

Student Sustainability Group Making a Difference through Green Design

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Syracuse University senior Sean Foote is working to create a better world for his 3-year-old son. The engineering major cares about the environment and wants to help preserve it for his son's future enjoyment. This is mainly why Foote got involved with the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) Students group at Syracuse University. As the group's treasurer, he's helping to lead USGBC Students in educating others both on and off campus to take action on sustainability.

As an affiliate of the USGBC's Center for Green Schools, the SU chapter of USGBC Students leans heavily toward educating others on green buildings and sustainable design. This was evident in the group's first service project last fall. Foote and several other group members gave students at H.W. Smith School in Syracuse a hands-on introduction to hydroponics.

"We worked with the sixth graders to help them construct small, single-plant hydroponic planters," says Foote. "We wanted to emphasize the ideas of recycle and reuse so we constructed the planters from empty soda bottles, old cotton socks, some small gravel and tape. Using items they may find lying around will hopefully teach them to think creatively, and that environmental stewardship and sustainability can be achieved with even the smallest of contributions. The students did a great job and we all learned something that day."

USGBC Students was launched two years ago and was recognized by the Division of Student Affairs as a student organization last spring. It currently has about 20 active members, and membership has been increasing.

"Our main student base is civil engineers, but we have been recruiting more architecture students and hope to branch into environmental policy," says Samantha Hinz, USGBC Students president and a senior engineering and computer science major. "We also have a few ESF students involved. We've put up some flyers, but word-of-mouth recruitment happens often as news spreads about our tours and events."

A major focus of USGBC Students is offering various resources on the USGBC's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program. This includes access to local field trips, webinars, courses and study materials for LEED accreditation exams. The group recently toured

the renovated LEED Platinum Hotel Skyler, located a few blocks north of Main Campus, and held a study session for students interested in taking the LEED Green Associate accreditation exam. Earlier this month, several members attended the New York State Green Building Conference in Syracuse.

“We got good feedback on the Green Associate exam study session and hope to continue offering these types of events,” says Hinz. “We encourage students to pursue their own endeavors and to let us know how we can help. We recently had a group of students enter the EPA’s Campus RainWorks Challenge and we offered them help in finding an adviser.”

Although launching a new group can be tough at times, USGBC Students is fortunate that SU’s Sustainability Division has been a strong advocate by their side. “It is exciting to watch sustainability-related student groups prosper on campus,” says Melissa Cadwell, SU Sustainability Division’s marketing manager. “The USGBC group is no exception. They have worked hard to increase membership and to host events that are interesting to attend by all students.”

The USGBC Students group at SU will hold its next monthly meeting Thursday, March 28, at 7 p.m. in the Hall of Languages, Room 111. Anyone wanting to get involved in educating others about sustainability and green buildings is welcome to attend. Membership in USGBC Students is open to all SU and SUNY-ESF students interested in environmentally sustainable design, construction and building operations regardless of declared major or primary area of study.

For more information about USGBC Students, visit its Facebook page at www.facebook.com/SUUSGBC or email susgbc@gmail.com.