

CAPSTONE SUMMARY

DETAILS

Student

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Site

US EPA Region 10

Faculty Advisor

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Internship Quarter

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"The Culture of Consumerism: Eco-Labels and Sustainable Choices"

Summary:

I collaborated with two other capstone students to develop a sustainable consumption clearinghouse for the West Coast Climate and Materials Management Workgroup. We conducted independent research based on research criteria developed by the Workgroup leads. The clearinghouse consisted of synthesized journal articles and our policy recommendations that aimed to help local government and policy-makers develop more sustainable decisions concerning consumption.

Why I did it:

This project aimed to address the problem of unsustainable consumption. As population continues to rise, consumption increases at an even faster pace. The detrimental implications of unsustainable consumption are contributions to climate change, increased waste to landfills and limited raw resources as well as social implications such as social inequity and unethical labor practices. Applying policy that encourages more sustainable consumption and more importantly conservation is as important as ever. This project served as an educational and supplemental foundation for government officials to easily access holistic information concerning consumption.

How I did it:

The general topic of sustainable consumption was divided into about 10 subcategories among the three interns. In addition to conducting research for each of these categories, we also ranked each of our sources based on criteria given to us by the sustainable consumption workgroup. We synthesized each document and added our policy recommendations in order to render an article that is technical and long, easier to access for stakeholders and local governments. There was also general collaboration and regular communication between the interns and the EPA in order to assure that we were headed in the right direction.

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The Big Picture

The product of the sustainable consumption clearinghouse has the potential to reach out to a diverse group of influential people. EPA Region 10 prides itself on setting a positive example concerning sustainable policy. This project aims to act as a foundation for a dialogue concerning encouraging more sustainable consumption choices.

What I discovered:

I discovered that culture and values play a large part in why people choose to consume. This idea that culture propels consumer choice prompted me to take a closer look at the eco-label and both its global prevalence. I found that eco-labels, while culturally palatable, should not be heavily relied upon to render current consumption choices more sustainable. Through my research, I came to the conclusion that our values and our cultures must transform in order to embrace conservation.

What I Learned:

During this capstone project, I improved my skills of how to search for information in online databases. There is a lot of already existing information concerning sustainable consumption. I developed the capacity to filter through all the information to find what is pertinent to local governments. Also, as this was an independent research project, my capstone allowed me to strengthen my communication skills in order to stay in touch and to develop research with my fellow capstone research colleagues as well as the workgroup leads, our site supervisor and our faculty advisor.