

SEF Final Narrative—Green Team Communications

Summary of Project:

The goal of the Green Team Communications project was to increase awareness about campus sustainability. Melissa Burlingame, Green Team President and Assistant Director of the Institute for the Study of the Environment, Sustainability, and Energy, approached me with the idea for the project towards the end of the fall semester. She had stated that there was a considerable lack of widespread knowledge about the progress NIU is making regarding sustainability, and that there is a large portion of the NIU community that is unaware of all the different sustainable practices happening at NIU.

To solve this problem, Melissa gave me two main tasks. Throughout the semester, I was to write press releases for NIU Today discussing various environmentally related initiatives that were occurring around campus, and I had to develop new content and restructure the current sustainability website. Prior to writing my first press release, I wanted to gain a general sense of what the typical member of the NIU community knew about either the NIU Green Team or sustainability at NIU. Unfortunately, almost everyone I asked knew very little about either topic. From here, I decided that it was crucial that I first introduce who the Green Team is and what they do, and then I moved on to writing about more specialized topics.

As for the website, Melissa and other members of the Green Team came up with a proposal for a new layout for the site. Then Melissa and I went through the sustainability website and the Green Team Website and began consolidating the information. Originally, the sustainability website was used as a repository for information on sustainability at NIU, but since then, its target audience has shifted to be broader. Melissa and I wanted to ensure that the content

was still comprehensive, but was suited for a wider audience, so I spent a lot of time combing through the content of the old website and rewriting it or editing it to be a better fit for the new site.

Now that Melissa and I have the majority of the information ready to be published to the new site, I have started working with the program Cascade to upload and format all of the new content to the website. There is still more to be done, as some content needs to be reworked and some introductory information needs to be written, but soon, the website will be ready for its relaunch.

Outcomes:

This project seems to have been relatively successful. I think it has achieved its purpose of generating interest in sustainability at NIU. Following the publication of my first press release, which was an introduction to the Green Team, the Green Team email address received between 5 and 10 new emails from people who wanted more information on the Green Team and who wanted to get involved with the group. According to Melissa, this is more email interest than the Green Team has received previously.

Even though the website has not yet been launched, I am eager to see how it goes. After having spent a considerable amount of time working with the previous website, I think that the new website is going to be far more accessible to a wider reaching audience. The new content we've added will help not only students, but faculty and community members as well. There is more up to date information available, and I think it will be an excellent resource.

Personal Reflection:

I have thoroughly enjoyed the time I have spent working on this project. While writing press releases and content for the website, I have actually learned a lot about NIU and how committed the university is to lessening their environmental impact. A lot of the information I was writing about was new to me, and I'm an environmental studies major. Being able to share this content with a wide audience made me excited because I knew that there would be something new for everyone to learn.

I am incredibly grateful that I was given this opportunity, for this project helped me to improve my communication skills immensely. Most of the writing I have done throughout my college career was science writing that was geared towards a scientifically-minded audience. Having the chance to write for a more general audience helped me to communicate more effectively and efficiently. I had a limit of 500 words per press release, so I had to make sure my writing was clear and concise. Because of this, it was critical that I understood what I was writing about, otherwise, my press releases would not make sense.

While preparing for this project, Melissa had me take a Lynda course on writing for the web and review the NIU standards for writing for the web. Those both helped to improve my writing and made me aware of the proper way to communicate with a wide audience. Taking part in the Community Engagement Showcase also helped me with my communications skills. Written communication and spoken communication are very different, and I think CES taught me how to have a professional conversation with someone and how to quickly formulate responses to questions.

Overall, I am so glad I was able to participate in the Student Engagement Fund. Prior to this project, I was a little unsure about what path I wanted to take in the future, but this project has made me realize how fulfilling community outreach and communicating with the public is. I

love knowing that I was able to spread knowledge with people and help them learn about new things. As I move forward in my professional life, I think I would really enjoy taking part in projects like this one.