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The Power to Create a Healthier, More Inclusive Future

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Elizabeth Cain '21 | Environmental Conservation and Sustainability, Business Administration minor

Spring 2021 was Elizabeth's third semester in the [B Impact Clinic](#), serving as a student consultant and peer mentor on student teams

helping regional businesses assess and improve their social and environmental impact. On campus, some of her involvements include being the Co-President of Net Impact UNH, serving as the Green Office Intern for the UNH Sustainability Institute, and being involved in various other organizations including Publicity Coordinator for Girl Up, Student Environmental Action Coalition and Xi Sigma Pi Natural Resources Honor Society. She's looking to pursue a career in corporate sustainability following graduation and believes that private industry has

an immense capability to enact and normalize stakeholder-driven and sustainable practices for the good of our world.

UNHSI: *In your studies at UNH, you've paired an Environmental Conservation and Sustainability major with a minor in Business Administration. Why did you feel this was important and what have you gained from this pairing?*

ELIZABETH: I decided on the combination of an ECS major and a Business Administration minor because I'm really interested in the intersection of sustainability and business. I'm planning to pursue a career in corporate sustainability following graduation, and felt like supplementing my sustainability work with a business perspective would help prepare me well for this path. It was interesting to integrate a different style of thinking into my studies, and helped me to understand the existing framework of how business is done in order to leverage entry points for sustainable improvements to business practices when in the field. This line of work is something I'm passionate about, as I feel that the impact that private industry has, both on the environment, and in society, has immense power to create a healthier, more inclusive future across the three pillars of sustainability: people, planet, and profit.

UNHSI: *You've also had some really interesting hands-on experiences to deepen your understanding and practice of sustainability, from participation in the B Impact Clinic and interning at the Sustainability Institute to your involvement in Net Impact. Can you tell us a bit about these and how these experiences impacted you and/or your career aspirations?*

ELIZABETH: All of these co-curricular activities have been incredibly valuable experiences in that they have all given me opportunities to apply my learning and gain a more robust understanding of the collaborative nature of sustainability work. In my time at the Sustainability Institute, I have served as the Green Office Intern and an Outreach and Engagement intern, which has broadened my scope of communication not only to the UNH community, but also to the larger

sustainability community between higher education institutions and our surrounding New Hampshire community as well. The B Impact Clinic also fortified my exposure to hands-on, practical experiential learning by directly introducing me to the B Impact Assessment and our partner companies, where I was able to appreciate the intricacies of business operations and the concrete steps required to achieve formalized sustainability improvements within private organizations. This experience reaffirmed my professional commitment to process improvement towards more sustainable and stakeholder-driven companies, and gave me a sense for the types of mission-driven businesses that I'd like to work for someday in the B Corp community!

Along with those two endeavors, I also have thoroughly enjoyed my time with Net Impact, where I currently serve as our Co-President. This student organization is different than others in the sense that it's a project-based, sustainability-driven chapter of an overarching international organization that focuses on enacting systemic change centered around the triple bottom line of people, planet, and profit. Throughout my time with this organization, we have worked with a wide range of stakeholders around the UNH community, including administration, departments, other student organizations, local businesses, and the general student body to make UNH a more sustainable place, with our current project being a Fair Trade Campaign to get UNH to be a Fair Trade certified campus. The project management, facilitation, organization, and professional communication skills I have gained as a result of these efforts are truly paramount to continuing my career after college, and I was able to use them towards causes that are important to me.

UNHSI: *Sustainability recognizes the integrated principles of environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic vitality in order to meet the needs of present and future generations. In looking at business from a sustainability lens, do you think it has the power to effect change in these areas? On the flip side, from your experience(s) what do you see as a challenge of doing business with*

sustainability as an integral goal?

ELIZABETH: To me, the power of business in the sustainability sphere cannot be understated. As the majority of industry currently stands, it has a profoundly negative impact on our natural resources and our environment through our structure of an extractive, linear economy. With a change in public perspective and the political will, we have the ability to shift our economic endeavors into a restorative, closed-loop structure by designing out waste and becoming more service-based rather than product and consumption-based. In this way, due to how business is so integral to our daily functioning, private companies have the opportunity to be very influential in this transition by prioritizing sustainable pursuits.

Of course, this type of cultural shift is much easier said than done, and garnering the political will I mentioned can be a large challenge. Along with this, there is often the misconception of a competing dichotomy between being environmentally friendly and pursuing profits. Environmental considerations have been painted as detrimental to the bottom line, when their adoption actually can lead to significant operational cost-savings. In this way, I think another challenge would be dismantling the stigma surrounding prioritizing the environment and other stakeholders instead of solely maximizing shareholder value, and demonstrating the business case for sustainability.

UNHSI: *Beyond your studies, you've been pretty deeply engaged in sustainability and making change at UNH. As a senior, do you have advice for first-year or future Wildcats who want to make a difference on campus or in their careers?*

My advice for those who are looking to be changemakers is to pursue any co-curricular opportunity that comes your way and interests you, on-campus or off-campus. In becoming involved with these student organizations, department programs, research opportunities, internships, or otherwise, you are able to find a community of like-minded others that can help you establish your niche on campus.

Something I've really appreciated about my time at UNH is the breadth of these opportunities and how I was able to find my place despite a fairly large student population.

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