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Student Project Adds Green Energy to Campus

Aug 21, 2009 - Jarad Petroske

It's hard not to notice Humboldt State's latest renewable energy project. The top of the Old Music Building has been outfitted with an array of 60 photovoltaic (PV) solar panels quietly pumping out clean energy.

Environmental Research & Engineering graduate student Nathan Sanger works with HSU alum Bryce Mayall as the two install photovoltaic solar panels atop the Old Music Building. /Humboldt State University

"We chose the location because of its high visibility. We wanted people to notice it when they came back to campus in the fall," said James Robinson, student manager of the Humboldt Energy Independence Fund (HEIF), a campus energy initiative funded by students

The project is so visible that community members and campus visitors have called the contractor in charge of the job, Scurfield Solar, asking when the array's output meter will be up and running.

"A few people have even called to tell us that it's broken, but we just tell them we're not quite finished yet. It'll be up and running soon," said Bryce Mayall, Humboldt State environmental science alum and solar installer for Scurfield Solar.

The installation, a joint project between the Renewable Energy Student Union and HEIF, will feature an interpretive sign and display from Natural Resources Planning & Interpretation students and a solar-themed art installation on the back of the PV panels. HEIF is currently soliciting proposals from art students to take on the project.

Robinson says HEIF's mission is to reduce the environmental impact of energy use at Humboldt State University through student-driven projects—and this project hits the bull's eye. On a sunny day, the array can provide as much as 40 to 50 kilowatt hours, roughly enough to power four homes.

The panels were installed over the summer, when the work could be completed with minimal interruptions. Christopher Carlsen and Nathan Sanger, both students in the Environmental Research & Engineering program, were selected as interns to work side by side with the contractors, providing labor and learning first-hand the tricks of the trade.

HSU Environmental Science alum Bryce Mayall shows Environmental Research & Engineering graduate student Nathan Sanger how to install PV solar panels atop the Old Music Building. /Humboldt State University

For Scurfield, an HSU alum himself who frequently works with HSU students, the project was an opportunity to expand the training and raise Humboldt's profile as a place to learn about solar.

"The problem we're facing right now is that there is tons of solar ready to be installed but no real place to get the training. Between HSU and CR we hopefully are meeting the demand and making Humboldt a destination for learning about solar."

The Old Music Building project, part of the California Solar Initiative, supplements two existing University projects, a small solar demonstration system at the Telonicher Marine Laboratory in Trinidad that is a component of a hydrogen generation system, and a demonstration PV panel at the Campus Center for Appropriate Technology.

The Humboldt State solar projects along with projects at 15 other CSU campuses, are expected bring eight megawatts of green power on line, offsetting almost 9,500 metric tons of carbon dioxide, equivalent to mothballing almost 49,000 cars. ##
Cutline:
On the roof of the music building contractors and student interns install racks for photovoltaic panels.