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Profile Interview With Faculty Mentor Lindsey Payne

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How

Where

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Why

PROFILE INTERVIEW WITH FACULTY MENTOR LINDSEY PAYNE

John Saltanovitz, College of Agriculture, College of Engineering

STUDENT BIO

John Saltanovitz is a sixth-year undergraduate student at Purdue University pursuing a dual degree in natural resources and environmental science (NRES) and environmental and ecological engineering (EEE). During his junior year, he had the opportunity to be a peer-teaching assistant for a class under the supervision of Dr. Lindsey Payne. This class emphasized the importance of critical thinking and innovative solutions in relation to current world issues. After this experience, Dr. Payne invited him to be a part of her service-learning class titled Urban Water Projects (EEE 495).

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Lindsey Payne is the assistant director of service-learning at Purdue University with the Center for Instructional Excellence. She is also an assistant professor in the Department of Environmental and Ecological Engineering and serves as the faculty advisor for the Student Sustainability Council.

Dr. Payne stands out from any teacher I have had. She is passionate and brings a great attention to detail to the class. She gets to know every student and provides him or her every opportunity to succeed. Dr. Payne pushed me to be a better student and person, and she gave me opportunities that will prepare me for life. She encouraged me to advance my education in service-learning courses such as Urban Water Projects (EEE 495), and Engineering Environmental Sustainability (EEE 355). This encouragement is a reflection of her teaching style

and her ability to motivate those around her to strive for more. Service-learning courses like EEE 495 provide students with a real-world experience—the opportunity to make a difference now.

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING

Teaching may not have been Dr. Payne's initial career choice, but the idea to “use one's skills and knowledge to better those around you” has always been her mantra. After working a couple of different jobs, Dr. Payne

Dr. Lindsey Payne, rain garden project. Courtesy of Purdue Marketing and Media.

Dr. Payne with students in Urban Water Projects (EEE 495). Courtesy of Pat Kuhne.

realized that teaching would provide an opportunity to improve the lives of others by using her skills, training, and experiences. She desires to build sustainable communities and educate future generations on the importance of conservation and innovative thinking.

Dr. Payne explains:

I first became involved in service-learning through my volunteerism for the Wabash River Enhancement Corporation (WREC). In 2012 in partnership with WREC, I was awarded the \$50,000 College Community Challenge (Ford C3) grant from Ford Motor Company Fund. Through the grant we had intended to work with student groups to implement small stormwater best management practices in the Lafayette area. I realized there was a unique opportunity to link this project to a credit-bearing course that would give students a real-world experience in building sustainable communities.

Dr. Payne has since taught the class EEE 495 three times, working with multiple partners, including WREC, Imagination Station, Oakland High School, Cary Home, Tecumseh Middle School, City of Lafayette Fire Station #8, Christ United Methodist Church, and the Food Finders Food Bank. In this course, student teams, in partnership with a community organization, identify site-specific stormwater management issues, codesign solutions, maintain budgets, and install practices. This course aims to integrate transdisciplinary knowledge—knowledge produced by students, community partners, and other stakeholders—into the final projects. These classes have provided 28 different small-scale water

projects (e.g., rain gardens, native savannas, bioswales, rain barrels) to seven community partners, planted over 17,000 plants and 16 trees, involved 29 different Purdue students, and engaged over 600 volunteers.

REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING

Using service-learning as an instructional technique allows students the opportunity to connect their academic course content to solving real-world problems through civic engagement, sustainable design, integrating diverse perspectives, communication, and leadership. Service-learning is challenging. Some of the biggest barriers are communication and the sustainability of the project. While these challenges are daunting, they also give students a chance to face adversity and grow professionally. In order to prepare us for these situations, Dr. Payne stressed the importance of professionalism and understanding when approaching the project. The ability to meet the objectives and incorporate multiple ideas into a final solution were points she stressed daily. She helped us realize that a class that involves real-world experience required us to be mature, work hard, and communicate effectively. Additionally, Dr. Payne had us write self-reflections and self-reviews on our own work to help us better our understanding of the process and how we could improve.

Students reflected on the long-term mind-set needed in order for a project to be successful. Project needs do not stop just because the class ends. While challenging, this provided us the opportunity to grow individually and professionally. We were able to use the skills and

knowledge learned in the classroom and apply them in the local community. Many students thought they couldn't have an impact until after they graduated; however, this course helped them realize that anyone can have a positive impact at any time. All that is required is the right mind-set and hard work.

Communication and relationships played a vital role in getting these projects started. Dr. Payne held many meetings with the stakeholders about working with the students and what to expect. It was essential to get partners' input on the project and what they thought would work best. We incorporated stakeholders' ideas into the final design. Meetings, design charrettes, and interviews provided outlets for the stakeholders to provide feedback to the students and voice their concerns. Communication between stakeholders and students is key to success.

RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING

In Dr. Payne's words:

Service-learning provided me the opportunity to connect with students on a different level than in a traditional classroom. I get more one-on-one time

with students that allows me to get to know them better, as well as provide mentorship support. I get to know students' interests, strengths, weaknesses, and what they want to do in their professional careers. This knowledge is essential to not only creating a good learning environment, but it continues to push me to grow professionally.

Dr. Payne's work in service-learning has also allowed her to work closely with a community that she cares about, and with topics she is passionate about. In her free time, she makes an effort to become involved in community organizations, including N-10 Community Garden, West Lafayette Go Greener Commission, WREC Education Committee, and the Purdue University Friday Nights Lights program. Her work provides her with a sense of pride and joy that comes with helping those around her.

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