**Sustainability Campus Intern Final Report**

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*ENVS 491 Final Report*

*Spring 2021*

**ABSTRACT**

This report discusses Haley Tholen’s work towards iCAP Objective 6.5 during the Spring 2021 semester. She focused on two main objectives for the semester including: research on certifications, awards, etc. that make a company eco-friendly and outreach to companies for a mini sustainability career fair event. The mini career fair was part of a larger event, the ELP Corporate Sustainability Workshop, which was held on April 13th, 2021 over Zoom. Haley, her supervisor, and colleague successfully recruited ten companies to attend the career fair. Next year, Haley hopes that the career fair will expand into a larger, campus-wide sustainability career fair that is also an independent event. Perhaps in a few years, the University of Illinois can be the primary organizer of a Big Ten Sustainability Career Fair, open to all students at participating universities.

**INTRODUCTION AND MOTIVATION**

The purpose of this report is to document my work towards iCAP Objective 6.5 throughout the Spring 2021 semester. The iCAP Objective 6.5 proposes a partnership between The Career Center and potentially other career offices by the Fall 2022 semester to give students the opportunity to explore sustainability in the corporate realm. This objective was the primary motivation for my work this semester, as I helped develop a pilot program for what may become a Green Career Fair in future semesters. The pilot program included two Environmental Leadership Program (ELP) workshops, one of which was centered around corporate sustainability. The workshop was divided into sections, the last being a mini career fair, which was the focal point of my work.

**TIMELINE**

*January 2021*

I began this “internship” by trying to determine what it meant to be an eco-friendly company, what metrics and qualifications we may be able to require of attending companies, and investigating if a similar sustainability-oriented career fair existed at other universities. I found it very difficult to pinpoint any criteria we could use to define eligibility for such an event, but some certifications to keep in mind are listed under “Potential Certifications” in the Appendix. Some relevant links that facilitated the research process can also be found in the Appendix, under “Important/Relevant Links.”

*February 2021*

Early into my research, I came across the All Ivy Environmental and Sustainable Career Fair, which is usually held in-person at Columbia University for all Ivy League students. I soon found that this career fair was actually the only sustainability fair for universities in existence, at least as far as Google is concerned. I reached out to Cari Shimkus ([cshimkus@ei.columbia.edu](mailto:cshimkus@ei.columbia.edu)), the primary organizer of this event, to seek more information. A spreadsheet containing all relevant information from the All Ivy Environmental and Sustainable Development Career Fair is in my file archive. Eric and I also met with the Career Center of the university and gained some insight as to how our pilot program could eventually become a large event. The Career Center seemed reluctant to add yet another event to their agenda at the beginning of the meeting, but by the end, Career Center representatives suggested a Big Ten Career Fair may be of interest in future years, which was a great turnaround! It was mentioned that there was previously a Green Career Fair on campus, but we did not go into details as to why this event stopped. However, an interesting tactic that was used for this career fair was having companies justify why they are eligible to attend a sustainability-based career fair, since, as I have found in my own research as well, it is very difficult to “define” sustainability and criteria that would qualify some companies over others.

During the meeting with the Career Center, we also discussed the Illini Internship and Career Fair, which was to take place virtually on April 1st, 2021. It was suggested that I look through the 20 companies in attendance and see if anyone was interested in attending the ELP Workshop in addition to the general career fair.

I had a couple other important meetings this month, one with Joe Nano from Capital Dynamics and one with Summer Ursomarso and Jennifer Butler from Sun Tribe Solar. Joe Nano was very enthusiastic about helping students seek opportunities for sustainability in the workplace, but unfortunately, Capital Dynamics requires 1-2 years of experience in investment banking before you can work there. He would be a great panelist to speak on corporate sustainability in the future, but it is very unlikely that Capital Dynamics will attend a career fair as a recruiter. In my meeting with Summer and Jennifer, we primarily discussed the logistics of the ELP Workshop. They wanted to attend the mini career fair as resume reviewers, since there weren’t any available opportunities at Sun Tribe Solar at the moment.

*March 2021*

March was another busy month, as it was the last month before the ELP Workshop. I contacted all companies in Research Park that may be interested in giving sustainability-related opportunities to students, and I also contacted all of the All Ivy League Environmental and Sustainable Development Career Fair recruiters through any mode of communication I could find from Google (phone, email, online form). An example of one of the emails I sent is provided in the Appendix.

Eric and I also had a meeting with the Education SWATeam, for which I prepared a presentation to overview my work this semester. Some suggestions we had for future events were to promote the event through each college under the university, ask respective career centers of each college for lists of alumni and start contacting companies that way, potentially switch the name of the event from “Green Career Fair” to “Green Careers,” and potentially define eligibility for participation by focusing on companies who make sustainability part of their mission statement.

*April 2021*

On April 13th, we had the ELP Workshop on one of the non-instructional days. Unfortunately, attendance was low from the students who initially signed up, which is likely due to several factors including: burnout (we did not get a spring break this semester), students had found internships by that time, and students forgot about their commitment to this event. Nonetheless, Eric was still able to draft a recommendation for IWG to make this event become even bigger and better in the coming years. I am not sure of the status of this recommendation, but it is my hope that we can continue to develop a sustainability-based career fair on campus!

*May 2021*

May was a slow month since the event was completed and all I had left for the semester was to draft this report!

**FUTURE WORK AND EXPECTATIONS**

The primary issue I ran into during the outreach process was that I didn’t have personal contacts to companies and instead, primarily filled out online forms. These online forms on the contact page of company websites are hardly effective, since many companies do not stay up to date on incoming requests (although it did work for some companies). In the future, I would suggest contacting each college of the university and asking for alumni lists. This way, you will be able to contact employees of companies who are already familiar with the university and are more likely to respond in a timely manner.

The secondary issue I encountered was that April is a bit late in the hiring process, so some companies did not want to attend due to the lack of job availability. To mitigate this, I would suggest hosting an event earlier in the year, ideally the fall or early into the spring semester so there is a maximum turnout of both interested students and recruiting companies.

I believe one of the main goals for the upcoming year should be to define what makes a company eco-friendly and what we want “sustainability” to mean for these corporate sustainability events. I struggled to define a metric that would make a company eligible or ineligible to attend such events, but found that it is very difficult given the many different types of awards, certifications, job listings, and definitions currently available. Instead of focusing on an exact definition, perhaps it would be worthwhile to gather a checklist of criteria that “could” make a company eco-friendly. For logistical reasons, you would ensure that each company would check at least one of the boxes on the list, but would likely have to do additional research to ensure they are actually a good fit for the students.

Given more time, I would have sent out a survey to SEE Fellows and other students interested in sustainability to gauge interest in different industries and obtain suggestions for companies to reach out to. This would have given me a better understanding of student interest and would give me the ability to narrow my search. As previously mentioned, there are so many opportunities, job listings, companies, etc. out there, so I think it would have been useful to have both student interest and alumni contacts before I started outreach.

An idea that was brought up during our meeting with the Career Center was a Big Ten Career Fair, given the Green Career Fair is successful. In my opinion, I think a Green Career Fair that is labeled as such and not part of any other event would be small at first, but grow into something significant. From conversations with friends and peers, I know that students are interested in getting involved with sustainable careers, but they don’t know where to start. Lucky for me, I had the opportunity to be a SEE Fellow and learn about how I could implement sustainability into my chosen career, but this is not the case for all students. On the smaller scale, the Green Career Fair will require several student interns (like me) as well as several full-time employees of the university to supervise (not to spend all their time on this event, but to advise, organize, and provide authority). This task force could be similar to a SWAT team for the iCAP goals. A few years down the line, it is my hope that a Big Ten Career Fair could be established. The Ivy League schools host an event like this every year, and I think it would be extremely beneficial for the Big Ten community to make an effort towards sustainability opportunities for students. In terms of cost recovery, it is possible (and common) to charge companies a registration fee to cover costs associated with the event (staff, meals, etc.).

**APPENDIX**

***Email Example***

Dear Sun Tribe Solar,

My name is Haley Tholen and I am a senior in Engineering Mechanics this year at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I am working with Eric Green, the instructor/adviser for the Sustainability, Energy, and Environment Fellows Program (a minor), on an objective for our Illinois Climate Action Plan 2020. This objective seeks to create a "Green Career Fair" to connect students with internships.

This semester, the Institute for Sustainability, Energy, and Environment (iSEE) will be running a pilot program called the Environmental Leadership Program. One of the workshops that will be a part of that program will focus on corporate sustainability. During that workshop, we will be hosting a small green career fair.

We would like to request that your company attend our career fair! We feel that the students at our university will be thrilled to hear about your company's work and values. The event will be on April 13th from 1-2 pm. I have attached a brief schedule for the day. Registration for the event has closed for students, in which the full capacity of 35 students was reached very quickly. If you have any internship opportunities, full time employment, or would like to connect with our students, please let us know if you would like to attend.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Haley Tholen

***Potential Certifications***

| **Certification Name** | **Level** | **Description** | **Number of Attending Recruiters** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| WELL Certified | International | A building certification for spaces that are designed to advance human health and well-being | 2 |
| LEED Certification | International | Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design - green building certification system | 5 |
| Gold City of Portland Sustainability at Work Program | Local | Integrate sustainable practices into their company actions | 1 |
| TRUE Advisor Certification | National (?) | Employees are trained for zero waste terminology, tools, technologies, and implementation | 1 |
| GREENGAURD Certified | National | Products meet third-party chemical emissions standard to help reduce indoor air pollution and the risk of chemical exposure | 1 |
| Cradle-to-Cradle Certified | International | A measure of safer, more sustainable products made for a circular economy | 1 |
| CBLP Certification | Regional | Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional - Creates a community of certified professionals to be better stormwater partners and environmental stewards | 1 |
| Certified B Corporation | International | New kind of business that balances purpose and profit - legally required to consider the impact of their decisions on their workers, customers, suppliers, community, and the environment | 2 |
| International Living Future Institute Zero Energy Certification | Global | Focuses on the energy balance of a project - buildings that include combustion are prohibited | 1 |
| PHIUS+ Source Net Zero Certified | National | Advances community goals of carbon neutrality in the building sector | 1 |
| International Living Future Institute Petal Certification | Global | Part of a rigorous standard for green buildings (above and beyond LEED certification) - strive for net-zero and net-positive energy, free of toxic chemicals, and lower energy footprint below the generic commercial structure | 1 |
| National Biosolids Partnership Environmental Management System Certification | National | Provides biosolids management training and support that helps biosolids management organizations improve their programs | 1 |
| GPRO Certification | National | Comprehensive training for green construction | 1 |

\* only included certifications given to the company, not certifications given out by them

Other certifications that could be taken into consideration:

| **Certification Name** | **Level** | **Description** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ENERGY STAR | National | A building must meet strict energy performance standard set by the EPA - they must perform better than at least 75% of similar buildings nationwide |
| Green Business | National | For businesses that adopt principles, policies, and practices that improve the quality of life for their customers, employees, communities, and the planet - for positive social change |

***Important/Relevant Links***

* + <https://www.greenamerica.org/green-living/getting-green-job>
  + <https://environmentalcareer.com/>
  + <https://www.greenamerica.org/green-america-green-business-certification>
  + <https://www.sustain.ucla.edu/about-us/careers-in-sustainability/>
  + <https://graduateland.com/event/2978>
  + <http://greencollarblog.org/green-job-fairs/>
  + [Careers in Sustainability by UCLA](https://www.sustain.ucla.edu/about-us/careers-in-sustainability/)
  + [Getting a Green Job](https://www.greenamerica.org/green-living/getting-green-job)
  + [Search for Green Jobs](https://environmentalcareer.com/)
  + [Sustainability Virtual Career Fair](https://graduateland.com/event/2978)
  + [MobilizeGreen Annual Conference and Diversity Career Fair](https://www.mobilizegreenconference.org/)
  + <https://environment.yale.edu/careers/resources/jobs-sites/>