

Corporate Careers in Sustainability

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General Background

The employment outlook for professionals seeking new and emerging sustainability careers is bright in for profit organizations. This is due to sustainability becoming an increasingly critical part of business strategy and operations. In 2014, 43% of executives said their companies seek to align sustainability with their overall business goals, mission, or values—up from 30% in 2012—according to McKinsey Global Institute. Whatever their trajectory, students benefit from early planning which can involve visiting the Career and Professional Development Center of the Duke University Undergraduate Career Center (DUCC) and taking stock of their skills and experiences in addition to utilizing the resources of the Nicholas School of the Environment Career and Professional Development Center (CPDC).

Research Question

How can Duke's career resources better inform, and support undergraduate students interested in corporate careers in sustainability?

Significance

Sustainability careers are a professional pathway for students entering the job market that is not only relatively new but is changing rapidly. The DUCC is designed to “serve the Duke community as the comprehensive career center committed to the education and development of the whole person, integrating academic, personal and career development.” The DUCC is undergraduate students’ primary resource to begin their professional path and explore new career paths. Additionally, Duke master's students can take advantage of resources from the CPDC as its mission is to “provide focused assistance with career advice, job search strategies.” Therefore, this project aimed to consider ways that the resources of both Centers could be leveraged to support job searches in sustainability for undergraduate students.

Key Objectives

- ❖ Explore the interest of a subset of Duke students in sustainability careers
- ❖ Explore existing career resources for students interested in sustainable careers
- ❖ Deliver recommendations to both Career Centers on how to leverage their resources to better help students
- ❖ Compile findings into a blog as a resource for the Career Centers to direct students



Figure 1. A career in corporate sustainability integrates the ideas of building a Better Planet, Better Communities, and ultimately Better Business. (CHEP, A Brambles Company). <https://www.chep.com/us/en/consumer-goods/sustainability>

Methods

For this project, data were collected regarding a) existing career resources for students interested in pursuing careers in sustainability, b) students' perspectives of careers in sustainability and Duke's resources, and c) current students' and alumni's paths to careers in sustainability. This was done by the following methods:

- Interviews with 5 members of both the Undergraduate, Fuqua, and CPDC career centers as well as interviews with 6 students and 3 alumni
- A survey sent out to dorm Groupme, fraternity/SLG Groupme, and class Facebook groups
- A literature review of careers in sustainability and social responsibility as a career field

From this, it was determined the best way to move forward was to create a blog with the interview accounts as well as the results from the student survey in order to provide students a reliable resource to engage with in exploring careers in sustainability while at Duke. This project addresses the economic component of sustainability by focusing on careers that can support a professional in sustainability. It addresses the social aspect by considering companies and opportunities that have social responsibility mission components. Finally, this project addresses the environmental aspect by looking at how the jobs and opportunities conveyed to students move a company to environmental improvement.

Student responses (n=67) to the question "How familiar are you with careers in sustainability?"

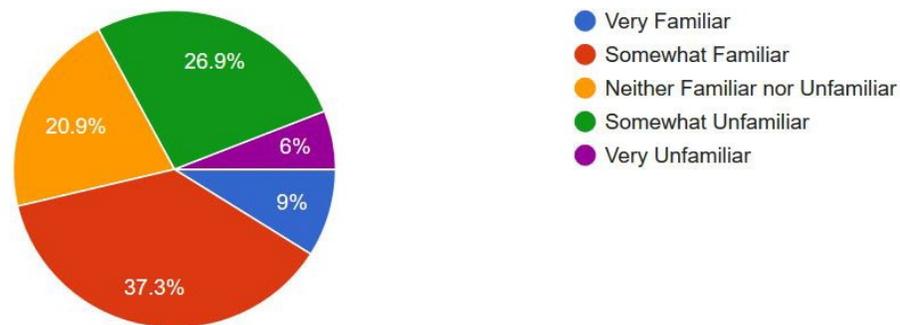


Table 1. A description of all interviews conducted.

Name	Occupation	Organization
Jen Agor	Assistant Director of Career Services	Duke University Undergraduate Career Center
Anna Balas	Sustainability certificate; Currently working for Food Corps	Trinity College of Arts and Sciences '19
Madison Barnes	Environmental Sustainability Associate	Former Duke Undergrad and NSOE masters, currently at Disney
Allison Besch	Director of CPDC	Duke University
Abhinav Jain	Student who has done a sustainability-related internship	Trinity College of Arts and Sciences '23
Kelly Jones	Planet Blue Ambassador Program Coordinator at the Graham Institute of Sustainability	Former Duke undergrad and NSOE masters, currently at University of Michigan
Katie Kross	Managing Director of the Center for Energy, Development and the Global Environment (EDGE)	Duke University, Fuqua School of Business
Jamie Lockwood	Climate and Clean Energy Associate	Former Duke Undergrad, currently at Environment North Carolina
Maia Matheny	Student studying Environmental Science and Policy	Trinity College of Arts and Sciences '22
Teri Mills	Associate Director, Counseling and Programs	Duke University Undergraduate Career Center
Nimisha Pant	Student studying Mechanical Engineering that has completed a sustainability-related internship	Pratt School of Engineering '21
Kayana Tyson	Student studying Environmental Engineering	Pratt School of Engineering '22
Gaurav Uppal	Student studying Mechanical Engineering that has completed a sustainability-related internship	Pratt School of Engineering '20

The data from the from the student survey was coded in R. The interviews and benchmarking literature were coded with the following themes: the multifaceted nature of sustainability careers, the demand for professionals to guide the sustainable revolution, transferable skills necessary in this field, sustainability skills provide a competitive advantage, the need for career center resources, and different avenues of careers. From this, a deeper understanding of students' knowledge of sustainable careers, the Career Centers' capabilities, and insights surrounding student and alumni experiences in sustainability were gathered and organized. These were then compiled into a blog.

Findings

These findings were all obtained from the data and series of interviews with students, alumni, and directors of the career centers across Duke

Recommendations for DUCC and CPDC



Collaborate with Sustainable Duke to host a careers and information event about sustainability to help students explore and make connections



Develop resources to identify sustainability career options, and the pathways that lead to students getting these jobs (how to prepare)



Put together a guide like Net Impact's (a national organization focused on social impact, corporate responsibility and sustainability) for undergraduate careers in sustainability



Encourage communication between the DUCC and CPDC by establishing an interdepartmental team to facilitate collaboration between the two career centers.

Recommendations for Students

Students

- Research summer internship options in sustainability
- Use Duke resources, such as [Bass Connections](#), [Duke Engage](#), [Stanback Fellowship](#), etc.
- Consider the [Sustainability Certificate](#) at Duke

Alumni

- Read articles about your area of interest & sustainability and research the organizations mentioned
- Get involved in environmental organizations at [Duke](#)
- Volunteer at environmental organizations
 - These include, but are not limited to, NGOs, sustainable consulting agencies, and sustainable technology

Career Centers

- Attend Duke Fuqua's annual sustainability and energy impact conference in February
- Reach out to [Sustainable Duke](#) about a part time job or conversation around sustainability
- Explore Duke alumni in sustainability careers on LinkedIn & reach out
 - Find an alumni using Duke's online [tools](#)
- Complete relevant training such as LEED GA, GRI, SASB

Possible Career Pathways in Corporate Sustainability

1

Duke University Undergraduate Degree

Sustainability Internship (in the middle of completing undergrad)

Duke University NSOE Master's Degree

Corporate Sustainability Coordinator

Corporate Director of Sustainability

2

Duke University Undergraduate Degree

Sustainability Internship (in the middle of completing undergrad)

Sustainability Consultant

[Here](#) is an additional resource to explore career pathways in sustainability, created by Margaret Overton (T'20)

Conclusions

The sampled group of Duke students show an interest in sustainability. However, some are uncertain about the range of opportunities that the field has to offer, or how to get involved. The expertise and resources of the DUCC and CPDC can create effective synergies to better help serve undergraduate students interested in corporate careers in sustainability. This can be achieved through creating a comprehensive salary and career pathways guide aimed at undergraduate students at Duke. The DUCC can draw inspiration from the CPDC's [guide](#) aimed at master's level students. Additionally, it is important to convey to students that there is no one set pathway to a career in corporate sustainability. The alumni and students of the CPDC are great resources for the DUCC to possibly conduct virtual or physical information sessions to better showcase the pathways to undergraduate students. In essence, the combined resources of the DUCC and CPDC present a great opportunity to help undergraduate students gain more exposure to the world of corporate sustainability.

Generally, these ideas fall into two categories:

Interdepartmental Communication

- Giving the DUCC and the CPDC ideas about how to connect students to jobs in the field more seamlessly by leveraging both centers' resource guides, student, and faculty as a centralized team

Content Related to Sustainable Careers

Providing general information to students about sustainability careers to increase interest in the field (through the blog, informational videos, etc.) This could also include figures that show the upward trends of sustainability careers across different fields

Next Steps



Identify a communications liaison tasked with the responsibility to add new entries to the blog and facilitate communication between the Career Centers



Clients will continue to follow the interview question template with more Duke students, alumni, and even faculty involved with sustainability careers



Clients will gauge undergraduate Duke student interest in the blog through conducting surveys for ideas on strengths and areas of improvement going forward

Blog Website Link -- [Bit.ly/SustCareers](https://bit.ly/SustCareers)

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