Sustainability Internship Programs: Strategies for Creating Student Ambassadors for Sustainability

Hongor Batbold, Office for Sustainability
The Office for Sustainability is not only responsible for advancing the campus community’s sustainability commitments through various collaborations and initiatives, it is also a discovery-driven learning space to guide students in improving quality of life for all.
- Semester long
- Cohort based (8-10)
- Paid 500$
- 6-8hrs per week
- 2-3 hrs hands-on activity
- Group project
- All majors
- Undergrad & postgrad
- International & domestic
- Different experience level
Core Competencies: Learning for Sustainability

Pre-existing Sustainability Internships

Learning Objectives
What are our learning outcomes?

Students will be able to **describe and discuss the state of the planet** and be able to **articulate the consequences of their everyday actions on multiple scales** (on themselves, their communities, and on those distant from them in space and time, including nonhumans).

Students will **explore leadership strategies**, **model sustainable behaviors**, and experiment with changing their (and potentially others’) **patterns of thinking and behaviors**.

Students will **develop an understanding of the organizational goals** and corresponding short- and long-term objectives that **propel sustainability efforts at Western Michigan University on local, national, and global scales**.

Students will be able to **effectively articulate**, through written and oral communication, their **knowledge of and appreciation for complex, interconnected, and sometimes conflicting sustainability challenges across multiple perspectives**.

Students will **develop a deep understanding of the coevolution and interconnectedness of all species** and use this knowledge to **explore human development opportunities and priorities that promote improvements in quality of life for all** (especially the flourishing of nonhumans and endangered cultures).
WEEKLY THEMES

Readings
- Alternative Energy/Design
- Systems Thinking
- Alternative Transportation
- Permaculture
- Social Justice

Journal Question

Discussion Meeting

Enrichment Activity

Leadership Development
- DIY
- Zero Waste
- Behavior Analysis
- Sustainable Food Systems
- Career Development
Consumer Culture Week
The readings illustrate how small, seemingly innocuous actions can have more profound, long-term consequences. Our continued preoccupation with buying the best, newest material items even when those items aren’t needed, perpetuate unsustainable behavior. What might help change these prevalent patterns of behavior and the prevailing consumer culture underlying such behavior?
Sustainable Food Systems Week
Journal Prompt:
Striving to connect back to nature is rarely a priority for citizens of the United States, as Kingsolver pointed out, and people most often prioritize their lives around jobs, family, good weather, and good schools instead. How has this prevalent culture been shaped and what can be done to shift priority to areas that promote sustainability of the environment? Kingsolver suggests that lack of knowledge is one of the biggest problems and challenges. Do you agree?
ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- Career Development Activity
- 2 Community Sustainability Events
- Collaborative Group Project
- Pre & Post Assessments
Pre/Post Assessment

1) What is your definition of sustainability?

2) Which diagram below do you believe presents a more accurate depiction of sustainability, and why?

3) a. Provide a few sentences that highlight your knowledge of perspectives on the following topic: “Affinity for all life”

- Brief, succinct & full sentence
- More writing space
- Eliminated Likert scales of importance
- Began recording individual questions scores:
  - Topics & competencies we engage & teach well
  - Areas for improvement
STUDENT EXAMPLE
PRE VS. POST

Pre
Post

1 sustainability
2 diagrams
3 affinity for all life
4 systems thinking
5 quality of life
6 state of the planet
7 consumer culture
8 alt. energy
9 justice
10 transportation
11 food systems
12 recycling
13 behavior change
14 local issues
1. Describing

2. Examining
   - Sustainability knowledge
   - Leadership skills
   - Values
   - Motivation

3. Articulate learning

Qualitative assessment/reflection
I am equipped with permaculture principles that I think will help me to systematically engage people in a change of perspective — Emely

This internship has given me the skills and knowledge and confidence to act — to speak on behalf of humans and non-humans who are not granted a voice or who are being unjustly silenced — Kaitlin

The most important thing I took away from this internship was the positive communication and adaptability to shifting scenarios — McKenzie