Overview of Summer Internship

The success of the Green Teams Program is dependent upon individuals who generously volunteer their time to help increase sustainable practices at Indiana University. To ensure that their time is reciprocated by tangible results and progression, teams need easy access to resources allowing them to fulfill specific sustainable actions within their respective units. It is the responsibility of the IUOS, then, to provide teams with those resources.

Over the course of the summer, the efficiency of the currently-supplied resources—i.e. the green teams website, monthly “Green Bag” luncheons, and online certification system—were assessed. Ideas for improvement were discussed, and they will continue to be implemented over the course of the 2010-2011 academic year.

At the start of my internship, it was clear that the online implementation of the certification process was of central importance. And in talking to current green team leaders, I was able to confirm that a certification system would be of great use to them. This report, then, will focus on that system.

Primary Project: Online Green Team Certification System

***Where the project was at the start of my internship:

Using Harvard’s “Green Office Program” as her model, my predecessor, Sarah Vessel, designed a linear series of four certificates—Seed; Sprout; Sapling; Tree. For each certificate she offered a list of 16-19 sustainable actions distributed amongst eight categories: Energy and Built Environment; Resource Use; Recycling; Sustainable Computing; Transportation; Environmental Quality; Food; Education and Outreach. The categories correspond to both the IUOS working groups as well as categories included in AASHE’s Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System. The idea, then, is that by obtaining certification, green teams will help ensure that Indiana University continues to be regarded as a leader in sustainability.

The final product of Sarah’s internship was the conceptual framework for a green team certification program. Within her report she included the checklists for all four certificates as well as language and images that could be included in the online implementation of that program. IUOS web designer Tony Minich then used Sarah’s proposed designs when he created the actual design of the green teams website. Tony had, for the most part, translated Sarah’s conceptual framework into the online context. A registration link and a certification link were available on the green teams site, but the system was still in a nascent state.

***Techniques used to confirm applicability and usefulness of the certification system: Green Bag Presentation; Focus Group; In-person Interviews:

Thinking that the system was nearly operational, Tony and I unveiled it to current teams at the June 3rd “Green Bag” luncheon. The immediate feedback we received that day covered the full spectrum from excitement to skepticism. Simply put, it was made clear that the online system was not yet ready to go live.
Following the June “Green Bag,” all four lists of actions were made available on the Green Teams Oncourse site and a request was made for feedback concerning those actions. After receiving minimal feedback, we decided to conduct a focus group. On June 24th Tony and I met with a group that included representation from 25% of the green teams. The objective was to gauge the system’s usability. Although participants were able to register a mock team and then apply for “Seed” certification with those mock teams, it became clear that changes were needed to both the content and the design of the system. A feedback form organized by three topics—Function (accessibility; intuitiveness; utility); Content; and Collaboration—was sent to participants, and the responses I received confirmed the need for alterations.

Unfortunately, less than half of the focus group participants returned the feedback form and the responses given offered only a few constructive suggestions. At this point, I knew I wanted to meet with team leaders in person to discuss the current status of their teams. Rather than inundating them with more questions regarding the certification system, I decided to ask questions specific to their team, the Green Teams Program, or their personal involvement with the Green Teams Program. The interviews were setup as the result of my wanting to assess how the IUOS could better lend itself to teams’ efforts, which allowed me to confirm the usefulness and applicability of the certification system without directly referring to it.

During the first two weeks of June, I conducted interviews with five team chairs/leaders (roughly 20% of total membership), recording the struggles and the successes of their teams. Again, the hope was that the gathered information would allow the IUOS—and future Green Team Interns—to be of better assistance. Reviewed teams ranged from long-established (IU Foundation) to recently-developed (Kelley School of Business—Graduate Program). But two points were raised by all: teams are constrained by time and teams are looking to the IUOS for ideas and leadership. By implementing the certification system, the IUOS will actively respond to both.

***Uses:

Participation in the certification process will be voluntary. But, should a team pursue certification, the endeavor will prove beneficial. Indeed, the certification process is full of potential.

The primary objective of the certification system is to bring increased legitimacy to the Green Teams Program. There are, however, several other aims of certification:

- Highlight people’s agency by illuminating what can be achieved by IUB faculty, staff, and students when they work in collaboration to improve their shared environments
- Provide teams with four lists of feasible sustainable actions
- Increase the cohesion between the entities that comprise the program by creating possibilities for collaboration
- Present examples of successful teams to the greater IUB community, motivating others to develop new teams

***Creating a clearer progression from “Seed” to “Tree”:

According to the majority of green team members who provided feedback, the overall certification process lacked a clear progression from one certificate to the next. It was then
suggested that each certificate be given a statement of purpose, and that the actions included with the first two certificates lend themselves to the completion of the more challenging actions included with the third and fourth certificates. By utilizing the analogy between the growth of a seed into a tree and the progression from the “Seed” certificate to the “Tree” certificate, the system of certification can easily be seen as the process it was intended to be.

To emphasize that process within the checklists, I have rearranged the actions compiled by Sarah. Looking at the “Seed” checklist, one can now see that it provides teams with an active start. The actions included with the “Sprout” certificate then encourage teams to conduct a walkabout of their office, to assess which sustainable changes to pursue and who they need to contact to ensure those changes are instituted. In fulfilling those actions, a team will have acquired the awareness needed to successfully implement the actions included with the “Sapling” and “Tree” certificates.

***Making Amendments: Ideas on where to go from here

As of August 15th, 2010 the online system of certification exists as a beta version, and it will likely continue to exist as such for the rest of the year. During the coming months several things will need to occur if the system is to be operational before the 2010-2011 academic year ends:

• Revisions to the checklists need to be completed and then reviewed.
• Alterations need to be made to the “certification” page located on the green teams website, providing teams and prospective participants with a coherent understanding of the system’s function and applicability
• Changes to the design of the online system will need to be made
• Although not necessary, gathering another focus group comprised of the most established teams would confirm the system’s usability

All of that said, I still think the certification system can be operational by the end of the Fall 2010 semester.

While the above-mentioned actions are being fulfilled, a “Green Teams Office Toolkit” needs to be created. The development of a companion toolkit containing necessary resources—e.g. informational prompts and contact info—will prove useful to teams. Rather than searching for those resources, teams can spend their already limited time fulfilling sustainable actions.

Comments Regarding Other Green Teams Resources:

***Green Teams Website

A well put together, central location is needed to house all green team resources. While Oncourse has, arguably, the most potential, too few green team participants utilize the already-existing Green Teams Oncourse site. Therefore, it seems that the page made accessible via the IUOS website should act as the needed location. Alterations are currently being made to the site, and should be live by the end of August 2010.
**Green Bag Luncheons**

Over the course of the summer recess, three “Green Bag” luncheons occurred. In June, the topic addressed was green team certification. Sustainable office purchasing was the topic for the July event. And sustainable computing options at IUB were discussed at the August event. Attendance was minimal at all three events. An average of twelve people attended with less than 50% of teams represented.

There were, however, several people who attended all three events. Also, when I interviewed the five team leaders—Kathy McCarnes; John Scully; Rebecca Lowe; Aliza Pain; Tracy Smith—all spoke of their appreciation for the monthly luncheons.

Once the 2010-2011 academic year begins, I will create a survey on Survey Monkey to assess people's thoughts concerning “Green Bags.” Hopefully the events can then become more efficient.

In addition to assessing the structure of “Green Bag” events, I will also seek ways to make the material covered during a luncheon more accessible. As of now, the information is typed as meeting notes and then sent to people via the GREENTEAMS-L listserv. I plan to: include pictures with the meeting notes; post a PDF—pictures included—of the notes on the green teams website; record events and then post the resulting video footage online. (The July “Green Bag” was video taped, but due to their size, not all of the files could be uploaded.)

**Conclusion:**

The Green Teams Program has officially existed for less than one year. Although young, the program has already attracted twenty-three teams from a diverse selection of campus units. Academic; administrative; lab/research: there are teams representing all three categories. The involvement of these teams and the people who comprise them extend the reach of the IUOS far beyond the Geology building in which the office is housed, increasing the feasibility of its mission “to advance sustainable human-environment interactions within the Bloomington campus and community.” Still, if green teams’ efforts are to best lend themselves to the goals set by the IUOS working groups, teams must be given guidance. The three described resources—i.e. certification; “Green Bag” luncheons; green teams website—will all be an effective means to provide guidance to existing and burgeoning green teams.