

Green Jobs Networking Event

A Community based Leadership in
Sustainability event

Hosted April 2018

This event is part of Hamilton Sustainability Professionals Network (SPN)'s Community-based Leadership in Sustainability (CLS) educational series, which is supported through collaboration with McMaster University through the Academic Sustainability Programs Office.

The CLS initiative was created in the fall of 2014 as a joint initiative between a number of groups and organizations with the goal to develop a culture of sustainability through education, community engagement, and collaboration that inspires practical implementation.

Event Summary

Overview

The goal of the annual Green Jobs Networking Event is to connect students, recent graduates, community members, and Hamilton-based sustainability professionals to learn about and share information about green jobs and careers.

The fifth annual Green Jobs Networking Event was held on Wednesday April 4, 2018 from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at the McMaster University Centre for Continuing Education. The morning's agenda included opening remarks, introductions, and roundtable discussions with sustainability professionals, and concluded with a networking session.

Opening Remarks

Anna Magnotta, the Manager of Experiential Programs at the Student Success Centre in McMaster University, provided a presentation on networking. The presentation provided students with quick tips on the best ways to network, discussed how networking is the most effective way to find jobs, and reminded students of the importance of following up after meeting.

Pre-Event Survey

Following Anna's opening remarks, Liz McHardy, CEO of LURA Consulting and our event facilitator, gave a summary of the results obtained from two surveys conducted prior to the event - one survey of the sustainability professionals and another survey of registered attendees. A brief summary of the responses is included below and a full table can be found in Appendix A. Note that while we use the terms "attendee" and "emerging professional" interchangeably, this may not be the case depending on the individual respondent.

What skills are emerging professionals lacking?

- Interestingly, both attendees and professionals listed the same skills highest, including skills in Project Planning and Project Management; and Preparing and Delivering Presentations; and the Ability to Apply Knowledge and Skills to Real-world Settings. However, attendees listed Working Knowledge of Computers and Technology, while professionals did not. Professionals listed the Ability to Communicate Effectively in Writing, while attendees did not.

What skills do emerging professionals have most competency in?

- The only skill that both attendees and professionals rated highest was the Ability to Locate, Organize, and Evaluate Information from Multiple Sources. Attendees listed Interdisciplinary Teamwork Skills and the Ability to Collaborate with Others, as well as Critical Thinking and Analytical Reasoning Skills, while professionals did not. Interestingly, professionals listed Working Knowledge of Computers and Technology, which was one of the skills that attendees felt were lacking.

Pre-Event Survey Continued

In addition to the questions above, attendees were asked to list their questions for sustainability professionals, and professionals were asked to provide advice for emerging professionals. One attendee posed the following question:

“What are the barriers faced when implementing sustainable practices in business? What strategies have worked to overcome them?”

One of the professionals gave the following advice to emerging professionals:

“Continue to meet people and network, because you never know where the next opportunity is going to come from. It is an old cliché but it is true. Increasingly I am seeing firsthand how networking is opening doors for people. Also, continue to build your relevant experience. There are no shortage of places to volunteer to allow you to build your resume and learn new skills. Hundreds of people are applying to the same jobs, so gaining experience can help differentiate you.”

A complete list of questions and advice can be found in Appendix A.

The Sustainability Professionals

Following the presentation of survey responses and before engaging in roundtable discussions with attendees, each of the 17 sustainability professionals was introduced to the attendees.

The sustainability professionals that participated in the Green Jobs Networking Event include:

- **Janelle Trant**
Project Manager Transportation Planning, City of Hamilton
- **Erinn Todd**
General Manager, Green Venture
- **Jay Carter**
Hamilton Program Manager, Evergreen CityWorks
- **Dylan Ward**
Assistant Transportation Planner, City of Hamilton
- **Ian Borsuk**
Climate Campaign Coordinator, Environment Hamilton
- **Greg Iarusso**
Assistant Community Planner, City of Hamilton
- **Corey Helie Masters**
Marketing and Membership Coordinator, Community CarShare
- **Kate Flynn**
Sustainable Food Systems Research and Program Coordinator, Mohawk College
- **Kyle Malashewski**
Operations Manager, Bikeables
- **Jeff Axisa**
Transportation Planner, Dillon Consulting
- **Jayde Liebersbach**
Owner and Principal Designer, East 45th + Maple
- **Liz McHardy**
CEO, LURA Consulting
- **Vikram Hardatt**
Transportation Planner, IBI Group
- **Peter Topalovic**
Project Manager, Transportation Demand Management
Program Manager, Smart Commute Hamilton
Mobility Programs and Special Projects | Public Works Department (HSR) | City of Hamilton
- **Melissa Gallina**
Community Engagement Coordinator, LURA Consulting
- **Tony De Crescenzo**
Technologist, Active Transportation, IBI Group
- **Justin Abbiss**
Cof-founder, Bikeables, Coffeecology

Attendee Demographics

In addition to the 17 sustainability professionals listed above, 51 people attended the event. Registered attendees identified as undergraduate students (36), graduate students (7), community members (4), and recent graduates (4). Students who identified with an academic faculty mentioned Engineering (10), Science (5), Social Sciences (5), Health Science (3), Commerce (3), Arts and Science (2), and Humanities (2). College and graduate students referenced programs of Master of Business Administration (1), Sustainability Management (1), and Engineering and Entrepreneurship (1).

Event Feedback

In a follow-up survey, 22 attendees provided their feedback on various questions, which is summarized below. Attendees were offered the chance to win a \$25 gift card to the Mustard Seed Co-Op.

When attendees signed in on the day of the event, we asked them how they heard about the event. Majority of attendees said through Facebook (14), word of mouth (7), eventbrite (4), and some from posters and class talks (4).

When asked which aspects they found to be most appealing when choosing to register for the event, most said Networking/Professional Development (14), followed by Speaker/Content (3), Community Engagement (3), and Employment Opportunities (2).

When asked about their level of satisfaction with the event, attendees were Very Satisfied (12), Satisfied (9), or Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied (1). None of the attendees said that they were Dissatisfied or Very Dissatisfied with the event.

The highest rated event components, based on weighted average, include Quality of the Sustainability Professionals (WA 74%), Quality of Opening Remarks (WA 56%), Fun and Enjoyment (WA 56%) and Accessibility of Location (WA 56%). These were followed by Relevance of the Discussion (WA 48%), Value of Networking Activity (WA 47%), and Promotion and Communication of the Event (WA 39%).

Some specific comments included:

“The sustainability professionals were friendly, informative, and encouraging. I also liked the format of having 2 opportunities to meet and converse with people from different organizations, and the amount of time allotted for discussions.”

“I like the way it was organized. It was in a more casual setting which made discussion easier and there was less pressure to maintain a fully professional composure at all times.”

“Well-organized and accessible to people from diverse backgrounds. The event structure (speaker, roundtable followed by informal networking) was very effective.”

When asked what could be improved, attendees mentioned having more time to network (6) and that they would like more roundtable rotations to meet more professionals (3). Respondents suggested having more diverse professionals attend the event (2). Respondents also mentioned that they would like the event to be more sustainable and use less plastic utensils and to have more recycling bins (2) and lastly to promote the event to students better (2).

Some specific responses included:

“Perhaps more diversity in the professionals (although the diversity was still great) - would have liked to network with someone working in health and sustainability. Additionally, I think the event could have been more sustainable in terms of waste generation. The organizers could have encouraged participants to bring their own mugs and utensils, avoided the parfaits (plastic packaging), and provided compost bins for the plates.”

“I think having more rotations and a longer period of time for informal networking would be great. There was so many people I would have loved to talk to and learn from but there was not enough time.”

Finally, we are pleased and encouraged to know that 21 of the 22 respondents would be interested in attending another event in future.

Feedback from the sustainability professionals was extremely positive. They enjoyed the opportunity to meet with a passionate group of individuals around the topic of sustainability. Based on recommendations from respondents, we will be sure to have more time to network, include more roundtable rotations, provide more diverse professionals, promote to students more effectively, and ensure there are green bins and less waste from the catering service.

We would like to thank and recognize At the Table Catering for providing the delicious, healthy, and conscious breakfast for the event.

Collaborators

In addition to all of the Sustainability Professionals listed above, collaborators who contributed to the 2017/18 Green Jobs Event include: Gloria Ko and Anita Bharja as McMaster Student Volunteers who helped plan and coordinate the event; Elise Desjardins and Abbie Little from McMaster’s Academic Sustainability Programs Office who provided dedicated project management support for the event; and Amber Malik and Samir Habib who photographed the event, Thank you to our student facilitators; Clara Bulhoes, Anna Kulesza, Alicia Giannetti, Serad Abdi, Zainab Husain, Katheleen Eva, Gloria Ko, and Anita Bharja; for helping to create a positive networking atmosphere and ensure all attendees were able to have one-on-one discussions at the roundtables. A thank you goes out to the Hamilton Sustainability Professionals Network Executive Board members who supported overall strategic planning and direction, members include: Jayde Liebersbach, Liz McHardy, Peter Topalovic, Janelle Trant, and Kate Whalen.

Funding support was provided by McMaster’s W. Booth School of Engineering Practice; McMaster Student Success Centre; and McMaster’s centre for Continuing Education who provided a discounted rate on event space at One James North.

Event Photos



Photo credit: Samir Habib



Photo credit: Amber Malik



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Appendix A

Survey feedback highlighting the top responses from attendees and sustainability professionals. Numbers in brackets indicate the number of responses. Note that attendees did not select many skills that they felt emerging professionals were Not Competent in. Therefore, their ratings for Somewhat Competent are also included to demonstrate the trend.

What Attendees Said (23 respondents)	What Professionals Said (15 respondents)
What skills are most important to achieving success in sustainability? <i>(List of skills was provided. Reported in weighted average on a 5-point scale)</i>	
<p>The ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources (4.39)</p> <p>The ability to effectively communicate in writing (4.26)</p> <p>The ability to effectively communicate orally (4.22)</p> <p>Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills (4.22)</p> <p>The ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings (4.22)</p>	<p>Working knowledge of computers and technology (4.0)</p> <p>Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills (3.62)</p> <p>The ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings (3.43)</p> <p>Preparing and delivering presentation, and facilitating relevant discussions (3.25)</p> <p>The ability to effectively communicate orally (3.14)</p>
What skills are emerging professionals lacking in competence? (Not competent, Somewhat competent, Very Competent)	
<p>Skills in project planning and project management (4 not, 9 somewhat)</p> <p>Skills in project planning and project management (4 not, 10 somewhat)</p> <p>Organization and prioritization of work (3 not, 9 somewhat)</p> <p>The ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources (3 not, 13 somewhat)</p> <p>The ability to effectively communicate Orally (3 not, 9 somewhat)</p>	<p>Skills in project planning and project management (8 not, 6 somewhat)</p> <p>The ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings (6 not, 8 somewhat)</p> <p>Interdisciplinary teamwork skills and the ability to collaborate with others (3 not, 9 somewhat)</p> <p>Preparing and delivering presentations, and facilitating relevant discussions (2 not, 10 somewhat)</p> <p>The ability to effective communicate orally (2 not, 12 somewhat)</p>

What skills do emerging professionals have most competency in?

(Not competent, Somewhat competent, Very Competent)

<p>Interdisciplinary teamwork skills and the ability to collaborate with others (17)</p> <p>Preparing and delivering presentations, and facilitating relevant discussions (12)</p> <p>Organization and prioritization of work (11)</p> <p>Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills (11)</p> <p>The ability to effectively communicate in writing (11)</p>	<p>Working knowledge of computers and technology (14)</p> <p>The ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources (11)</p> <p>The ability to effectively communicate in writing (5)</p> <p>Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills (5)</p> <p>the ability to innovate and be creative (3)</p>
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Your questions for sustainability professionals

(asked of attendees)

- What are common misconceptions do people have about the sustainability profession?
- What drives you to develop a sustainable idea from ideation to creation and implementation in the real world? What challenges have you faced throughout this process?
- What skills can't you go without in the workplace (especially in a sustainable one)?
- If there is anything you could do differently in your education/career path, what would it be?
- What does the sustainability profession differ from the rest. How does one enter the sustainability professional world from an industry not part of sustainability profession. How do you define "sustainability professional" to an individual who does not have any background in sustainability. What qualities would you recommend an employee seeking a job to look for in the employer that would deliver an experience which the employee would learn about what it is precisely to be a sustainability professional. How does one distinguish a sustainability professional from any professional. What might be improved in the divide to create a more cohesive professional environment to be for sustainability.
- Any civil and environmental engineering opportunities? How do people with civil engineering backgrounds get involved? Any new projects coming up?
- What are some of the projects that sustainability professionals are involved in? Have you considered doing projects relating to sustainability in third world or developing countries? How did you get started in the workforce becoming a sustainability professional? Did you have co-op or internship experience prior?
- How to find secure employment in an increasingly unstable and somewhat unsustainable job market.
- What roles are in high demand currently? What type of science and technology experience should a business student have to be considered for a role? What does a day in life look like?
- What role do politicians and community leaders play in initiating these sustainability efforts? Is their role more important than that of common people.
- How can you build a self-sufficient career around your core values? How can one navigate 'sustainable choices' if there is no such thing as an impact-free solution?
- How far have you taken your studies? (Masters, PHD) How much has your education helped you in your field? What path do you recommend to take when starting a career in the sustainable energy industry? Has becoming a LEED AP, Energy Manager, or another designation, helped you in your career?
- How do you get people to care? What are you doing to create impact and how can I get involved? How can you translate sustainability into stories that mean something to me and my community?
- How did you get your first job in sustainability? What parts of your education are most relevant and helpful in your current career
- What is a good way to get into this field? What opportunities (jobs, volunteering, clubs, etc) would you recommend to students? If there is anything you find new sustainability professionals are consistently lacking, what is it, and how could they improve? Is there anything you dislike about this field?

Your advice for emerging professionals (asked of sustainability professionals)

- I think teamwork and collaborative skills are incredibly important for any young professionals looking to succeed in sustainability (or any field, for that matter). Sustainability is a collective effort that requires community-wide efforts and planning. Being able to bring people to the table and effectively facilitate interdisciplinary partnerships is an incredibly important skill to have in this field. My advice would be to work on forming relationships with as many people as possible and utilizing those relationships in your work! Get people involved!
- Get involved in an area that interests you! Saying yes to things today will open doors for you tomorrow.
- If your passion is sustainability, the key will be discovering what you are best at and applying that to the field.
- Build and maintain strong relationships in the field that you want to one day work.
- There may not actually be sustainability jobs in your field. You might need to be a leader in your industry.
- Strong communication skills, both written and verbal are a must. Sustainability in the transportation planning field is a work in progress. Decision makers / politicians are reluctant to make progressive changes to the way we allocate space in the road right of way. Transportation planners must be able to sell the overall benefits to all modes even if that means a slight delay for auto travel.
- There are so many ways to be part of the solution to environmental and social problems. Look for interesting problems, and consider how you can bring to bear an effective solution. Either on your own through (social) entrepreneurship or in your capacity within a larger organization. Ambition, creativity and passion be your guide.
- Network, follow-up, and network some more! People are generally very willing to help others, you just have to demonstrate initiative, interest, and why you are an asset. Volunteer, intern, do whatever it takes to learn as much as you can and get your name out there.
- There are many facets to this field and many avenues you can go down. My advice would be to find a niche that you find appealing and follow that path. Strive to become the best you can be in your chosen area. Above all, you must care about what you're doing and be passionate. You must find ways to make even the most mundane tasks somewhat enjoyable - like anything in life, you get back what you put in.
- If your passionate about the environment, socio-political issues, or want to make a real difference, this is the field for you. Apply your discipline to a variety of sustainability positions, and if there isn't one in your field create one!
- Be open to new paths and experiences that may not be exactly what you're looking for, but can be stepping stones to get there. There are lots of opportunities presented along the way - learn to see them and jump at the ones that speak to you. Your ability to forge connections with people is critical. Activism burnout is real - make time for self-care and purposefully seek out examples of optimism and hope.
- Sometimes the best learning is done doing the "grunt work" at organisations, don't be afraid to take things slow!
- Communication skills are critical, whether you're working in a team or making a presentation or trying to get people to engage in a new project. In work and volunteer jobs, and at events and conferences, always try to learn how a successful person is communicating. How do they communicate? What makes them good at it?
- Show up to everything and be sincere in doing so. If you have genuine interest in the subject then you should dive in, get involved wherever and whenever possible, step up into leadership roles, and demonstrate your passion, talent, and why you stand out.
- Build your resume while you are still in school. This doesn't have to be in a job setting - volunteer, take courses with internship components, attend conferences, etc. Recognize that sustainability is still an emerging field. Not all sustainability-related jobs will have "sustainability" in the title. Don't be discouraged if you don't get your dream job right out of school. It takes time to develop your strengths and find a job that is meaningful to you!