**UNH Sustainability Internship Program (SIP)**

**Responding to Global Challenges Today by Mentoring the Leaders of Tomorrow**

Jason Whitney – Internship Coordinator, University of New Hampshire Advising and Career Center

To say we live in challenging times is an understatement. We are facing complex social, business, and environmental challenges like never before. We can’t afford to use the old ‘business as usual’ approach if we are to effectively respond to these challenges. We need to consider new options – alternatives that can help us learn about and implement sustainability in our lives. Developed from an idea of Dr. Thomas Kelly, Chief Sustainability Officer at the University of New Hampshire as a response to some of these challenges, the Sustainability Internship Program got its start two years ago.

The UNH University Office of Sustainability explains sustainability as “seeing things whole and acting accordingly” – sustaining quality of life generation after generation across biodiversity, climate, food and culture. By collaborating with employers and offices on our campus SIP is giving students the opportunity to help solve these challenges.

Students at UNH want to know more about sustainability and ‘green’ jobs and industries, and are actively seeking out opportunities to learn more. The UNH Sustainability Internship Program – more often known as ‘SIP’ – is an innovative response that is helping to meet the needs of our students and diverse communities at UNH and beyond.

The UNH Sustainability Internship Program (SIP) works to connect talented students with organizations advancing sustainability throughout New Hampshire and beyond. Today’s students can be the next great generation of leaders if they have opportunities to apply what they are learning in the classroom to real world issues. They want to make a difference and can help organizations meet their challenges and achieve their goals for a more sustainable organization.

So what makes the SIP experience innovative? Students not only apply what they learn in the classroom as they would in any well developed internship, they also gain valuable work experience where they learn from dedicated mentors how to incorporate sustainability into their professional and personal lives. All of the internships either focus on or deal with some area related to sustainability. SIP goes further because the interns participate in peer meetings to discuss selected readings or media, go on field trips to see sustainability in action, in addition to blogging about their internship experience and what they are learning about sustainability. Students also work with their internship supervisors to develop presentations where they share their experience and learning as part of UNH’s annual Undergraduate Research Conference. Students also benefit by networking with professionals in diverse industries throughout New England who share their interests in sustainability and corporate social responsibility. All of these structured ‘outside-the-internship’ experiences that focus on sustainability help students to expand their knowledge and understanding – the actual internships are the jumping off point – all of the other experiences make SIP innovative.

The internship program is open to all students in any academic discipline. We deliberately marketed the program to encourage students from Liberal Arts and other disciplines to help them get beyond their preconceived notions about sustainability and ‘green industries’ being only for students in environmental science and natural resources. We recruited SIP employers to span this holistic conception of sustainability, allowing us to involve more students than just those interested in natural resources.

Many employers who participate in the program are established companies that have a record of innovation and achievement in sustainability – helping to ensure that students are going to get the related experience they want in these areas. These employers provide one or more students with an internship focused on researching, implementing, or enhancing sustainability/social responsibility for their organization. Internships range from students working for non-profit organizations who are helping municipalities reduce their energy use and carbon footprint, to a student learning about the growing field of eco-hospitality and its potential benefit to for-profit companies and the local economy, to another student who is conducting research for a sustainable investing firm.

By providing these hands-on internships and high quality, consistent supervision and mentoring, employers are making a sound investment in the future – helping to solve their challenges while giving students the experience they need to grow and develop into the leaders of tomorrow. As one SIP intern stated this year, “The experiences of my internship coupled with the roundtable discussions and guest speakers has provided me the most comprehensive view of sustainability, possibly more so than in any class I have taken as an Environmental Conservation Studies major.”