn about current sustainability focused internship opportunities.

2.1 General Research

The first step was to understand what a sustainability internship looked like by researching organizations with sustainability programs. I began by specifically looking at universities and discovered there are two types of programs. One is more project-based and focuses on partnerships outside of the university and the other is more initiative-based and works closely with campus offices and departments to raise awareness of sustainable practices. Eric and I determined that our program should follow the project-based approach because one of the goals was to build relationships with the local community rather than groups within the university.

My next step was to attend the iCAP monthly meeting, where I got a lot of great suggestions on how to move forward and organizations to research and contact. One idea was to investigate general job sites, specifically Handshake. I found that there are opportunities to join possible sustainability events, but there was no specific hashtag for sustainability and at that time there were no postings that matched the program's needs.

Also, I investigated the resources recommended by the Illinois Green Business Association. Some of these resources included Loyola University's School of Environmental Sustainability, UIUC's Gies College of Business - Illinois Business Council, and the Champaign County Economic Development Corporation.

2.2 Program Research

During my initial research of universities with project-based sustainability programs I found that Cornell University had great partnerships with their community³. I reached out to Cornell University and two of their partners, Tompkins County Climate Protection Initiative (TCCPI) and Tompkins County Energy Task Force (TCETF) via email with questions about their partnerships. I was interested in understanding what a continued relationship looked like, if there were weekly/monthly meetings, and what internship opportunities came out of these partnerships.

After the conversation with the iCAP team, I was also interested in learning more about the Minnesota GreenCorps (MGC), which aims to "preserve and protect Minnesota's environment through projects that increase communities' resilience to climate change"⁴. While their website was very informative, I still had remaining questions about the program, so I reached out via email. I received a response from Shelby Gamache, the program's coordinator and set up a phone call with her to discuss my questions further.

In addition, I reached out via email to UIUC's Interdisciplinary Health Sciences Institute (IHSI), which collaborates with faculty and staff, students, community organizations, health systems, and community members to create a healthier society⁵. I hoped to learn more about two of their

programs, WeCU and Community Academic Scholars, which both had pieces I was interested in implementing into our program. Fortunately, Eric and I were able to set up a Zoom meeting with Emily Stone and Kelsey Hassevoort, who are co leaders of IHSI to further discuss their programs.

Also, I reached out to local government representatives Lacey Rains (Champaign), Scott Tess (Urbana), and Dennis Donaldson (Savoy) about sustainability internships in their respective towns. Lacey Rains provided a list of departments with paid and unpaid internships available in Champaign. Scott Tess directed me to Kevin Garcia, who is part of the Urbana planning division, but I was unable to connect with him. Although Dennis Donaldson responded to my email, I was unable to have a conversation with him to learn more about sustainability opportunities.

Towards the end of the semester, Eric and I had another Zoom meeting with Cassie Carroll and Anthony Santarelli from the Illinois Green Business Association, which is a “non-profit organization that helps businesses integrate green practices through education and engagement”⁶. During the meeting, we discussed their program, the structure of our future program, and they provided many resources for us to research. In addition, they helped me get in touch with their contacts at Greenest Region Corps, who previously had not responded to me.

Throughout the semester, I tried to contact Greenest Region Corps, a “partnership between the Mayors Caucus and AmeriCorps that pairs volunteers with GRC communities to lead sustainability projects”⁷, with no luck. However, with Cassie’s help I was able to connect via email and set up a Zoom meeting with Katie Friedman and Edith Makra, who are in charge of this environmental initiative.

3. Results

This section delves into the results of my email, phone call and Zoom meeting conversations with all of the organizations I contacted throughout the semester. After acquiring all of this valuable information, I created a chart to compare the different programs I had researched to easily identify the information I was missing that would help form my recommendation for the sustainability internship program. The categories I compared were the structure of the organizations, the number of participants and members, duration of the internship, funding, budget, marketing strategies, partnerships, the sustainable categories of projects, and project examples.

3.1 Programs

In terms of Cornell University's partnerships, I was informed that representatives from Cornell partake in monthly TCCPI meetings and they present to the group from time to time. In addition, interns from Cornell's engineering school have assisted in collecting and analyzing energy and water performance data for the Ithaca 2030 District, which is TCCPI's main program apart from monthly meetings.

During my phone interview with Shelby Gamache from MGC, I learned that the structure of the program is three full time employees (including Shelby) from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, which is a state organization and eight part time employees. They connect their 48 members to various host sites for 11 months. Although it is more of a professional development program rather than internship, members still receive a stipend of around \$25,000. All of their funding comes from a competitive federal grant and state funds. This allows host sites not to pay anything, ensuring smaller organizations have the same opportunities as larger organizations. These local organizations are recruited through two major marketing tools: word of mouth and newsletters. Their partners are mostly schools and nonprofit organizations. And in terms of the specific projects, they need to align with 1 of the 4 topic areas, including reducing air pollution, community outreach, green infrastructure improvements, or waste reduction.

When Eric and I met with Emily Stone and Kelsey Hassevoort via Zoom we had an important conversation about all of their programs and the possibility of forming a partnership with their WeCU program. The goal of this program is to match students with community partners for volunteer hours that students can count towards their degrees. It is managed by two co-directors, Katie Shumway the Director of the Community Learning Lab (CLL) in the School of Social Work, which has connections with hundreds of local agencies and Emily Stone, who works with their 800 members. The duration of the program depends on the students and their projects. In the past, this program usually required around 40 hours in the summer and 20 hours per semester, but they're changing the requirement to a total of 400 hours over 4 years. In terms of marketing, CLL knows all of the organizations one-on-one so they can reach out about a specific need, such as a sustainability project or send a mass message about any general projects available. Since their focus is health, the sustainable categories would mostly revolve around the environment and health rather than just the environment.

The second IHSI program is the Community Academic Scholars and their objective is to offer around 16 students the opportunity to pursue community-based research projects with faculty mentors in Urbana-Champaign over the summer. This program is also managed by two co-directors, Emily Stone, who connects with the students, and Kelsey Hassevoort, who connects with the faculty mentors. The budget for this program is around \$3,500 per member to cover living expenses, which is paid for by the university and the community partners. Their outreach is similar to Minnesota GreenCorps with relying on word of mouth and newsletters, but they put more emphasis on in person meetings with the partners, which are all local organizations. Also, this program doesn't offer any projects that relate to sustainability.

In terms of information from the local representatives, the email I received from Lacey Rains is below:

Departments with paid internships

Information Technologies Department - 1

Legal Department (Law clerk) - 2 or 3

Neighborhood Services Department (Code Compliance) - 2 or 3

Planning and Development Department - 2

Public Works Department (Environmental Sustainability) - 1

Departments that have offered unpaid internships for college credit

City Manager's Office (Office of Equity, Community and Human Rights)

METCAD

Police

Neighborhood Services Department

GRC

IGBA

During the Zoom meeting with IGBA, they provided us with many resources to look into, including Champaign County Economic Development Corporation, Entrepreneurial Center, IL EPA, Randolph Street Garden, Environmental Defense Fund, and the Greenest Region Corps. As of now, the only organization I have contacted is the Greenest Region Corps, but I think it would be beneficial to look into the other organizations as well.

The last organization I spoke to was the Greenest Region Corps. This program is managed by two individuals, Edith Makra the Director of Environmental Initiatives and Katie Friedman, who works with the students and their relationships with the host sites. They connect their 12 members to various host sites for 11 months. These members receive a living allowance of around \$18,500 for 10 months of service, which is mostly covered by AmeriCorps, who contributes around \$16,000. In addition, the host community contributes \$20,000 to cover all other expenses, including the remainder of the living allowance, health insurance, payroll taxes, travel, training, etc. When GRC began, they focused on direct emails to recruit organizations to host, but now they mostly rely on word of mouth and it has been quite successful. In terms of their sustainable categories, each project is different and depends on the host community's current initiatives and needs.

3.2 Comparison Chart

	Minnesota Green Corps (MGC)	IHSI - WeCU	IHSI - Community Academic Scholars
Structure	3 - Full time 8 - Half time	Katie Shumway - Local agencies Emily Stone - Students	Emily Stone - Students Kelsey Hassevort - Faculty mentors
Members	48	800	16
Time	11 months	400 hours/year	10 weeks
Funding	\$400,000 - AmeriCorps \$600,000 - MPC	N/A	½ Internal institution ½ Partners Always looking for grants/donors
Budget	\$25,000 / member	N/A	\$3,500 / member
Marketing	- Word of mouth - Newsletters - Flyers - Phone Calls	CLL - one-on-one Emails - Specific need - General projects	Community partners - Meetings Students/faculty - Word of mouth - Newsletters
Partners	Public entities School district Higher ed Nonprofit	Carle Hospital Champaign-Urbana Public Health District Multicultural Community Center	Champaign Urbana Public Health Dept Champaign County Forest Preserve Urbana Park District
Sustainable Categories	Reduce Air Pollution Community Outreach Green Infrastructure Waste Reduction	Environment & Health	N/A
Project Examples	<u>Waste Reduction</u> Help reduce the amount of food waste generated in the retail and food service sector while providing quality, fresh, wholesome food to the hunger-relief system	Creating programs for seniors with Circle of Friends Running a needs assessment by phone with local artists with Urbana Arts and Culture	Addressing COVID-19 Health and Educational Disparities Improving Health and Access for Disadvantaged Communities

	Greenest Region Corps (GRC)	Tompkins County Climate Protection Initiative (TCCPI)	Illinois Green Business Association (IGBA)
Structure	Edith Makra <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Director of Environmental Initiatives Katie Friedman <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student interactions 	7 full time positions: Business, Education, Local government, Nonprofit, Youth, Coordinator, Intern	Anthony Santarelli <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Directs and maintains the Technical Advisory Groups Cassie Carroll <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develops partnerships with businesses
Members	12 (usually recent grads)	1 (engineering student from Cornell University)	?
Time	11 months (October - September)	1 year	1 year (minimum) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensures the time spent training and getting comfortable with the relationship is worth it
Funding	\$16,000 - AmeriCorps \$20,000 - Host community	Grant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From local foundation 	Depends on the business
Budget	\$18,500 / member	?	Depends on the project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If unpaid, try to align with seminar for class credit
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct emails - Word of mouth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Newsletters - Social media 	Certification brings businesses in Focus on keeping those relationships
Partners	<u>10 sites total</u> Village of Park Forest City of Evanston Rockford Metropolitan Mayors Caucus	Cornell University City of Ithaca	A few examples from an extensive list: Marriott, Busey, Green Home Experts, Loyola University, Oak Park Township
Sustainable Categories	Climate, Economic development, Water, Energy, Land, Leadership, Mobility, Sustainable communities, Municipal operations, Waste and recycling	Anything related to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and accelerating the transition to a clean energy economy	Relies on what the client needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Common categories: waste, energy, packaging

Project Examples	Write sustainability plans Create a natural area management plan and a wetland management plan	Collect and analyze energy and water performance data for the Ithaca 2030 District	Within IGBA: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Sustainability business consultant- Marketing / outreach- Campaign- Research
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4. Recommendation

This section discusses my recommendation for the university's future sustainability internship program. I will explain my thought process behind each aspect, which includes all of the categories listed in charts above.

4.1 Structure

For the structure, I recommend two co-directors who work full time with one focusing on the student interactions and the other focusing on the community interactions. This would hopefully ensure all of the responsibilities don't fall on one person. It's a similar setup to GRC, IGBA, and both of IHSI's programs and it seems to be working well for all of them. As the program grows, there may need to be more people, such as a program coordinator or other positions, but for now, I believe two is sufficient.

4.2 Members

In the first year, the goal should be around 5-10 students. Although I believe that many people will be interested in being a part of a sustainability internship program, it'll be difficult to convince students to join without a reputation or concrete expectations. At my meeting with GRC, I learned that it's important to keep the number of members somewhat small. This ensures the director will have more time to connect with the students and the students will be more likely to form meaningful relationships with the other students allowing the program to be a more personal experience and create a sense of community.

4.3 Duration of Internship

My recommendation for the time frame of the internship would be eight weeks in the summer, from mid-June to mid-August, giving the students a few weeks after school ends and before the semester begins. Also, I believe the summer months and a shorter amount of time would be more manageable for students and there are always students looking for summer jobs.

4.4 Funding

In terms of the funding, I propose that it should be shared between the university and the partners so it doesn't fall on one group. This would be an incentive for organizations to join without the problem of cost. In addition, I also recommend looking for grants and scholarships to help with the cost because a few of the organizations I contacted found this to be a successful strategy. I haven't done much research in this area, but this could be a potential job for a part-time employee.

4.5 Budget

For the budget, I suggest between \$3,000 - \$5,000 for each member. I calculated this range by considering the minimum wage (\$9.25 / hour), the number of hours per week (40 hours - full

time), the number of weeks (8), and other living expenses, such as rent/utilities, food, transportation, etc. Also, I based this estimate off of the budget for the IHSI Community Academic Scholars program (\$3,500), which has a similar time frame and number of members to my proposal.

4.6 Marketing

To contact community organizations, I recommend starting with emails, phone calls, Zoom meetings, and potentially in-person meetings to connect and form more personal relationships. The IHSI WeCU program was a great example of the benefits of one-on-one personal connections. They're able to match around 800 students to different organizations each year, which is an incredibly large number.

Once all of these aspects of the program are confirmed, I believe other strategies can be used to bring in both students and organizations. Some of these strategies include word of mouth, flyers, newsletters, and social media. Although none of the organizations talked about using social media to market their programs, I think it's an important and necessary outlet because it's used a lot and you can reach many people.

4.7 Partners

Note: The scale of the program hasn't been decided yet. My recommendations are based on the scale of the program being local (Champaign-Urbana). If the scale was larger there might be changes in the partnership outreach as well as the structure with possible additional employees.

In determining the specific organizations to partner with, I recommend looking into the Champaign County Chamber of Commerce (see Appendix). I think it's helpful to have a full list of all the local businesses to ensure that you aren't missing an important opportunity.

Another possibility could be partnering with WeCU, but it's a volunteer program, so the interns wouldn't be paid, and there would be less control compared to creating a new program and partnerships. Also, IGBA was more than willing to help us connect with local organizations if there was interest in collaborating with them.

4.8 Sustainable Categories

In the beginning, I recommend just focusing on creating and forming solid partnerships with local organizations without the limitations of specific categories. However, if partnerships are more stable in the future, I think there will be opportunities to create green categories that consider energy, waste, and air pollution.

Also, I thought the GRC approach to deciding the sustainable category for each project was interesting and could be implemented into our internship program. The program decides the category based on the community's current green initiatives and analyzes its future sustainability needs rather than the organization choosing their own category.

4.9 iCAP Revisions

After my presentation to the iCAP team, which had the recommendations above, we discussed the logistics of my recommendation, possible revisions, and other things they needed to think about before the program was final. The first aspect we discussed was the duration of the internship. They stated that an 8-week program might be too short for students to get up to speed and have a meaningful experience. Also, I mentioned that if students had to rent an apartment for this summer job, the most common sublease would be the full three months, so why not make the internship longer. We concluded that there should be a variety of durations depending on the project and its location, including 8-weeks, 10-weeks, and 12-weeks.

Along with this, I brought up my question about the scale of the program. As I mentioned, I assumed all of the organizations would be very local within the Champaign-Urbana area. However, they thought the scale would be larger, expanding to all of Central Illinois. If this were the case, there would be a lot more organizations to consider and contact.

Another part of the proposal we discussed was the addition of an application for the organizations. The application would ask a series of questions about the organization as well as the organization's plan for the internship to ensure it was sustainability related and had educational benefits for the student. Also, this would allow the directors to check in with the students and organizations to confirm both groups are following the plan of action and gaining something from this experience.

The last major point we talked about was the funding. Someone asked if the university offers internships where they just put out money, but no one knew if this was a possibility. I recommend looking into this idea because I think it would be very helpful.

5. Conclusion

Throughout the semester, my goal has been to develop a sustainability internship program by researching current opportunities that connect students with internships that focus on any aspect of sustainability, as well as contacting programs that are applicable to our program. In addition, I provided recommendations for our program based on a few assumptions and what works for other groups. I hope my work helps the iCAP team move forward and continue working towards creating this sustainability internship program because it's an important part of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and building the community's resilience to climate change.

6. Bibliography

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- (4) <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/waste/minnesota-greencorps>
- (5) <https://healthinstitute.illinois.edu/community-impact>
- (6) <http://www.illinoisgba.org/AboutIGBA.aspx>
- (7) <https://mayorscaucus.org/greenest-region-corps/>
- (8) <https://www.champaigncounty.org/list/>

7. Appendix

7.1 Champaign County Chamber of Commerce

This source contains a list of all the businesses in the Champaign County area⁸. I attempted to rate the general categories based on two criteria: quantity of businesses and sustainability possibility. In the chart below, on the left, one can see that real estate / construction, finance / insurance, and business / professional services categories have the highest number of opportunities (# on the right). On the right, one can see that public utilities / environment and agriculture / forestry have moved to the top of this list. This rating was based on sustainable categories I learned about from other programs, such as waste reduction, green infrastructure, energy, etc.

Quantity of Businesses	Sustainability Possibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Real Estate & Construction (130)- Finance & Insurance (110)- Business & Professional Services (109)- Shopping & Specialty Retail (77)- Ownership Type (73)- Restaurants, Food & Beverages (68)- Health Care (66)- Family, Community & Nonprofit (54)- Government & Education (52)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Public Utilities & Environment (12)- Agriculture, Fishing & Forestry (31)- Business & Professional Services (109)- Real Estate & Construction (130)- Government & Education (52)- Industrial & Manufacturing (38)- Sports & Recreation (11)<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Parks (3)- Home & Garden (34)

7.2 Contacts

Name	Organization	Contact Info	Response?
Peter Bardaglio	TCCPI	pbardaglio@gmail.com	Yes
Cornell Sustainability Campus - Sarah Brylinsky	Cornell University	sustainability@cornell.edu	Yes
Shelby Gamache	MGC	Shelby.Gamache@state.mn.us	Yes
Emily Stone	IHSI	ers@illinois.edu	Yes
Kelsey Hassevoort	IHSI	hassevo2@illinois.edu	Yes
Lacey Rains	Champaign	Lacey.Rains@champaignil.gov	Yes
Scott Tess	Urbana	srtess@urbanailinois.us	Yes
Kevin Garcia	Urbana - Planning	kjgarcia@urbanailinois.us	No
Dennis Donaldson	Savoy	dennis.donaldson@savoy.illinois.gov	Yes
Cassie Carroll	IGBA	ccarrol2@illinois.edu	Yes
Anthony Santarelli	IGBA	asantar2@illinois.edu	No
Katie Friedman	GRC	kfriedman@mayorscaucus.org	Yes
Edith Makra	GRC	emakra@mayorscaucus.org	Yes