PIEER SUSTAINABILITY

There is a new initiative at UNI. The Provost and Executive Vice President’s Office at the University of Northern Iowa is pleased to announce a new collaborative initiative entitled, the Provost’s Initiative for Environmental Equity and Resilience, PIEER. This effort creates a two-year partnership between the Provost’s Office, students, sustainability faculty, and the Recycling Reuse Technology Transfer Center (RRTTC) to deliver awareness programming, educational opportunities for student interns, and community engagement projects in the area of both environmental equity issues (justice and diversity) and environmental resiliency (sustainability). PIEER will work with schools, UNI Centers, and community organizations to provide educational awareness activities that can bring about new insights and understandings of rural/urban environmental equity and resilience issues. The overall goal is to create engaged populations to consider positive changes in their environments and health by increasing awareness about common issues and concerns between rural and urban Iowans. Examples of an issue PIEER will address is lack of access to healthier food choices and solutions such as, community gardens, gathering unused seasonal fruits and vegetables for the Northeast Iowa Food Bank and making these changes sustainable to benefit future generations.

Julie Grunklee, a non traditional Health Promotion student at UNI, serves as PIEER’S Field Project Coordinator and assists with their Public Relations, “It’s my job to set up projects and make sure they are executed smoothly by the team. I also publicize events as well as take event photos and do write-ups for local media.”

Julie is an RN and is earning her B.A. in Health Promotions because she wants to focus her nursing practices on prevention. “In 20 years of nursing, I learned that prevention is the best treatment and a lot of suffering can be avoided if the disease did not happen in the 1st place. As a personal goal, I would like to find a better balance to our current food system by working with healthcare providers, food producers and consumers to provide healthier food choices for all people across the globe.”

Julie is part of the PIEER initiative team that involves students led by Provost Fellow and Environmental Health Professor, Dr. Catherine Zeman. Julie has gained a rich learning experience from PIEER. “The PIEER project has opened my eyes to the possibilities of preventing a lot of health disparities and suffering by teaching people to avoid or decrease exposure to these factors in the first place. I also have a great team to work with. While I have a lot of experience with collaboration, I've learned to rely on my team for expertise and creativity far beyond what I can do alone. I've also learned a lot about UNI and what it has to offer students, staff, faculty and the community. The whole campus is really service oriented not only to students and those who work here, but to the larger community as well.”

PIEER has participated in the Sustainability Conference, the African American Children’s and Family’s Read–In Conference, and the FEMA Disaster Preparedness Fair. PIEER will help the RRTTC with next week’s Earth Week activities. In the fall, Julie will be a guest in Dr. Lea Ann Shaddux’s Dimensions of Wellness class to discuss Environmental Wellness. “We want to partner with others (organizations, faculty, etc.) to provide awareness and education about things in their living, work, or recreational space that can have an impact on their health and well-being. These STEM principles can be applied in many fields of study such as Chemistry when discussing how Iron and Calcium deficiencies increase the likelihood of lead poisoning; Math when discussing the power of prevention vs. treatment of disease, or the cost of carbon foot printing; Engineering and technology when discussing how to transform a space into an environmentally friendly one that can promote health and resilience, making the healthy choice the easy choice.”

Julie see’s endless possibilities with the PIEER Sustainability Program at UNI. “We aim to partner with others such as schools, UNI centers and community organizations to provide educational awareness activities about things in the environment that can have a negative effect to one’s health and resilience. Through these activities, our aim is to provide insight and understanding to these environmental factors that they could be exposed to in their everyday lives, and how to lessen or avoid those exposures. We are here to serve you. If faculty, staff or students think would like us to present a topic, provide an interactive activity or participate in a conference or fair, let us know. I would be happy to visit with you. The easiest way to reach me is via email at juliern@uni.edu.”

Story by Stefani Keller, UNI STEM Program Associate, Communications
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