NUSOS 2012: Public Health and the Environment
Final Report for ISEN Grant

Background
Since 2005, Engineers for a Sustainable World at Northwestern University (ESW) has hosted an annual sustainability conference. Previously known as “Energy Day”, the conference was renamed so the theme could change on an annual basis, allowing us to focus on other critical issues relevant to sustainability. Now the Northwestern Summit on Sustainability (NUSOS), the conference continues to enable us to educate the broader community about specific issues in sustainability while exhibiting the work of ESW and providing a valuable networking opportunity for leaders with a passion for solving the problems we present. NUSOS provides members of ESW with the opportunity to share our work and vision with other members of the community and inspire action outside of our own organization.

On March 30-31, 2012, NUSOS brought together students and community members from a range of disciplines and professions to explore the theme of Public Health and the Environment. This theme allowed us to attract students who might not normally attend a sustainability conference. In particular, a number of students studying global health or in the pre-med program were in attendance.

Our speakers came from equally diverse backgrounds, and were able to connect the issues with efforts on the international, regional, and local levels. NUSOS 2012 speeches were:

Keynotes
- “A New Understanding of Hunger, Obesity and the Food System” by Ellen Gustafson, Founder of FEED Projects, Founder and Executive Director of the 30 Project
- “A world of Seven Billion: What Does it Mean?” by Dr. Suzanne Petroni, Vice President for Global Health at the Public Health Institute

Break-Out Sessions
- “Environmental Justice and Obligations to Future Generations” by Dr. Mark Sheldon, Assistant Dean of Weinberg and Philosophy professor, Northwestern University
- “Asthma and the Environment” by Victoria Persky, MD, Professor of Epidemiology in the School of Public Health, University of Illinois at Chicago
- “Resilience on the Louisiana Coast” by Dr. Craig Colten, Professor of Geography, Louisiana State University
- “Greening the Health Care Sector” by Peter Orris, MD, MPH, Chief of Occupational and Environmental Health at the University of Illinois Hospital and Health Science System

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• “What’s Wrong with our Food System? An Evaluation and Possible Solutions” by Cassie Green, Owner of Green Grocer (Chicago)

The schedule also included a reception with Ellen Gustafson after her speech and a networking lunch and poster fair for ESW members to showcase their projects. Many of our ongoing projects, such as the water purification project in Chile, were directly related to our theme.

Funding Usage

The ISEN grant was used specifically to bring two high-profile keynote speakers to our conference, Ellen Gustafson and Dr. Suzanne Petroni. Gustafson is the founder of FEED Projects, which funds school lunches through the World Food Program and is currently launching the 30 Project, which is connecting food system innovators and activist to reshape our food system over the next 30 years. Petroni is an expert on global health issues, reproductive rights, and population and the environment. She previously worked for the State Department, USAID, CDC, NASA, and many other organizations. Currently, she is the Vice President for Global Health at the Public Health Institute.

Both of our keynotes were able to bring forth broad ideas which gave context to the more specific concepts discussed in the breakout sessions. Gustafson discussed the surprising relationship between obesity in the US and hunger around the world. She detailed the toll this same system has had on the environment and identified how engineering students today can help shape a healthier, more sustainable food system.

Dr. Petroni discussed the implications of our world’s growing population, and what it means for the environment. She reviewed how, even though industrialized countries are growing at a slower rate than those in the majority world, and their toll on the environment is still disproportional. She also discussed key concepts on how human rights, and especially rights and opportunities for women, are related to improving health and controlling population growth.

Bringing in these well-known speakers was key for our marketing. Our attendees consistently cite the major keynotes as their primary reason for attending NUSOS. This helps us bring our message to broad audiences and connect how different disciplines are key in the sustainability movement. Both of them also offered inspiration to the students in attendance, all of whom had the opportunity to speak one-on-one with Gustafson and Petroni after their speeches.

Press

NUSOS 2012 was featured by the Northwestern Global Health Portal and The Daily Northwestern:

• http://globalhealthportal.northwestern.edu/blog/2012/03/young-firecracker-sparks-sustainability-summit/

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