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Schaumburg's Sustainable Future: student research, social media, and suburban sustainability

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Abstract The Schaumburg's Sustainable Future (SSF) online social media project is a student-faculty collaboration at Roosevelt University that addresses sustainability issues, challenges, and solutions in the northwest suburbs of Chicago and, more generally, suburban communities. Conceived as an experimental class assignment in 2011, the SSF website and blog has become a locally relevant publication venue that engages sustainability topics in an interdisciplinary fashion and provides constructively critical information for the public about local suburban communities' efforts to become more sustainable in government operations, use of water and energy, and transportation systems. Students and faculty benefit from the opportunity to produce meaningful and potentially useful research and commentary through specially focused class writing projects (both individual and collaborative), the university community has become more aware of its role in the "edge city" suburban community of Schaumburg, a major employment and shopping center in suburban Chicago, and local organizations have connected with the university in mutually beneficial ways through the website. In a time when urban sustainability is a primary focus of city planning, parkland development, urban farming, and green infrastructure projects—all worthy endeavors most assuredly—the SSF Project (1) highlights the need for and impact of suburban-focused sustainability initiatives in public/active transportation, stormwater reduction and water conservation, and restoration of native ecosystems and (2) demonstrates the role colleges and universities can play in this process.

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Introduction

On Earth Day in the spring of 2011, Roosevelt University students and faculty launched an online educational and outreach project entitled Schaumburg's Sustainable Future—a website and blog that since then has been expanded and diversified through a plethora of undergraduate student research and writing projects in multiple classes within Roosevelt's Sustainability Studies program. At a time when urban sustainability research, writing, science, and policy tend to focus on the problems and potentials of large, densely settled cities, the Schaumburg's Sustainable Future (hereafter, SSF) Project deliberately takes as its explicit focus a paradigmatic "edge city" American suburb (Garreau 1991) that greatly expanded in the late twentieth century to its present population of just under 75,000, hosts one of the biggest shopping malls in the Midwest, and epitomizes the geography and problematics of suburban sprawl.

The SSF Project's goals are ambitious and intertwined, as students strive to

- Document the progress that Schaumburg and other suburbs are making on implementing sustainability measures across a variety of sectors—from open space conservation to enhancing public/active transportation systems to encouraging local food consumption to reducing stormwater runoff
- Critically evaluate the scope and efficacy of said efforts in a manner that is constructive yet academically rigorous

- Educate local citizens and the university community about environmental issues and sustainability resources in the region
- Demonstrate how institutions of higher learning can be a catalyst for progressive environmental change within suburban ecosystems

The project has provided undergraduates in Roosevelt's Sustainability Studies program that was founded in 2010 (Bryson and Zimring 2010) with a unique and ever-evolving venue for publishing original research, news reports, critical analyses, and local/regional commentary. This work contributes to a larger and more ambitious goal: to connect this constructively critical discussion to the concerns of citizens and leaders of Schaumburg and its neighboring communities, as well as eventually generate ideas for environmental policy development, university-government-community collaborations, and/or grassroots activism. The SSF Project also demonstrates the value of using introductory undergraduate courses as a vehicle for social media-based explorations of sustainability.

This article discusses the genesis and goals of the SSF Project, describes its pedagogical implementation thus far in several undergraduate Sustainability Studies courses at Roosevelt University (both online and campus-based) from the spring of 2011 to the fall of 2014, assesses the value of the project for student learning and engagement in campus- and community-based sustainability issues, discusses the relevance of the project to the recent sustainability initiatives of the Schaumburg community and neighboring suburbs, and connects the goals and scope of the project to a modest but growing trend within interdisciplinary fields such as urban ecology and sustainability studies of addressing the special problems and challenges inherent to suburban communities and ecosystems.

Urban ecology and suburban communities

While explicitly focusing on one American suburb, the SSF Project proceeds from the recognition enabled by the insights of urban ecology that cities and suburbs are interconnected and interdependent communities of both people and nature, co-existing within a heterogeneous built environment of pavement, infrastructure, buildings, and green spaces (Mancebo 2014). Sustainability issues, therefore, are just as critical for suburbs as they are for large cities—not only because of structural co-dependency and ecological relation but also because of the geographic reach and growing population of suburbia. According to Grimm et al. (2008), "cities [are]… heterogeneous, dynamic landscapes…[and] complex, adaptive, socioeconomic systems, in which the delivery of ecosystem services link society and ecosystems at multiple scales" (p. 756). From this perspective, cities include suburban municipalities as part and parcel of urban processes that must be analyzed in the context of global environmental change. The relevance of suburbs is illustrated by population statistics within the Chicago region. Within Cook County, IL, the 2010 US Census found 2.7 million people living in the city of Chicago along with another 2.5 million in the surrounding suburbs. Just beyond Cook County, the four collar counties of Lake, McHenry, Du Page, and Will add another 2.6 million residents to the metropolitan region. This means that 65 %, or nearly two thirds, of the population within Chicagoland reside in suburban areas (which here include exurbs as well as proximal rural communities).

The diversity and scale of suburban communities are key indicators that support the value of student projects such as Schaumburg's Sustainable Future. Far from being homogeneous in form or character, suburbs differ greatly from one another (Forsyth 2012). This inherent diversity provides both a wealth of ripe material for student researchers to document, assess, and compare how various suburbs are doing on articulating and realizing their sustainability goals—if indeed such goals are embraced at all. Moreover, the scale of most suburban communities—which sometimes include what Tumber (2012) describes as small industrial cities—theoretically allows for more ready apprehension and assessment of progress and problems related to sustainability as well as potentially quicker implementation of (and/or experimentation with) practical solutions. Here in the Chicago region, for example, edge city suburbs like Schaumburg and post-industrial river towns like Joliet, although quite different in many respects socioeconomically, share a similar physical size and population density, relatively small governments, and other factors that make scale an advantage rather than an obstacle.

Genesis and goals of the SSF Project

This online endeavor began as the culmination of the final assignment for a Spring 2011 class at Roosevelt University, Sustainability Studies 210 "The Sustainable Future"—an undergraduate course required for SUST majors and minors, but open to non-majors, which provides an introduction to sustainability by exploring definitions, controversies, trends, and case studies in various systems and locales (from urban to rural, as well as local to global). Using the Chicago region as a learning laboratory, the course takes a multidisciplinary approach to such topics as environmental history and urban ecology, sustainable development and landscape transformations, recycling and waste management, food and water consumption, ecosystem restoration, and environmental justice. The course has been offered regularly at both of Roosevelt's campuses (Schaumburg and downtown Chicago) as well as in

hybrid and fully online formats to maximize its accessibility to students.

The initial version of the SSF Project was launched on Earth Day, 22 April 2011, when it was unveiled at the Roosevelt University Schaumburg Campus film screening of the Aldo Leopold documentary *Green Fire*, as part of that film's national series of screenings in 2011. Since that initial build-out period, students in various SUST classes have researched and published blog posts and critical essays on the project's website, which as of September 2014 had totaled over 100 and 70, respectively. The SSF Project is thus a work in progress and an invitation to consider the prospects for sustainable development in the northwest suburban region of Chicago.

In this context, a sustainable future is one that integrates environmental stewardship with economic development and social equity. This is a much different take on the notion of progress—from the misguided assumptions that growth is good and that profit is the primary end goal of economic activity to the sustainable ideal in which development means fostering social equity, broad-based economic opportunity, and environmental ethics. The project proceeds, then, from the belief that students, academics, and citizens can and must contribute to the future sustainability of communities, rather than simply leave the task to professional planners and government officials. The hopeful outcome is an ongoing dialogue on what sustainability means in a suburban environment and how it can be implemented.

Pedagogy of the project

From its beginning, the SSF Project was conceived as both a pedagogical tool and a method of connecting students to the local community as well as to the ongoing discussion of sustainability issues in our cities and suburbs. One key goal was to create a final research/writing assignment that was not only feasible for both online and campus-based students but also rooted in a particular place: namely, the Village of Schaumburg, where Roosevelt has maintained a campus since 1996 and which is one of the Chicago suburbs at the vanguard of many sustainable development initiatives. Not only did this final project aim to integrate what they would learn in SUST 210, but also it represented a potentially meaningful contribution to the emerging discourse about sustainability, natural ecosystems, and the built environment that was in the air at Roosevelt and within the Chicago and Schaumburg communities.

During its initial design and build-out during the Spring 2011 semester, a subgroup of students investigated four key areas related to sustainable development: biodiversity, corporate social responsibility, land use, and water. These topics were not dictated by me as the instructor, but rather developed in conversation with the students so as to take full advantage of their interests, backgrounds, and prior academic training. Each student was responsible for researching and drafting an essay on their assigned topic, as well as finding relevant images and web resources. In my role of instructor and SSF Project coordinator, I edited each essay, compiled/edited the students' images and links, and designed the style and organization of the website as a whole.

Students have made many additional and diverse contributions to this site over the last two-plus years from the Fall 2011 to the Fall 2014 semesters. Participation in the SSF Project has come from three different SUST courses, all of which are core requirements in the major: online and on-campus sections of 210 Sustainable Future, one section of 220 Water, and two sections of 240 Waste (see Table 1). These contributions have taken the form of concise blog essays on timely topics and issues related to suburban sustainability, more in-depth, research-based critical essays on a wide range of issues and environmental problems, and collaborative documents in which student authors co-wrote introductions and bibliographies and contributed individually written chapters. Sustainability topics addressed in the project thus far, in addition to those noted above, include energy, environmental justice, food, green design, parklands, recycling, transportation, and waste. The obvious gaps in this list, such as climate change, merely indicate there is ample room for future classes to make substantive and necessary contributions to the Project.

Student writing for the SSF Project takes two primary forms: 300–500-word blog posts that address a timely sustainability issue, event, problem, development, etc. relevant to suburban communities and ecosystems and 1500–2000-word critical essays that engage suburban sustainability topics in a

Table 1 Semester-by-semester class contributions to the SSF Project

Semester	Course	Format	Blog posts contributed	Essays published
2011 Spring	SUST 210 Sustainable Future	Hybrid	0	4
2011 Fall	SUST 220 Water	Hybrid	0	14
2012 Spring	SUST 210 Sustainable Future	Online	22	15
2013 Spring	SUST 210 Sustainable Future	Online	24	12
2013 Fall	SUST 210 Sustainable Future	Online	23	7
	SUST 240 Waste	Hybrid	8	3
2014 Fall[a]	SUST 210 Sustainable Future	Online	25[a]	25[a]
	SUST 240 Waste	On campus	13[a]	13[a]

[a] Projected for the 2014 Fall semester

more in-depth and nuanced fashion (such as the impacts of waste upon environmental justice in suburban communities). The blog assignment has a rolling due date throughout the semester, so that students effectively produce blog content two to three times per week during the course of the term. The latter is a capstone assignment due at semester's end that represents that class's major contribution to building out the site's content areas.

While the blog posts are shorter and more informal than the essays, both assignments require students to integrate visual media (photographs, videos, and/or maps) as well as hyperlinks within their writing. Hence, the project serves to introduce students to the type of writing, file management, and attention to detail necessary to designing multimedia web pages and maintaining a professional-looking blog. Finally, some SUST classes which worked on the SSF Project undertook team-based research assignments, in which groups of three to five students were given a general topic (e.g., food, energy, green design) and tasked with identifying subtopics relevant to Schaumburg and/or suburban ecosystems and communities. Organizing these group endeavors required a lot of communication, debate, and reflection among the group members and guidance from the instructor, as well as collaborative editing/critique of the essays prior to their uploading to the website.

Value for student learning and engagement

The SSF Project has enhanced student learning and engaged undergraduate scholars in critical discussions of sustainability in urban and suburban communities in several ways. First, the Project provides a forum for the publication of writing that matters: instead of students merely writing traditional research papers directed at the professor-as-reader, their research and writing is much more goal- and audience-directed. Students write about a particular suburban community or sustainability topic for a *general* reader, not a purely academic audience; yet their writing also must integrate sources and utilize evidence, much as is done in more formal academic discourse. The fact that student-generated writing constitutes the bulk of the SSF Project and, semester by semester, builds out the scope and depth of the site's content means that students have gained a sense of ownership about the project and pride in their contributions to it. These feelings are reinforced in a positive feedback loop when website readers comment on the site, or other blogs link to its content, as happens fairly frequently.

Also significant is the sense of place the project has engendered among student participants, which is one of the key secondary impacts of the SSF Project. One critique of modern suburbia is its placelessness, a sense in which one could be anywhere USA, rather than in a particular community with specific needs and distinguishing features (Thall 1999). With its prevalent chain stores and restaurants, high-profile shopping districts, neighborhoods of architecturally homogeneous townhouses, and thousands of people who commute there for work but know little about the community at the neighborhood level, Schaumburg suffers from this notion of placelessness within the consciousness of many who work, shop, or study there. The SSF Project not only requires its student writers to learn about, document, and assess the various aspects of "place" within and around Schaumburg but also serves to construct an alternative narrative about the village that complements (and often critiques) outsiders' assumptions as well as official governmental accounts, for example.

This effect is aptly illustrated by the reaction of students in my Sustainability Studies classes when I incorporate student-authored material from the SSF Project into our required readings and ask them, at the semester's outset, for their general impressions about the site. Students from the Chicago region who know about Schaumburg by popular reputation or from infrequent visits typically reply with comments like, "I had no idea Schaumburg had these kind of open space features or was doing this kind of conservation work," or "I've lived in (or near) the Village for many years but never visited this site."

Related to this is the recognition of diversity within Chicago's suburban communities, a revelation that often surprises students from the city who paint the suburbs with broad strokes, as well as those from specific suburban or rural communities who have limited knowledge of other parts of the metro area. This notion of diversity refers to the great variance among Chicago's suburbs in terms of population size, racial demographics, geographic area, economic status, level of industry, transportation access, pollution levels, government structure, and—last but not least—commitment to and progress on achieving sustainability. Students are frequently required to pick one or another suburban community for their research and writing; this in turn often provokes a question to me: "Is this community a suburb? If not, can I still write about it?" As urban planning scholar Ann Forsyth has argued, this conundrum is not particular to undergraduates: "Even among urban scholars…there is no consensus as to what exactly constitutes a suburb. The plethora of meanings expands when one includes popular and media accounts" (2012, p. 270). Thus, participation in the SSF Project has resulted in vigorous class discussions about the definition and characteristics of suburbia, which scholars suggest has important implications for planning and policy within suburban communities (Forsyth 2012; Mancebo 2014).

The third value of the SSF Project is the means by which it has provided a context for developing new research/writing assignments in the SUST curriculum as well as assigned reading materials for students in other courses not actively working on the project. For example, in developing a

research-based writing assignment for SUST 240 Waste, I adapted the requirements for a "waste and environmental justice" essay to suit the context and purpose of the SSF website by focusing it on students' choices of suburban communities and requiring the integration of links and annotated images, etc. This has created the foundation for future sets of waste/EJ essays to expand and diversify this part of the project, provide potential reading material for other SUST classes that instructors can utilize (such as the Water in Schaumburg Project from the Fall of 2011), and publish community-focused critical research that is congruent with the university's mission of social justice. In general, students have reported in class discussions and course evaluations a high level of satisfaction with the SSF Project-related writing assignments in terms of providing a suitable academic challenge and a valuable applied learning opportunity that encourages them to draw on their own life experiences, conduct new research, and focus on a real suburban community (rather than, say, a hypothetical research problem).

Moreover, the experience of developing multimedia, web-based essays proved to be a jumping off point for several students to present their work at public environmental conferences and/or engage in other online writing projects of considerable substance. Two outstanding students from the Spring 2011 class who contributed to the initial build-out of the site were selected to participate in a regional sustainability and ethics public forum at the Chicago Botanic Garden the following October. One went on to secure a paid internship as an environmental sustainability associate in Roosevelt's Physical Resources Department in 2013, and a significant part of her work was to produce copy, images, and design features for the university's "Green Campus" website, which was the first comprehensive documentation of Roosevelt's sustainability efforts across its facilities, grounds, and academic departments (Green Campus 2014). The other landed a job after graduation as communications director for Angelic Organics Learning Center, the educational arm of a CSA organic farm in northern Illinois, for which a good part of her job involves managing social media. Still other students have gone on to make substantive contributions to the official blog of the Sustainability Studies academic program, which now features several student contributors on a variety of topics, from urban farming to energy to biodiversity to waste and recycling.

Sustainability in Schaumburg and neighboring communities

Beyond its many pedagogical objectives, the primary focus of the SSF Project is to document and assess the state of environmental conservation and sustainable development in Schaumburg, a prominent "edge city" in the Chicago region that in many ways epitomizes late twentieth/early twenty-first century sprawl. The project thus aims to track the past and ongoing efforts of Schaumburg to become a more sustainable suburb. Another way to put this is in the terms used by Simmons Buntin, whose insightful essay, "The Good Suburb," beats against the tide of pervasive criticism of suburbia as sprawling, inherently wasteful, and unsustainable by suggesting that it is indeed *possible* for suburbs to be "good" communities in terms of design, liveability, and environmental impact. As he notes, "The good suburb strives to be the sustainable suburb. That is, it works to ensure the equitable preservation of the built and natural environments, cultural heritages, and economic opportunities for all citizens. As part of a larger region, it does not deplete the varied environmental, economic, and social resources from the surrounding region without a mechanism for replenishing them, just as species do not deplete the resources of their habitats without risk of death or the ability to move on" (Buntin 1999). While Buntin's definition of a good suburb is an idealization, it provides as worthy blueprint for suburban sustainable development.

At the heart of Schaumburg's civic identity is a fundamental paradox: this large and thriving community is at once defined by physical sprawl and economic production/consumption, yet in many ways is environmentally progressive. That tension, along with Schaumburg's status as a regional employment center, makes it particularly valuable to study as an ongoing experiment in fostering sustainability in the suburbs. Moreover, by including news from and analysis of other suburban communities, both local and far-flung, the SSF project will over time be able to assess Schaumburg's progress from a much wider and better-informed perspective.

The paradox involved in envisioning a sustainable future for Schaumburg is illustrated first by its environmentally progressive characteristics, such as the village's biodiversity survey and plan completed in 2004, only the second such plan in the Chicago region (the first was by Chicago in 1999). This document, "Biodiversity: A Plan for the Village of Schaumburg," justifiably has been lauded for providing "specific guidance for maintaining, restoring, and preserving the integrity of open space in the village. The plan [also] targets specific high priority sites and makes recommendations for the preservation and restoration of these sites" (Village of Schaumburg 2014b; Applied Ecological Services 2004). Four years later, this was followed by another planning document, the "Comprehensive Green Action Plan," also referred to as the "C GAP," which describes the suburb's accomplishments to date and maps out future projects and challenges within the areas of carbon emissions, land use, transportation, green power, energy efficiency, green buildings, water management, recycling and waste reduction, education and outreach, and funding opportunities (Village of Schaumburg 2014b). More recently still, the village committed itself to assessing and improving its longstanding bicycle network in 2011–12, in terms of better signage and lane markings, safer

crossings and path linkages, and heightened awareness of and enthusiasm for biking among the citizenry. The effort was made in collaboration with the Chicago-based Active Transportation Alliance and resulted in the production of the "Schaumburg Bikeways Plan" (Active Transportation Alliance 2012; Bryson 2011; Goff 2012; Village of Schaumburg 2014a). As these efforts indicate, Schaumburg has been a leader in suburban sustainability planning in the Chicago region and has integrated green metrics into its planning and development processes.

Despite the fairly rosy and faintly boosterish rhetoric of the C GAP, though, several open questions remain for students, planners, citizens, scholars, and politicians to address: how much concrete progress has Schaumburg actually made in becoming more sustainable? What particular aspects of sustainability among those addressed in the C GAP demonstrate tangible results? These and other questions point out the local relevance of community-focused academic efforts to independently assess Schaumburg's sustainable future from an objective, independent viewpoint. The related areas of water and green infrastructure show how sustainable development efforts are fundamentally in tension with key structural characteristics of Schaumburg's built landscape.

One early example of such assessments is the Water in Schaumburg Project, in which five groups of SUST 220 Water students researched and analyzed several aspects of water sustainability, management, and conservation vital to Schaumburg in the fall semester of 2011: water supply, water quality, wastewater treatment, wetland ecology, and the Salt Creek watershed (Radeck and Bryson 2011). Students soon recognized the impossibility of stopping at the political borders of a suburb in analyzing and critiquing its water management practices and policies and that the presence or absence of green infrastructure has a great impact on water conservation and wastewater management. Schaumburg's water supply comes from Lake Michigan, approximately 30 miles away in another major watershed. Thus, its supply and water quality status directly depend upon Chicago, which manages the facilities that draw water from the lake and treat it prior to public distribution.

Likewise, Schaumburg's wastewater is managed by separate systems (stormwater and sewage) both within and outside its borders and thus impacts many downstream communities. Much of its stormwater drains through sewers, ditches, and creeks into Busse Lake, a flood control and recreational impoundment within the 3700-acre Busse Woods unit of the Cook County Forest Preserve to the east of Schaumburg. Schaumburg's sewage is treated by the John Egan and Hanover Park Treatment Plants of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicagoland, a countywide government agency which services all of Cook County and thus dozens of suburban communities as well as Chicago itself. Finally, Schaumburg is part of the upper Salt Creek watershed, a major suburban/urban stream that drains suburban communities in the northwest, west, and southwest regions of the Chicago metro area, one that encompasses approximately 500,000 people. Consequently, what happens upstream in Schaumburg matters greatly to communities in the lower part of the Salt Creek watershed.

The Water in Schaumburg Project not only provided a first-of-its-kind comprehensive overview of water sustainability issues and around Schaumburg but it also has made a positive impact upon Roosevelt's own sustainable landscape planning and redevelopment efforts starting in the 2011–12. The university's location in the most paved-over quadrant of the village made it abundantly clear that Roosevelt needed to invest in green infrastructure projects in order to capture as much stormwater runoff as possible to reduce polluted runoff into Salt Creek and provide a living demonstration of water conservation practices within the community. Such efforts have included the installation of pervious paving; improved water conservation fixtures throughout the campus; installation of rain gardens and bioswales; removal of turfgrass and restoration of prairie plant communities; greatly reduced use of fertilizers and other chemicals in grounds maintenance practices; and ecological management of the detention pond to remove invasive species, encourage native wetland plant growth and animal biodiversity, and increase detention and filtration capacity of runoff wastewater (Green Campus 2014).

One highly symbolic as well as practical manifestation of green infrastructure in part inspired by students' work on the SSF Project is the RU Community Garden, founded in 2012 and expanded/improved in its 2013 and 2014 growing seasons. The garden was designed from the get-go with sustainable water conservation practices in mind: rain barrels were utilized in 2012 and 2013 and a drip irrigation system installed in the summer of 2014 to provide a convenient and minimally wasteful source of water. Nestled within a prairie restoration across the street from the local IKEA store, the garden has caught the interest of larger community as an educational site and water conservation landscape feature, as exemplified by an invited presentation by one of the garden's student managers (and key contributor to the Water in Schaumburg Project) to the Schaumburg Community Garden Club. We hope this nascent connection to local master gardeners will prove a fruitful means of sharing sustainable water use practices in lawns and gardens with the larger community.

Lessons learned and future directions

Three years after the debut of the SSF Project, there have been numerous successes and positive impacts, particularly for student learning and engagement as well as for mapping out some of the major sustainability issues and

challenges facing Schaumburg and its suburban neighbors. These include the following:

- Increasing student engagement with suburban-specific sustainability issues, particularly among city-based students who previously had little knowledge of suburban communities and their diversity
- Fostering a greater sense of place about the Village of Schaumburg by documenting its environmental and cultural history and assessing its many sustainability assets (such as the several conservation areas within the Village's Park District, and its proximity to forest preserves and wetland complexes)
- Characterizing various sustainability practices and identifying the challenges, gaps, and problems facing Schaumburg and similar communities that emerged as outer-edge suburbs in the post-war period, such as sprawl, the lack of public transportation and walkability, the need for sustainable water/wastewater management, and the paucity of high-quality open space for the conservation of local biodiversity
- Providing a comprehensive and wide-ranging critical analysis of sustainability issues in/around Schaumburg that goes beyond the useful but limited perspective of local governments striving not only to educate citizens but also to market their best achievements
- Uniting efforts of campus-based and online students in advocating for sustainable suburban development in and beyond Schaumburg
- Providing an accessible publication venue for undergraduate writers, and in the process integrating multimedia writing and editing into the Sustainability Studies curriculum at Roosevelt

That said, there remain challenges in maintain and improving the SSF Project in the near-term future, as well as significant unrealized potential in connecting with the general public, non-profit social and environmental organizations, businesses, and local government officials. At present, the editorial load of the project's blog and content essays is labor-intensive and time-consuming and is handled by a single faculty member (the author). This is one situation in which an intern, work-study student, or independent study student could provide significant support. Drawing in other instructors over time will make the task of managing the site's content and design more of a challenge but could also be a way of scaling up the content, blogging frequency, and diversity of sustainability issues examined.

Perhaps most important are the potential connections with and impacts upon the local community that is the project's primary focus. Thus far, the interactivity with the general public via the website has taken the form of people posting occasional comments to the blog as well as individuals e-mailing the site's editor with questions or comments about a wide range of topics. These have come from private citizens with personal interests in local recreation or conservation issues or from conservation-minded folks engaged in restoration work in the northwest suburban region of Chicago. Little to no engagement of local government officials or planners has materialized, and it would seem that exploring ways to develop this kind of interactivity would not only better connect the Sustainability Studies program as well as Roosevelt University to the Schaumburg community but also help influence sustainability planning and project implementation in Schaumburg.

Finally, the SSF Project holds significant potential for raising the university's visibility and establishing it as a creative and active voice in promoting suburban sustainability. Over the short lifetime of the project, the campus has undertaken a wide-ranging landscape redevelopment effort that aims to make the physical space of the university on 27 acres in Schaumburg as environmentally sustainable as possible. By removing 60 % of its non-native turfgrass (with plans to remove more over time) and replacing that with native prairie and wetland plants, developing bioswales and butterfly gardens, planting additional trees and enhancing its existing urban forest (now designated as a Tree Campus USA by the National Arbor Foundation), managing a naturalized detention pond by periodic prescribed burns in order to mitigate invasive plant species, launching a community garden in 2012, replacing sections of brick and asphalt with pervious paving, building a walking trail and creating signage in the different natural areas of the campus to provide outdoor recreation and educational opportunities for students and staff, and improving campus recycling efforts, the RU Schaumburg Campus has committed itself to becoming an exemplary green institution in the NW suburbs of Chicago (Green Campus 2014). These efforts have resulted in a dramatic transformation of the campus from a highly conventional corporate headquarters facility to a sustainable college campus by reducing stormwater runoff; providing on-site environmental education opportunities for pre-school children, college students, faculty, and staff; enhancing local biodiversity (and awareness thereof); and growing organic food for use in the school's dining center as well as for donation to local food pantries.

The SSF Project embodies the ethos of that ongoing effort and has documented and commented upon its progress every step of the way. It provides a meaningful venue for undergraduate students—regardless of their major, their campus location, or their prior knowledge of Schaumburg and/or suburban ecosystems—to document, analyze, and disseminate knowledge about sustainability problems and best practices, environmental justice issues, and the means by which local citizens can contribute to the ongoing efforts of Schaumburg IL (and suburban communities more generally) to create a more sustainable future.

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