Indiana University Office of Sustainability

Academic Initiatives Working Group Internship

Summer 2011 Final Report

Intern: Elizabeth Davis

Mentors: Carolyn Waldron, Tom Evans

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“Sixty-nine percent of college applicants this year say having information about a college’s commitment to environmental issues would contribute to their decision to apply to or attend the school.”

~USA Today

**AIWG**

This internship project is offered by the Indiana University Campus Sustainability Advisory Board’s Academic Initiatives Working Group (AIWG). The AIWG strives to “build an integrated program of academic research, undergraduate and graduate education, co-curricular and service-learning opportunities, and community outreach that will move Indiana University Bloomington (IUB) into a position of national leadership in sustainability studies.” Information on the AIWG is available on the IU Office of Sustainability website.\(^2\) The working group also stores documents and plans on an Oncourse site.\(^3\)

The AIWG has taken on a project that seeks to develop three readily-accessible, current, comprehensive, web-based tools: a listing of sustainability courses, a compilation of faculty sustainability research, and a collection of sustainability events and activities. These tools will increase the presence of IUB’s academic and co-curricular programs in sustainability.

**AASHE STARS**

The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) has created the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, & Rating System (STARS), a “transparent, self-reporting framework for colleges and universities to measure their sustainability performance.” The AASHE STARS rating is determined by evaluating several criteria.

The AIWG carefully reviewed these AASHE STARS requirements to select eight criteria to focus on improving. The AIWG’s “Top Eight” are as follows:

1. Courses with sustainability as main theme
2. Courses that include sustainability discussions/topics
3. Sustainability related programs: (Graduate/Undergraduate)
4. Sustainability related certificates: (Graduate/Undergraduate)
5. Community participation in sustainability related activities

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\(^2\) [http://www.indiana.edu/~sustain/Academics/index.html](http://www.indiana.edu/~sustain/Academics/index.html)

\(^3\) [https://oncourse.iu.edu/portal/site/415aefb-210b-4696-8ad4-232854afce3f/page/73b20ec1-5efe-4d9d-bc5a-9144485ee557](https://oncourse.iu.edu/portal/site/415aefb-210b-4696-8ad4-232854afce3f/page/73b20ec1-5efe-4d9d-bc5a-9144485ee557)
Curricular

The goal of the Academics portion of the project is to create and market a listing of IUB sustainability courses to achieve three objectives:

- promote the development of sustainability-related curriculum
- enable students to easily review and enroll in sustainability-related offerings
- streamline AASHE STARS reporting.

In order to achieve these goals, the course list should be easily accessible and useful to students, and publicized to faculty and administrators.

Currently, the intern is responsible for developing the course list. The intern obtains course lists from the Office of the Registrar prior to each semester, determines which courses qualify as possible sustainability courses, and then obtains syllabi from the respective professors, to evaluate the courses. Any courses that qualify as offering a sustainability theme is then categorized as “Sustainability Related” or “Sustainability Focused,” according to these definitions:

Sustainability focused (SF) courses concentrate on the concept of sustainability, including its social, economic, and environmental dimensions, or examine an issue or topic using sustainability as a lens. Sustainability is a consistent thread throughout each course component and most assignments are designed to help students develop a better understanding of sustainability and sustainable development.

Sustainability related (SR) courses incorporate sustainability as a distinct course component or module, or concentrate on a single sustainability principle or issue.

The course information is organized in a spreadsheet saved on Google Docs and the AIWG Oncourse site⁴. This spreadsheet is emailed to the Office of the Registrar so that the courses can be labeled with the appropriate SF/SU designation. This information is also emailed to Emilie Rex, IU Office of Sustainability (IUOS) Assistant Director, to be put on the IUOS website⁵.

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⁴ https://oncourse.iu.edu/access/content/group/415aaefb-210b-4696-8ad4-232854afe3f/Curriculum/SU%20Courses/Fall%202011%20SU%20Courses%20%201.xls
⁵ http://www.indiana.edu/~sustain/Academics/sustainability_courses_FA11.html
The course list for fall 2011 has been in use for registration since April 2011. There is a draft spring 2012 course list⁶, but that must be reviewed and updated before registration begins in November 2011. The courses are listed on the Office of the Registrar website.⁷ On this list, all of the courses are under the general sustainability “SU” designation. The Office of the Registrar is in the process of updating the functionality of the scheduling website. The “SR” and “SF” designations will be included in the new version. The IUOS keeps a more informational listing on its website.⁸ This listing includes more information about each course, including the course description provided by the professor.

Because this type of information has not been compiled in the past, finding new courses originally required a large amount of manual searching and documenting of numerous data. This nature of the AIWG Intern project requires continuous refining of the methods used to find and document the necessary information, and to document these changes so they may be improved by future interns. In the future, this project will develop to be completely comprehensive and self-sustaining.

This summer, an annual task calendar was completed to begin to move toward this goal. This calendar is posted on Google Docs and gives dates for obtaining the course list from the Office of the Registrar, the date when the list of SR/SF courses should be returned, and other applicable deadlines.

The current method for assigning the sustainability status to a course is somewhat subjective, and relies on the intern’s interpretation of the above definitions. It might be useful to create a checklist to use when assigning sustainability course designation, in order to better refine the SF and SR designations. Posted on Google Docs is a draft checklist⁹ that professors may use to determine whether their courses and research are sustainability focused or related. These checklists must be reviewed with the AIWG to determine how the descriptions for each checklist item should be changed and narrowed.

There are many other recommended steps for improvement of this project. Other interns have suggested a possible different approach to the course listing that would both make the list more accessible to students, more visible to the IUB community, and easier to maintain. For example, instead of creating an external list, the SU designation could be a clearly visible aspect of the course listing (for example, a green leaf symbol placed by the course name). With such visibility, faculty members would be more likely to make sure their sustainability-related courses were listed, and students would not have to seek out a separate source in order to find sustainability courses. This change would require added cooperation with the Office of the Registrar, as they have a specific system that drives how everything works.

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⁶ https://oncourse.iu.edu/access/content/group/415aaefb-210b-4696-8ad4-232854afce3f/Curriculum/SU%20Courses/spring%202011%20su%20courses.xls
⁷ http://registrar.indiana.edu/specialcourse/wwses_fallo.html#SU
⁸ http://www.indiana.edu/~sustain/Academics/sustainability_courses_FA11.html
⁹ https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_EvYNY7kjC5kJIrSiXU_RoIoTVydDtvUla1deVLs9M/edit?hl=en_US
If the Office of the Registrar is not able to add the SR/SF designation to the course title, the same purpose could be served by having professors add these designations in their course descriptions. For example: “This course has been approved by the Office of Sustainability to be SUSTAINABILITY FOCUSED.” The feasibility of this option should be discussed with the working group.

Another idea is to create an online form where professors could register their course with its sustainability rating. A rough sample form has been created in Google Docs.\textsuperscript{10} If such a form were used, the link could be sent to faculty on a yearly basis so any new courses could be collected. It may also be possible in the future to link such a form directly to the IUOS website, or another database that could be periodically checked by the intern and added to the website.

In addition to these ideas, it is important to brainstorm ways to get student feedback and identify possibilities for making the course listing more accessible to students. Such feedback could be explored through student AIWG representatives, or student groups such as the IU Student Sustainability Council.

\section*{Academic Research}

Similar to the Curricular project, the goal of the Academic Research project is to create a compilation of faculty research profiles, in order to achieve three objectives:

- market IU’s sustainability research
- act as a resource to IU members interested in research
- facilitate AASHE STARS reporting

\textsuperscript{10}https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0AmPUCc3DREdedE1ldmlc3pvLUdvSk5DdVQ5azNsZHc&hl=en_US#gid=0
This summer, several researchers from a previously-compiled list have been contacted, and a handful of summaries were written. This list is posted on the AIWG Oncourse site and in Google Docs. With help from mentor Tom Evans, researchers were selected. The intern created and followed these instructions for developing the summaries:

1. Obtain three to four papers and the researchers’ own summaries of their projects--check online faculty profiles and other sources
   
   Note: researchers will organize their projects differently

2. Read abstracts, conclusions, intros, and more of the papers if needed

3. Generate summaries using basic outline:
   a. General introduction to the project idea
   b. Explain why this is important or related to sustainability (more in-depth)
   c. Describe what the researcher has done in the past
   d. Briefly discuss the research methods used
   e. Current focus and future project goals

The biggest roadblock for this project has been the unresponsiveness of some researchers, potentially due to summer inactivity. This was not severe enough to cause difficulty in finding researchers to participate in the project. The completed profiles are listed in separate documents in Oncourse and Google Docs.

In the future, representative projects (10+) will be posted on a website highlighting and advertising the sustainability research on campus. At any given time, it is ideal that the website will host researchers from a variety of different schools and departments, so this should be kept in mind when selecting who to contact. It is the goal that this website will eventually hold a comprehensive collection of all of IU’s sustainability research.

Before these summaries are posted to a website, a formatted template should be created. This should probably include both the project summary and a small profile of the researcher. AIWG CO-Chair and Professor Tom Evans has been working on determining the URL for this website. The website design and this template should be created concurrently. In order for new research to be tabulated on the website, it is important to determine some mechanism for either finding new research, or having new research be brought to the AIWG. It will be important to determine such a mechanism in the next stages of the project.

11 https://oncourse.iu.edu/access/content/group/415aefb-210b-4696-8ad4-232854a0fe3f/Research/Faculty%20Research%20Database.xlsx
12 https://docs.google.com/?tab=m0&authuser=0&pli=1#folders/folder.o.oB2PUkc3DREdeMDQzOGVhMTAtOGF5YS00ZDg3LTItMGFmMzFhNDYyN2Fk
Current ideas for this mechanism are very similar to those mentioned in the curricular section. Considering similarities in the projects, the final solutions may also be very similar.

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**Co-Curricular**

The co-curricular project is currently the least-developed of the three projects. Its goal is to create a collection of co-curricular events and activities on campus. The project will serve three objectives:

- market opportunities to students
- serve as a resource for student groups
- aid in ASHEE STARS reporting

The AIWG is in the process of developing a framework for the project. The wealth of co-curricular activities at IU is overwhelming, and no direct way of approach has been identified yet. It is recommended that the intern research other Big Ten schools to see how they approach the problem of organizing their co-curricular events. Then, the working group will develop ways to disseminate information enlightened by this research.

The fall 2010 Sustain-ability Themester may also serve as a model for organizing and marketing campus-wide events. The goal of this model is to promote events sponsored by student groups, faculty, schools, and departments.

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**Conclusion**

In the coming semester, an AIWG intern should continue to work on all three of these areas. S/he should be able to work with the Office of the Registrar to develop a more visible location for the SR/SF designation, and research how better to market the course list to students. S/he should formulate summaries of sustainability research and aid in the development of the website. Finally, s/he should formulate and begin a plan of attack for the Co-curricular project. In the future, it may make sense for an additional intern to focus on the Co-curricular project. The Curricular and Academic Research projects are closely related. The Co-curricular project is significantly different and will require focus and a considerable investment of resources, including working closely with student groups. For example, if at first there is no easy way to simply identify and market the breadth of activities that IU offers (such as was done for the fall 2011 Sustain-ability Themester sponsored by the College of Arts and Sciences), an intern may be in
charge of compiling and advertising numerous sustainability activities and events using a more ad hoc approach.

In conclusion, through these projects, the Academic Initiatives Working Group has made much progress toward identifying sustainability-related course offerings, and research projects. In the future, more progress will be made toward identifying sustainability-related co-curricular events. As the projects become more developed, the visibility of sustainability courses, faculty research and events on the Indiana University Bloomington campus will increase.