

# Becoming a Sustainability Leader

IISD's role in shaping the next generation of sustainable development leadership

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## Preface

*“The world doesn’t easily break into categories any more... Maybe a leader is someone who can see and understand trends and risks, and take chances on ideas based on that understanding and then motivate people to achieve those ideas. Sustainability has a lot to do with understanding trends based on resource flows. It’s essentially a forward-looking discipline. Decision-makers for tomorrow, today.”* Jacob Malthouse, Regional Liaison, Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), USA (Intern, UNEP Finance Initiative, Switzerland)

For 10 years, from 1997 to 2007, the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) has engaged, trained and remained connected with some of the best and brightest of young Canadians in the sustainability field. We’ve recognized, from the beginning, that sustainability won’t be achieved within one generation and that the next generation will need to bring their fresh ideas and their own commitment to securing the future for generations to come. We set ourselves the challenge to find young professionals with the potential to make a difference given the right opportunity, access to key institutions, on-the-job learning and networks of peers, experts, and mentors.

The following report describes, in a very personal and direct way, what IISD’s internship program has meant to its alumni. And it provides us with greater understanding of what it takes to put young professionals on track to change the world.

For IISD and the future of its work with young professionals, this report raises a number of important questions and opportunities. Clearly, we have had great success with our program so far. But is that enough? While each one of the 300 plus participants has gone on to make his or her mark on the world, we need to work with hundreds more—and not just Canadians, but with young professionals from other countries who face similar challenges in gaining entry to the forums where decisions are made, in order to learn and ultimately, to lead.

We cannot do this on our own. And so we hope that other institutions will review this report, and work with us to engage, train and advance not just Canada’s, but the world’s best and brightest. We need to find and support the decision-makers for tomorrow, today.

Heather Creech, Director, Knowledge Communications

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## Executive Summary

New ways of thinking are required for the sustainable development of Canada and the world. The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) has made a commitment to engaging new generations in sustainable development, to ensure that the work that is being done today is continued into the future, with fresh insights and new dedication. From its beginnings in 1990, IISD has engaged young people in its work, both to build their capacity and in turn learn from their contributions. Over the past decade, **IISD's flagship program with young professionals has been its internship program.** The program gives entry to and experience with key sustainable development organizations around the world, providing the foundation for a career in sustainable development policy and practice, and the opportunity to make meaningful contributions to global sustainability.

A total of 311 people have benefited from IISD's young professionals program from 1997 to 2007. IISD has placed these interns with over 90 partner institutions in 40 countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, Europe and the United States. **IISD still has contact with over 93 per cent of the alumni; and 86 per cent note that they are still in touch with each other.** The social network created through this program is clearly robust and cohesive, fostered by IISD but with sustained engagement by the alumni.

The internship program has played a role in inspiring **78 per cent of its alumni to continue working in the sustainability field**; of the remainder, many consider that they are making a contribution through personal, sustainable lifestyles. **The people who go through this program stay focused on sustainability work for the long haul.** Most live in Canada now, although alumni can be found from India to Switzerland, South Africa to the USA, Kenya to Norway. A third of the alumni now work in for-profit enterprises, with the remainder working in non-profit, government or intergovernmental agencies. Almost all interns have worked in more than one sector as their careers have evolved. **This mobility—across sectors, across borders—combined with a long standing commitment to the goal of sustainability—is a fundamental characteristic of the new generation of SD leaders.**

We know where our alumni are working now, and **we know that they are in leadership positions in all sectors.** We also know that they are keen to explore further opportunities for developing their skills and knowledge base. By surveying a decade of interns and hearing about their career trajectories, it has become clear that there is a **cycle of learning that takes place from formal learning into an experiential training experience** (e.g., internship, often followed by a job) **and then—in 60 per cent of the cases—back to a formal learning environment before re-engaging with the work force.**

From January to March 2007, IISD took the opportunity to learn from these interns as well as their host organizations. The organization wanted to test what would truly “jump start” a sustainability career for a young professional—what is the mix of skills, values and training required? Research was carried out primarily through in-depth surveys with IISD's former interns and with a second group of young professionals at IISD, our Reporting Services writers. **It is a measure of success of the internship program that 72 per cent of the interns we have contact with responded to the surveys, indicating their personal commitment to this type of programming, and their view of the importance of leadership development for global sustainability.** The percentage of responses by gender and cohort are consistent with the overall distribution of interns by gender and cohort, suggesting that the findings are representative of the

population as a whole. Over a third of our Reporting Services writers also responded, providing us with a valuable comparison of views in order to validate our overall findings.

Based on a literature review, the research team identified 21 skill sets and 19 value sets that help “define” a sustainability leader (see Appendices 3 and 4). In addition, the team prepared questions that would help interns explore how they acquired these attributes, through formal and informal settings. The first half of the paper provides ideas from this research about the qualities of a sustainability leader. The second half of the paper explores the role IISD can and does play in fostering this leadership. **The research demonstrates the clear need for training of young professionals that integrates with on-the-job experience.** Although IISD has been open to a shift in direction for the internship program, the research results strongly recommend maintaining a similar structure into the future.

In terms of the **qualities of a sustainability leader**, the study highlights the knowledge, skills, values and attributes needed to work effectively on sustainability issues. The study found that individual training is still a cornerstone of leadership development; however, there is a noted shift across the survey group to thinking about **leadership as a team endeavour**, rather than an individual pursuit. Furthermore, **values were identified as the distinguishing factor in sustainability leadership**: *“If you share the values [described in this survey]...and communicate your ideas to others or work towards them in your own way you don't need a job title to confirm it.”* Indeed, when asked who they considered to be leaders, alumni more often mentioned those with whom they had a more personal connection, such as team members and mentors, rather than “marquee” leaders like Al Gore or David Suzuki.

**The values, beliefs and aptitudes that were ranked most highly include a capacity for innovation and a global mindset.** The personal commitment to a sustainable lifestyle was also pointed out as resonant across the whole field. Peer networking and experiential learning play a key role in fostering these values in young professionals. **Of the skills required, communications was at the top of the list.** Understanding how to engage people was key—the ability to work across sectors, personality types and cultures for a better future.

With respect to **IISD’s role in fostering sustainability leadership**, the research demonstrates the clear need for training of young professionals which integrates with on-the-job experience. The study found that a six-month experiential learning program—the model for IISD’s internship program—is long enough to teach young people important and transferable skills including communications, team work and project management. This study has found that the key skills for sustainability professionals are learned on-the-job, in concert with course work and peer learning. With this in mind, the **focus on entry-level professionals** should be maintained for the IISD internship program. It exposes young people to both overseas and sustainability work at a time when they are actively shaping their career path and views on the world. The learning process is accelerated at entry-level with new skills to acquire on everything from project management to stakeholder engagement. Host organizations express particular satisfaction in mentoring young professionals at this dynamic stage in their careers, as well as appreciating young people’s fresh outlook and passion. The demand for interns from host organizations is based on the fact that IISD’s internship program is competitive and the resulting **pool of interns is outstanding**. Hosts confirm that their **interns contribute substantively to the organization they are placed with** as well as benefiting personally from the learning experience. The vast majority of interns hit the ground running, making very real contributions to the teams they work with, whether organizing conferences, writing reports or facilitating on-the-ground change. This also makes the program both a fantastic learning experience as well as inspiring for most of the interns.

Interns are placed with a variety of organizations—NGOs, IGOs, business associations, academic research institutes—and this is a hallmark of the program. During the six months, the interns benefit from peer learning across this diversity of placements. In general, though, the placements are concentrated on NGO and intergovernmental organization placements; interns often have more opportunity to delve into a variety of tasks and be involved in strategic discussions in these types of placements. But the research suggests that **skills that interns acquire are definitely transferable across sectors, including from the not-for-profit to private sector positions** later in their careers.

In addition, the research results emphasize the **benefit of the overseas component** of the program, across multiple dimensions. Alumni noted how their international exposure has been critical for developing their geo-political awareness and a global mindset, key to understanding dynamics across the North and South, the political environment that underpins sound decision-making, and the interconnectivity of the planet's consumption and production patterns. This is true for placements in developed countries as well as those in the South. **Stepping outside one's own context seems to enhance young professionals' ability to span disciplines and cultures, which spurs their capacity for innovation. As there are few blueprints in sustainability work, this is a critical aptitude.** Also, when alumni return to Canada (as the majority do), they bring this global perspective into the Canadian workforce, informing national work on sustainability and other issues.

The study found that the **internship opens doors to Canadian and international opportunities to advance sustainable development through their careers**—opportunities which are otherwise hard to find at entry-level. Alumni go on to work in a diversity of jobs across skill bases, issue areas and around the world. After the internship, this 300-strong alumni network continues to expose young professionals to a wide range of career opportunities and perspectives in sustainable development. As past intern Alexandra Baillie wrote: *“It is very difficult for someone without experience to find entry-level opportunities. The internship really got my career going.”* The research study provides IISD and the sustainability community with insights into the sustainability career path and how an overseas internship can support young professionals in developing their leadership capacity and, in turn, furthering progress towards sustainable development.

The study concludes by noting several key issues worth further investigation:

- Given the shift to thinking about leadership as a team effort, how can training for team work and team management in the sustainable development field be reinforced? Does the concept of leadership become more fluid, attaching itself to different combinations of individuals and actions as circumstances require? **IISD should investigate further the leadership by team modality, and build this into its efforts to develop the next generation of SD leadership teams.**
- Corporate trends suggest that employees are more loyal to a profession than an organization<sup>1</sup>. Given the demonstrated mobility of interns across countries and sectors, and their transitions in and out of formal education, what are the implications for hiring practices and indeed for new organizational models that would support sustainability leadership progression as distinct from career progression within an institution? **IISD should work more closely with the human resources and organizational**

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Kimiz Dalkir. Netcorps Knowledge Management Seminar, Montreal 2007

**management communities to understand how to use career mobility as an asset to furthering sustainable development.**

- Many of the alumni expressed an interest in receiving further training through IISD, in particular in the issues on which IISD works. How can the life long-learning cycle best be supported for emerging sustainability leaders? **IISD should review how to support relationships and learning for the cohort of leaders it has already begun to foster through the internship program.**
- Respondents identified values and aptitudes, such as a capacity for innovation and a personal commitment to a sustainable lifestyle, as distinguishing features for leadership in sustainable development. But for those young professionals that have not [yet] demonstrated these aptitudes or values, how does one foster them? At what point in a young person's education and learning can one begin to introduce these capacities and commitments? **IISD should look to its partners in the formal education sector to explore how to foster values and aptitudes as part of sustainability education.**
- IISD's program has, for a decade, concentrated on young Canadians. Equally important is the need to provide a similar experience to young professionals from other countries, and especially those from developing and transitional countries. Are the skills for sustainability leadership universal? Is IISD's model for transferring and enhancing those skills appropriate for young professionals from other countries? **IISD should conduct an extensive feasibility study and map potential international partners to lay the foundation for an expansion of our work:**
  - **To bring young professionals from other countries into IISD's program**
  - **To establish a consortium of leading international sustainability organizations to coordinate next generation leadership training as a larger global initiative.**

## Introduction

This generation's challenge is to be truly innovative in linking social, environmental and economic issues.<sup>2</sup> As people seek out a better life around the world, the sum of their choices has increasingly global and urgent consequences; climate change, overflowing landfills, deforestation, the growing gap between rich and poor, and human rights abuses, among many others.

Leadership is required as we move forward. What is heartening is that the leaders who take up this challenge have the same ability to transcend borders and exert tremendous influence as the negative impacts they seek to address. So we face an exciting time where leaders have the potential to be more far-reaching than ever through international cooperation, the internet and the media, at the same time as the vision and action to re-design the world is required.

Leadership needs to come from all sectors and corners of the Earth, including Canada. The **International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)** has made a commitment to engaging new generations in sustainable development, to ensure that the work being done today continues into the future, with fresh insights and new dedication. From its beginnings in 1990, IISD has engaged young people in its work, both to build their capacity and in turn learn from their contributions.

Up to 2007, IISD has had three major thrusts for its work with young people. First, IISD has established working groups and networks of young people from around the world to undertake policy development and implementation in various arenas, from the Rio Summit and the resulting Youth Sourcebook on Sustainable Development, to engaging young Canadians on climate change, to the World Summit on the Information Society and the resulting study of Information Society and Sustainable Development policy linkages.

Second, IISD engages young professionals as consultants, co-authors, IISD Associates, and staff. In particular, IISD hosts the IISD Reporting Services team (IISD RS). Besides its core staff, the RS team has 60 expert writers and analysts (<http://www.iisd.ca/about/team/>) from thirty two countries. Most of these are young professionals; Ph.D. candidates, young lawyers or graduates with experience in international environment and development relations. Its flagship product is the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* (ENB) which provides daily, balanced, independent coverage of multilateral negotiations on environment and sustainable development. These writers have special status with the convention secretariats, taking minutes and preparing public reports on the progress of negotiations. The experience provides the writers with unparalleled access to decision-making processes and leaders as they document progress on sustainable development issues.

Finally, over the past decade, IISD has been fostering sustainability leadership in young people through its internship program, managed by IISD's Knowledge Communications team. The program gives entry to and experience with key sustainable development organizations around the world, providing the foundation for a career in sustainable development policy and practice, and the opportunity to make meaningful contributions to global sustainability.

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<sup>2</sup> "Sustainable development is a concept emphasizing the need to establish a balance between, and ultimately an integration of the economic, environmental, and social concerns." Definition from *Skills to Last: Broadly Transferable Sustainable Development Skills for the Canadian Workforce* (2003).

Every year, IISD selects approximately two dozen young professionals (under 30 years old) to work with intergovernmental or non-governmental organizations on six month placements.<sup>3</sup> Most of these placements are overseas and interns work on a variety of issue areas, including trade and climate change. There is a detailed training session before the interns depart as well as a debriefing after the program. During the six months, the interns learn on the job and share their personal and professional experiences with other interns through a listserv. IISD facilitates an alumni listserv for all of the interns who have completed their placements. The listserv is used for sharing job listings, seeking and sharing knowledge, discussing global events such as 9/11, mobilizing support for issues of common concern, and connecting alumni who live in (or are visiting) specific cities or countries.

Funding for the program has been made available through the Government of Canada's Youth Employment Strategy (YES), with the key agencies being the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT)'s Young Professionals International (YPI) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)'s International Youth Internship Program (IYIP). In addition, the program has benefited from the support of Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC), both at the national and regional levels. In the past two years, IISD has also managed interns as part of Netcorps Canada/International. And, every host organization that has received an intern has also contributed both financially (to supplement living allowances and for business travel) and in kind, with the provision not only of workspace, but thousands of hours of guidance, mentorship and friendship. The original program, Young Canadians Leaders for a Sustainable Future Program (YCLSF) was established in 1997. IISD has run several versions of the program, one for Manitobans, another for Arctic participants called the Circumpolar Young Leaders Program, and one for Netcorps, called Emerging Leaders in Governance and Communications.

A total of 311 people have benefited from IISD's young professionals program from 1997 to 2007. IISD has placed these interns with over 90 partner institutions in more than 39 countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, Europe and the United States. Hosts are primarily small and large NGOs, research institutes and intergovernmental agencies, such as the Stockholm Environment Institute, World Business Council on Sustainable Development, University of the Arctic, Development Alternatives and the United Nations Environment Programme. These internships seek to foster a network of young Canadian leaders capable of working across national boundaries to develop innovative solutions to sustainable development issues.

From January to March 2007, the IISD took the opportunity to learn from these interns as well as their host organizations. IISD was intrigued by testimonials from past interns and host organizations, such as the one that follows from past intern Tricia Mitchell, now Senior Program Coordinator for the Great Lakes: *"I thought my IISD internship was one of the best things I've ever done in my life - I was able to travel overseas, meet my husband, work for a fantastic organization, and jump-start my career."*

IISD wanted to test what would truly "jump-start" a sustainability career for a young professional—what is the mix of skills, values and training required? IISD also recognized the strength of its alumni network and other engagements with young professionals and wanted to build on these. It wanted to explore how it could build its role as a supporter of young professionals in sustainability work.

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<sup>3</sup> The average number of interns per year is 31, with variation between 22 and 34 placements.

Primarily through in-depth surveys, research was carried out about young professionals in sustainable development work. The findings are very rich and this paper shares some of the conclusions. The first half of this paper provides ideas from this research about the qualities of a sustainability leader. Specifically, it highlights the knowledge, skills, values and attributes needed to work effectively on sustainability issues from entry level through to leadership positions. How do young professionals acquire the experience? The second half of this paper explores the role IISD can and does play in fostering this leadership. Not meant as a formal evaluation of IISD's young professionals program, this research study has implications for the IISD program and how it develops. The research demonstrates the clear need for training of young professionals which integrates with on-the-job experience.

## **Methodology**

This study was conducted between January and March 2007 by an external consultant familiar with the program as both an intern and intern supervisor. The research consisted of five main components:

- background research, including a literature review;
- validating contact and employment information for interns from 1997 to 2007,
- survey of the sustainability skill set and how young professionals progress in their career; and
- interviews with past interns, host organizations and other experts, and
- focus group with interns and IISD staff in Winnipeg.

### **1. Background Research**

A literature review was conducted to ground the study in some of the latest thinking about sustainability skills and values in today's workforce. As well, the review helped the team understand what constitutes leadership. There are few integrative studies of sustainability skill set. A notable exception is the 2003 report, *Lessons Learned About Environmental Leadership Development from the Environmental Leadership Collaborative* by the Environmental Leadership Collaborative (ELC). It draws on the experiences of 16 leadership training programs. Although there is an emphasis on "environmental" leadership, its lessons are relevant across the sustainability field because they have defined environmental leadership broadly. In contrast, most studies cover a specific facet of the profession. On corporate social responsibility, the World Business Council on Sustainable Development has excellent resources on the career path and training opportunities. There was some excellent material about the benefits of overseas experience, including Jean-Marc Hachey's *The BIG Guide to Living and Working Overseas* (2005).

On training and capacity-building, the ELC report as well as materials from Leadership for Environment and Development (LEAD) were particularly useful as they went beyond the formal education system into experiential learning programs and peer-to-peer learning. A useful parallel to this research is a 2005 study by the Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT) *Skills, Networks & Knowledge: Developing a Career in International Peace and Conflict Resolution*. It served as a model for some of the survey questions.

To better understand the shape of IISD's internship program and its strengths and shortcomings to date, archival material was reviewed, including reports to donors. The 2005 IISD report, *Young Canadian Leaders for a Sustainable Future: Value to IISD*, also served as a major reference.

Based on the literature review, the team identified 21 skill sets and 19 value sets that help "define" a sustainability leader (see Boxes 1 and 2 below, as well as Appendices 3 and 4 for more detailed descriptions). In addition, the team prepared questions that would help interns explore

how they acquired these attributes, through formal and informal settings (see Appendix 7). Three key resources in this effort to define these attributes were: *Skills to Last: Broadly Transferable Sustainable Development Skills for the Canadian Workforce* (2003); *The CSR Competency Framework* (2004); and the *Education for Sustainable Development Toolkit Version 2.0: Reorienting Education* (online).

These are described in detail in Appendix 3.	• Awareness of stakeholder roles
• Staff and team management	• Geo-political awareness
• Long-term planning	• Facilitation skills
• Project management	• Network management
• Financial skills	• Systems approach
• Donor or client relations	• Understanding global institutions and processes
• Communication skills	• Understanding private sector
• Translating complex ideas	• Managing unpredictability
• Analytical rigour	• Bridging disciplines or sectors
• Knowledge management	• Bridging cultures
• Influencing strategy	• Managing diversity in the workplace and socially

Box 1: 21 skills for sustainability professionals

These are described in detail in Appendix 4.	▪ Embrace a learning culture
▪ Global mindset	▪ Accept trade-offs
▪ Rooted in community	▪ Tenacity
▪ Thirst for global awareness	▪ Warmth in human relationships
▪ Equity	▪ Respect for diversity
▪ Sense of urgency	▪ Science as part of the solution
▪ Passion for sustainability	▪ Value integrated thinking
▪ Capacity for innovation	▪ Commitment to a sustainable lifestyle

Box 2: 15 beliefs, aptitudes and values of sustainability professionals

## 2. Validating Contact and Employment Information

This research has been valuable for updating the alumni contact information. Through the survey process and its own research, IISD now has updated contact information for **93 per cent of all former interns**. For all but 23 we have, at a minimum, a working email address; for many more we also have up-to-date information on their current employment. When asked about contact with IISD 27 per cent of past interns replied that they are not currently on the alumni listserver. They can now be added, to the pleasure of many whose emails had changed over the years and lost contact with IISD: *“Due to problems with my hotmail account a few years back, it was not possible to continue to stay on the listserver. I would be interested to join it again now.”*

We further learned that the alumni are a very cohesive social network: of the respondents, **86 per cent indicated that they continue, even up to a decade later, to have contact with one or more alumni of the program.**

## 3. Survey

Two survey instruments were developed using the web based survey tool, Survey Monkey. Survey one explored skill and value sets across two groups; the 311 participants in the internship program and the young professionals involved in IISD’s Reporting Services team. Besides

exploring the sustainability career path, IISD also sought the advice of the interns on the shape of the internship program, including whether a shift in focus is desirable. A second survey was also conducted of the interns, seeking their ideas on how to strengthen the internship alumni network as well as the relationship between past interns and IISD as a whole.

The survey for the IISD RS team served as a comparison for responses on questions related to sustainability career paths and skills. As the RS group is significantly more diverse in terms of nationalities and international work experience, we wished to ensure a greater measure of validity of our observations by having this “control group” answer the same questions as our Canadian interns, for whom the internship program was their first paid career related work experience overseas. With some interesting variations discussed later in the text, we found that responses from this “control group” were consistent with responses from the interns.

The survey results for the interns are statistically significant. Analysis shows that the survey groups represent the population as a whole, based on the response rate as well as the gender mix and year of participation in the program. All surveys had significant response rates. Of the 311 interns, 208 (67 per cent) responded to Surveys 1, 2 or both. Again of the 311 alumni, 23 are considered “missing” as there is no up-to-date contact information for them, so the adjusted response rate was 72 per cent (208/288).

In terms of the gender mix for the alumni, the survey group is very representative. While 37 per cent of all alumni are male; 40% of respondents to Survey 1 were male. In the same vein, 62 per cent of the alumni are female; 60% of respondents to Survey 1 were female. The average response rate by year of the internship program was 47 per cent for Survey 1 and 59 per cent for Survey 2. There was a notably stronger response on Survey 2 from internship years 2001, 2004 and 2005. Details are in Appendix 1.

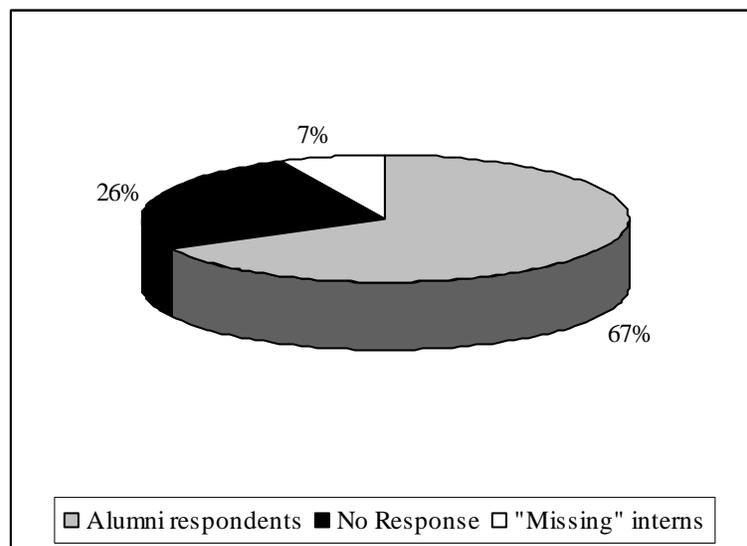


Figure 1: Response rate to surveys by the intern alumni group

For the purposes of this research, the young professionals working for the IISD RS team served as the control group. For this survey, a third of the staff posted responses. Besides validating the interns’ responses on the skill and value sets for sustainability professionals, the IISD RS survey results open the door for a closer relationship between the internship alumni and young professionals working with IISD RS. They also benefit the IISD Reporting Services management.

Each of the surveys contained blocks of quantifiable data but also many qualitative responses. It is in the richness of these individual responses that one finds a great deal of value to IISD. The vast majority of respondents agreed to have quotes attributed to them and this will be very valuable as IISD continues its program development and fundraising efforts. Respondents were exemplary in responding in depth to follow-up or stand-alone qualitative questions. In most cases, between two-thirds and three-quarters of respondents to the multiple choice questions also provided additional comments when provided the option to do so. The full text of the survey responses can be found in Appendices 7 and 8.

#### **4. Interviews**

To complement the survey materials and background reading, interviews were conducted with a subset of the host organizations as well as five sustainability career experts. Semi-structured interviews were carried out by telephone or email with nine host organizations. Those selected had a long history of placements with IISD. Also, they were a balance of NGOs, IGOs and research organizations from developed and developing/transitional countries. The hosts were asked a similar set of questions to the interns, with emphasis on reviewing the skill sets as well as the shape of the internship program. Informal conversations were held with some past interns, mostly by email. The full list of interview subjects can be found in Appendix 2.

#### **5. Focus group**

Preliminary findings were reviewed with a focus group in February with current and past interns as well as IISD staff. The list of participants can be found in Appendix 2.

#### **Definitions**

Sustainable development is a concept “emphasizing the need to establish a balance between, and ultimately an integration of the economic, environmental, and social concerns.”<sup>4</sup>

A sustainability professional views and carries out their work through an economic, social and environmental lens—with an appreciation for the finite nature of our planet and the need for social justice. Their work has a significant impact on improving the state of the earth and human well-being.

Sustainability leaders make proactive decisions on sustainability issues, are innovative in how they put together knowledge and skill sets, and they influence decision-making—often at multiple scales from local to global.

A young professional is a person in their 20s or 30s following a profession, especially a learned profession, as a source of livelihood or income. A young professional typically progresses from entry-level through to increased responsibility and leadership roles by refining and acquiring skills, aptitudes and experience.

Intern refers to a young professional who participates in an experiential learning program, by working directly for a host organization on substantive tasks. The interns surveyed for this study worked for six months for organizations on sustainable development issues, and most of the placements were overseas.

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<sup>4</sup> *Skills to Last: Broadly Transferable Sustainable Development Skills for the Canadian Workforce* (2003).

Explicit knowledge is that which can be written down, recorded or codified in some manner; often used almost interchangeably with information in the knowledge management / knowledge network context.<sup>5</sup> In this study, it refers primarily to formal education, from university to workshops.

Tacit knowledge is the understanding of how to do things. It is created by doing, by personal trial, error, reflection and revision (understanding how to research and develop new policy recommendations, learning how to run a community consultation or learning how to negotiate a policy change with a decision-maker). It is difficult, however, to articulate what that “how to” actually is. The transfer of tacit knowledge, therefore, is facilitated through shared processes (working together, mentoring and so forth) in addition to the physical transmission of written or recorded content.

Implicit knowledge refers to an individual’s “contextual surroundings...that are imbued with and shape [his or her] collective values, normative behavior, roles, customs...expectations of events”<sup>6</sup>—in short, an individual’s culture and values. An individual’s knowledge of the world based on religious beliefs or other value systems reflects an implicit understanding of relationships with people and the environment that can strongly influence choices and actions.

For the purposes of this report,

Overseas refers to any country that is not Canada; and

Developing/Transitional includes all countries except: Western Europe (including Scandinavia); Canada; United States; Australia; New Zealand; and Japan.

### **The Internship Program is a Force in Shaping Careers in Sustainability**

The internship program is IISD’s flagship program for building the next generation of leadership. As such, it is exciting that the research bears out how this six month program has been a definite force in shaping the careers of young professionals. This is true on a number of levels, which will be explored in this paper.

One finding of this study is that most of the young people decided to continue contributing actively to sustainability issues. Indeed, **78 per cent of all past interns who responded to the survey define themselves as sustainability professionals today**. A majority (64 per cent) are directly involved in sustainability issues through their work, with an additional 14 per cent involved peripherally. Of the respondents, 104 of the alumni identified themselves as still involved in sustainability work. Besides those who indicated that their work was “directly involved”, there were 19 additional respondents who identified themselves as involved indirectly. Fourteen of these marked “I am still peripherally involved in sustainability issues (as part of my work)”. Two marked “I believe in changing organizations from within and am applying my sustainability skills to a workplace that is just starting to engage with sustainability issues”. Two marked “other” but analysis of their comments shows them to be peripherally involved through contract work.

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<sup>5</sup> Definitions for explicit, implicit and tacit knowledge are excerpted from Creech and Willard, *Strategic Intentions*, IISD 2001. [www.iisd.org/networks/research.asp](http://www.iisd.org/networks/research.asp)

<sup>6</sup> *Knowledge Management: Implications and applications for development organizations, Key terms and definitions*, Bellanet, [www.bellanet.org/km/main/glossary.html](http://www.bellanet.org/km/main/glossary.html)

This example of a “peripherally involved” alumnus shows how difficult it can be to make a clear distinction: Andrew Robinson (IISD intern, Switzerland, 1999) currently works as Aboriginal Relations Coordinator for BC Hydro, an energy utilities company with strong sustainability targets. Of those who are no longer involved in sustainability issues, 14.3 per cent “tried to find work in the sustainability field but couldn’t in a good time frame.”

How much of this career trajectory can be traced to the internship itself? As the Environmental Leadership Collaborative’s scan of sixteen leadership development programs points out: “*Many factors influence individuals’ lives and thus make it hard to determine how much impact a program may have had on their achievements.*” That said, ELC’s scan finds that qualitative evidence can be very powerful in arguing for the influence of such programs. This is echoed in IISD’s own survey results and interactions with interns over the years, with a couple of examples from past interns’ survey comments of how the internship served as a launching pad for them:

*“The IISD internship was a rich and life altering experience for me. I feel that the initial investment in this program is paid back to society ten fold by the opportunities and skills it offers youth and their resulting contribution and commitment to the goal of sustainability. If Canada wishes to be recognized as a global leader in sustainable development it needs to continue to invest strongly in its youth and these important programs.”* Melinda Moriarty, Policy Advisor, Environment Canada, Canada (Intern, Education Development Centre, USA)

*“The IISD internship I completed in 2005 has been the most influential and important step in my career and personal development to date. I continue to draw on the skills and attributes I gained from the experience on a daily basis. This program has provided me with a global perspective, an open mind and skills that have fast-tracked my career.”* Lauren Elizabeth Haney, Environmental Planner, North of 60 Development, Jacques Whitford / AXYS Environmental Consulting, Canada (Intern, UNEP-Grid Arendal, Norway)

To build on such testimonials, both the 2006-7 and past interns were asked if they believed the internship “fast-tracked” their career development (defined for them as typically from entry-level through to increased responsibility and leadership roles).<sup>7</sup> The majority felt that it did, with an increased percentage of both positive *and* negative responses among past interns, who have had the benefit of time to determine the impact of the internship on their career path.

	<b>2006-7 Interns</b>	<b>Other Alumni</b>
Yes	52.9%	67.4%
No	11.8%	19.7%
Don’t Know	35.3%	12.9%

Table 1: Did the interns feel the program fast-tracked their career?

For many, the internship provided a first experience with peer networking—and from the survey results, this was a positive experience for most which shapes how eagerly alumni engage in peer networks throughout their career. It was also indicated as one of the ways in which skills development takes place, most particularly identified by respondents as key in developing one’s **Influencing Strategy** (understanding of how to influence and promote change, including what it means to be a “change agent” for sustainability) and **Awareness of Stakeholder Roles** (understanding the roles of different actors in sustainability, including the importance of involving stakeholders in decision-making).

<sup>7</sup> Based on Survey 1 of past interns and Survey 1 of current interns.

*"I think at the end of the day, it is important to get involved in SD networks or work in organizations or companies that are serious about SD. In these 'environments' you discover the key underlying issues (often through direct experience), and are supported in your search for practical and creative solutions. It is then your responsibility to take the action after you have done the research. Being networked to a large audience has an added advantage, that your actions can have a greater influence and impact on sustainability issues."*

Roopinder Hanspal, Consultant, France (Intern, LEAD International, UK)

In a complex field like sustainability, peer networking is a critical skill. On an ongoing basis, the alumni listserver promotes career development, as alumni share job tips and opportunities in a variety of sectors. Fifty per cent take part in other peer networks, including 25 who are members of the rapidly-expanding LinkedIn professional network. LEAD has a training module on team-building which discusses network management and may serve as a useful model for IISD.

Some of the most fascinating answers were in response to a question on changes in perceptions and roles that resulted from the internship: "Since the internship, what has happened to your notion of how social change (towards sustainability) occurs? And how you see your role in social change?"

This was very much about chronicling a set of personal journeys resulting from the six months, but there were some commonalities. Responses ranged from a radical shift in perception (e.g., "I have much less regard for the so-called 'experts', and seek leadership in more radical terms") to a more nuanced view of their own role in social change:

*"I realized, since my internship, that the world is full of shades of grey. Going to university, doing my Masters, I very much thought in terms of black and white. 'Social interest groups are good, industry is bad.' Since my internship, however, I have come to realize that you can't look at the world so simplistically. Everyone contributes to positive change, in one level, whether personally or professionally and we need to recognize this. And inspire people to even greater possibilities of change."*

Alison Lobsinger, Policy Advisor, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Canada  
(Intern, Institute for Environmental Studies, Netherlands)

A number of interns became more locally based as a result of the internship ("I realized that the best place for me to affect change was at a local level, working with impressionable, yet influential youth, as a teacher."). Some became disillusioned with the international sustainability world: "I worry that sustainable development is becoming a big international bureaucracy." Others were empowered by it: "[I have a] much stronger appreciation of the value of finding (or creating) levers to influence behaviour—and the power of a public commitment. The internship reinforced the importance of engaging all actors around an issue ( investors, NGOs, analysts, etc.) to affect change." Related, many alumni noted how the internship helped them see an expanded spectrum of opportunities to engage with sustainability work, for example:

*"I've come to see how many paths there are towards sustainability and while this has improved my faith in solutions, it has also helped me to see more clearly my role—less of an activist than before, more focused on innovation and science, but also a deeper commitment to small-scale, local, community-driven initiatives. I see the critical need for global change and international policy but now believe more firmly that the true impetus for change, and any lasting social change, must come at an individual level."*

Kathryn Martell, Senior Project Officer, Provincial Nature Programmes, TLC - The Land Conservancy of British Columbia, Canada (Intern, ICRAF – The World Agroforestry Centre, Kenya)

In turn, this helped them identify their own career paths within the sustainability field. The majority of interns were placed with small to medium-sized NGOs or international organizations. Now, the alumni can be found across all sectors, working in a variety of fields (see Figure 2). These young people who started their career with IISD hold exciting positions across Canada and around the world on sustainability issues. They include the Environmental Coordinator for the Diavik Diamond Mine in Northwest Territories, the Senior Sustainable Development Analyst for the Canada Revenue Agency, a Policy Advisor to the Government of Nova Scotia, the Climate Change and Energy Analyst at Shell Canada and a Technical Advisor to the United Nations Environment Programme. As 2000 intern Alyson Slater remarks: *“I think people don’t realize how powerful the network is. All of these interns have ‘grown up’ over the years and become leaders and knowledgeable people.”*

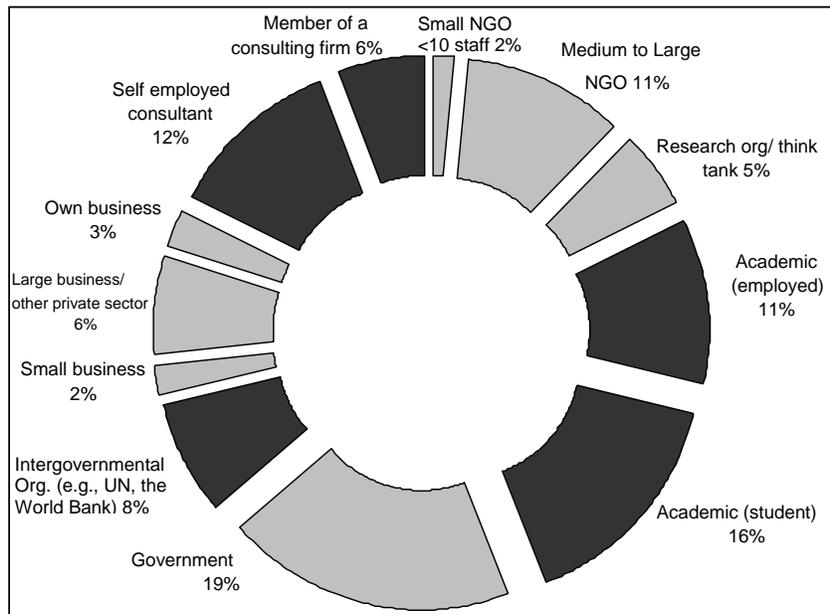


Figure 2: The sectors in which IISD alumni are currently working or studying.

The internship captures young people at a period in their life where they are often balancing their experience and values as young adults with what their role will be professionally. Terri Willard, IISD Associate and Taking IT Global Board Member, appreciates and reflects on this transition period:

*“I keep seeing all of these great young activists who really struggle how to shift from staging workshops and protests to figuring out how to positively engage national governments in change through the UN or elsewhere. Similarly, they go through university studying international development and think they will end up working in small communities in Latin America running agroforestry projects... only to later find that there are 1000s of perfectly qualified Latin Americans to do those jobs and that they are mostly needed to write funding proposals in Latin America. Making those leaps (and understanding the actual overseas realities) can be extremely difficult for young people—and universities seem to do quite poorly at preparing them.”*

Many commented on the nature of social change (*“Change is incremental and often requires patience. My approach is more spiritual now,”* *“My notion of social change is that there is an ocean of ideas and values continually swirling around—some more alike than others. These*

*different currents converge and disperse, but sometimes they amplify each other and create a whirlpool of like ideas, and this is when they have the potential to affect a greater sum than their individual parts... and that's when change can occur").* In the end, there were many responses but interns left with a changed—and usually empowering—vision of the world and how sustainability can take place:

*"I certainly lost a lot of my idealism and naiveté about the development sector, which is an industry like all others. However I also realized that idealism tempered with realism and pragmatic action is part of the change process and this is something that I feel I contribute towards. I think being a leader in this context is about being a collaborator—a team player—and this is the type of leader I aspire to be (become!)."*

Katherine Hay, Senior Program Officer, International Development Research Centre (IDRC), India (1998 intern, Development Alternatives, India)

Overall, the internship has been influential in the career development of the young professionals who participated. In a 2006 survey<sup>8</sup> of internship alumni, 96 per cent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that "the internship provided practical experience I needed but could not obtain elsewhere."<sup>9</sup>

### **What is a Sustainability Leader?**

As IISD looks forward to a next decade of supporting young professionals to become sustainability leaders, what should it consider? Before considering training needs, it is important to take a step back and explore what such a leader looks like. A sustainability leader views and carries out their work through an economic, social and environmental lens—with an appreciation for the finite nature of our planet and the need for social justice. They make proactive decisions, are innovative in how they put together knowledge and skill sets, and they influence decision-making—often at multiple scales from local to global. And, as we will discuss throughout the paper, they also have a certain "it" factor—a passion for sustainability, the ability to garner trust of others, humility combined with an enticing vision for the future. A past intern put it like this: "*[During the six months,] I learned that there were a range of intangible skills required to move from being a good leader to a great leader.*"

In order to get the survey group thinking about what leadership is, they were asked to name one leader they admire. An interesting finding is that a significant number of these young people think first of teams—rather than individuals—as sustainability leaders. In response to the question about a leader they admired, one past intern wrote,

*"To be honest—what comes to my mind are more teams of people that are leaders in various fields and not so much the great 'gurus' or individual leaders that rolled off the tongue in the 80's (like Brundtland for example). I think it's less interesting /useful these days to think in terms of the individual heroes of development and am more interested in how groups of committed individuals are working together to make a difference. That being said, one can always come up with a Bill Gates or Soros or Michael Quinn Patton for example as individual leaders—they are thinkers, problem solvers and driven by integrity."* Katherine Hay, Senior Program Officer, International Development Research Centre (IDRC), India (1998 intern, Development Alternatives, India)

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<sup>8</sup> Survey of IISD International Youth Internship Program alumni (*IYIP Survey*) conducted in 2006 by Jacob Malthouse. This informal study was conducted using Survey Monkey. The link to the survey was sent to the listserver of IISD alumni and had 53 respondents.

<sup>9</sup> 62.26 per cent strongly agreed, 33.96 per cent agreed, 3.77 per cent were neutral on the statement, and none of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Indeed, the notion of giving special recognition to individual leaders was questioned by another alumni, who wrote, *“Heaping adoration on just one person— it’s counter-intuitive to recognizing team work and building social capital, in my opinion.”* An IISD RS team member answered the question by proposing a specific team: *“I guess if at all, my sustainability Oscar would have to go to the team that drove the ITPGR [International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources] process. Sustainability leadership is a team thing..”*

This shift in thinking resonates with an insight from Ronald Heifetz of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard; the “lone warrior” leader is not a realistic mode for our times. In its scan of leadership, the Kellogg Foundation continued with, *“Leaders will have to learn new ways of solving problems...New leaders will understand that solving community challenges demands collaboration, shared leadership and learning how to partner with others in developing sustainable solutions.”* (p. 2). A past intern agreed: *“Goals are achieved within teams, so your ability to manage, communicate and get the most out of your fellow team members is key.”* The importance of team work (albeit often with leadership from one or a few individuals) is echoed in the skill and value set that has emerged from this IISD study, including the importance of communications skills, bridging cultures and disciplines, strong facilitation skills and the ability to manage teams. Many emphasized the importance of building social capital as well as working in teams across sectors, disciplines and cultures. As a field often requiring complex solutions, compromises and agreements across sectors and nations, there is the need to build capacity for networking and interaction across groups and cultures.

Nevertheless, over one hundred women and men were considered by interns to be leaders. A simple glance through their names is enough to acknowledge the key role a charismatic individual can play in stimulating social change. Some of the individuals model a way of working: *“Philip Burgess, the ex-Co-Chair of the UN Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea has excellent people skills and ability to bridge cultures and societies and find common ground. Also, he has an ability to use humour and a ‘human touch’ to bring abstract ideas of sustainability into real-life focus.”* Also, *“Mandla Mentor can motivate others (his community) to become more sustainable. He has great interpersonal skills...He can relate to many different kinds of people and knows when to ask for assistance. He believes in youth.”* Others show that change is possible through their actions: *“Ray Anderson [of Interface Carpets]: because he’s actually making it happen!”* And that success often takes pushing against boundaries: *“Liz Fajber from IDRC New Delhi is intelligent, opinionated, passionate and not afraid to go against the consensus.”* Still others help one think about how to balance one’s principles with reality:

*“Oystein Dahle, currently Chairman of the Board for the World Watch Institute, began his career in the oil and gas industry. He single-handedly implemented environmentally and fiscally sustainable practices on the offshore projects he managed. He went on to join the World Watch Institute and continue to make change. I admire him because he, at every turn, has taken the hard road toward environmentally sound progress and in the face of it, has never lost his optimism or his principles.”* Lauren Elizabeth Haney, Environmental Planner, North of 60 Development, Jacques Whitford / AXYS Environmental Consulting, Canada (Intern, UNEP-Grid Arendal, Norway)

The individuals selected include iconic sustainability leaders like David Suzuki and Stephen Lewis. What is striking is the variety of individuals seen as leaders.<sup>10</sup> Mid-level managers appear

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<sup>10</sup> Only eleven names came up more than once out of the 100 specific names offered up as sustainability leaders: Ray Anderson (Interface Carpets), Carolee Buckler (IISD), Marion Cheatle (UNEP), Bill Clinton, Al Gore, Kimo Goree (IISD), Stephen Lewis, Wangari Maathai, Achim Steiner, David Suzuki and Sheila Watt-Cloutier

alongside one's uncle; supervisors rank with grassroots leaders and philosophers; facilitators of international processes beside business innovators. Leadership is emerging from all sectors and across policy and practice, research and action. Seeing oneself within the diversity of leaders is a critical step for young people wanting to become influential in this field. The good news is that there is room for many different forms of leadership. As the Environmental Leadership Collaborative reports (p.7 and summary):

*“Effective leaders spur environmental progress, and...these leaders—who come from all sectors, communities, nations, and levels of society—need to be equipped to build the networks, partnerships, and public leadership necessary to push for broad environmental change... We need vibrant spokespeople for environmental issues, as well as active thinkers and doers who have the skills, visions and drive to lead successful efforts into the next decade and beyond.”*

### **Sustainability Leaders are Defined by Values**

By asking about individual sustainability leaders, it is clear that skills and knowledge are important, but that intangibles like passion and a global mindset truly define a sustainability leader. The characteristics people identified in these individual leaders usually had more to do with their passion, tenacity and personality than it did with their skill set or knowledge base, for example, *“for his integrity, devotion and respect of the different people and issues,” “ability to engage on personal level with most people,” “had the nerve to put everything else aside and focus his energy on communicating a message that he thinks is important,” “ she is a ‘superwoman,’ multi tasking like I’ve never seen before, always in a good mood even when close to project deadlines,” “lives his life with what he preaches,” “She has the courage to say things that need to be said (often on issues other people avoid),” “charismatic, genuine, committed, steadfast.”* The list could go on. Moreover, values are what link a leader to the outcomes they are seeking; to their vision for the future. One past intern summed it up with the following:

*“I admire everyone who pushes for positive change against the norm and who is willing to make sacrifices for the good of all and exceeds expectations. What makes these people great leaders? Genuine commitment, leading by example, persistence, vision, and the ability to appeal to a wide range of audiences.”* Matthew Woods, Technical Advisor, UNEP, Kenya (Intern, UNEP, Kenya)

A person's values seem to be a key distinguishing factor between professionals in sustainability work and those working in other fields. This was tested in two ways. First, respondents were given a list of beliefs, aptitudes and values related to sustainability (see Appendix 4) and were then challenged to pick the top three for a sustainability leader. Secondly, they were asked whether there is anything “unique” about the sustainability skills, values and attitudes that set SD professionals apart from other professionals. The answers to the second reinforce the finding that values are what set apart a leader.

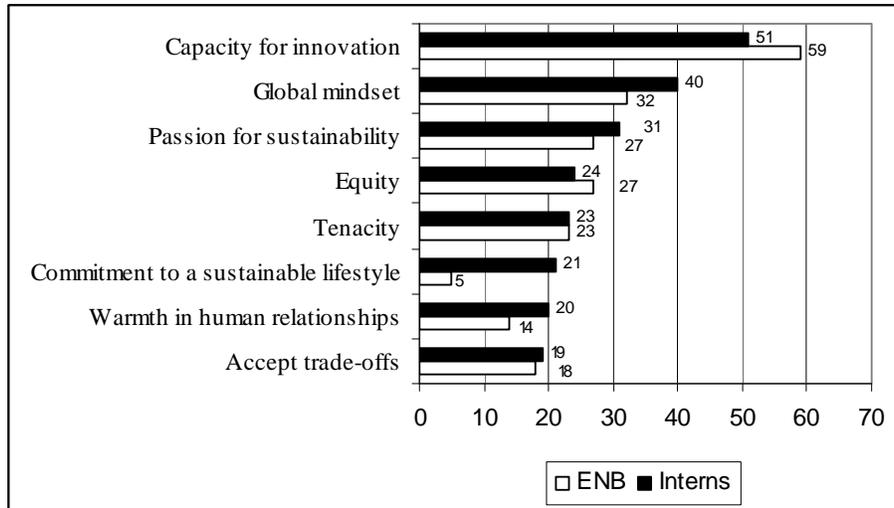


Figure 3: The top values by percentage, compared with IISD RS team members

What comes out most clearly in Figure 3 is that the **Capacity for Innovation** is solidly at the top of people’s priority list. As IISD host, Asbjørn Torvanger from the Centre for International Climate Change and Environmental Research – Oslo (CICERO, Norway) explains, “*It is the capacity for innovation that will help us chart a path towards win-win solutions wherever possible.*” Another top attribute is a **Global Mindset**, something which the IISD program fosters with its overseas placements. The section in this paper about the value of an overseas experience goes into more detail on this point. A past intern linked a global mindset to **Equity**, another of the top values: “*You see the global picture and understand the importance of equity!*” There are many dimensions to equity, but one can be highlighted here. Kakuko Nagatani-Yoshida of the United Nations Environment Programme had this to say about how even those at the start of their career can provide leadership through a passion for equity:

*“Several IISD interns have come to us and their eyes were opened to the divide in developing countries between rich and poor. In Latin America and the Caribbean, sometimes people take this social divide for granted. These young Canadians were able to provide a different perspective on the inequity, including how it translated into the work environment. Young people from the region gained a lot from the experience of working side-by-side with Canadians. Indeed, the Canadians stimulated new thinking, fresh ideas. With their passion for environmental issues, they helped embed an environmental dimension into the struggle for economic development.”*

**Passion for Sustainability** also came out as one of the top three attributes, a finding the Kellogg Foundation’s scan of leadership strongly supports: “*Future leaders, like their predecessors, must have a deep sense of mission and passion guided by strong moral, ethical and spiritual values*” (p.3). The most recent alumni of the program valued **Warmth in Human Relations** well above previous years’ alumni or IISD RS. Interns who are building and relying heavily on social capital as they embark on their career benefit greatly from leaders who display this characteristic.

Given their strong engagement with global issues and the fact that the team is made up of many nationalities, it is not surprising to see that both the **Respect for Diversity** and the **Thirst for Global Awareness** both feature prominently with the IISD RS team (see Figure 4). But most interesting is that a **Sense of Urgency** resonates most strongly with IISD RS team members. This result was not analyzed further, but there is a possibility that these young professionals—exposed

as they are to international policy fora – both recognize the complexity of these issues while hoping for faster progress towards implementation.

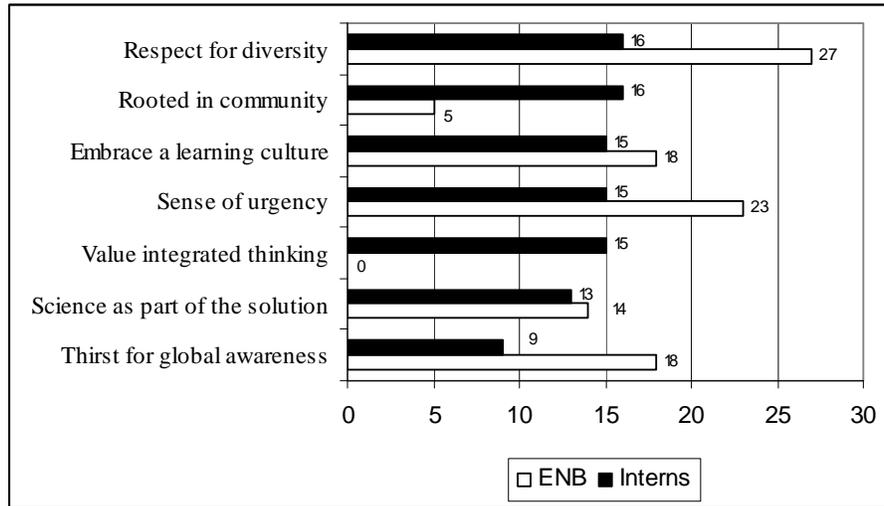


Figure 4: Other values, by percentage.

The second question put to the survey groups (interns, hosts and the IISD RS team) was: “Are there unique skills, values, attitudes that distinguish sustainability professionals?” This was meant to tease out what traits are considered to be the most important. All of the attributes being asked about can be found among other groups of professionals, certainly those working in equally complex environments such as mediators. Further, where does one draw a line between “sustainability professionals” and those working to end homelessness, and other pressing social issues? If sustainability is about creating and striving for a compelling vision of the future, this can be done at many scales and within many different professions. And wouldn’t it be *true* sustainability leadership to help transform “sustainability” from the sidelines to become embraced by all of society, no matter what line of work? A past intern sums up the challenge:

*“Sustainability encompasses so many different professions; engineers, lawyers, doctors, project managers—I don’t think you could outline a set of unique skills. There are skills that sustainability professionals have, but other professions have similar ones. Commitment, compassion, dedication, desire for change...the same could be argued for nurses.”*

Alison Lobsinger, Policy Advisor, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Canada  
 (Intern, Institute for Environmental Studies, Netherlands)

The many respondents who answered this question—both positively and negatively—rewarded us with insights about what it takes to become a leader in sustainability issues. Not surprisingly, given the discussion on defining a sustainability leader, respondents who saw uniqueness to the sustainability professional tended to find it around a similar set of issues to the values list—as well as a deep knowledge of how social, economic and environmental issues interact. A past intern posits: *“I think it’s the values side of the coin that distinguishes sustainability professionals, as well as the knowledge sets.”* Positive responses to the question include an interdisciplinary approach, working with a global mindset, a passion for sustainability (*“I think sustainability professionals are motivated by factors beyond compensation, job satisfaction etc.—and they also want to be part of a change process”*), social conscience and equity considerations, a personal commitment to a sustainable lifestyle, the capacity and willingness to work with diversity, including across sectors (*“to be open-minded, culturally sensitive and aware, work well*

*with people, keep your values in check when integrating other people's ideas”), an interest in moving from research to action or impact, a tendency towards long-term thinking, and an ability to network and identify leverage points on the path to sustainable development (“knowledge of how to interact with and influence all sectors of society from public to private”).*

One characteristic can be seen as resonant across all sustainability leaders, though not necessarily in people’s top 3 values. This is the question of a **Personal Commitment to a Sustainable Lifestyle**. In the words of past intern Christopher Evans, *“The only central element that I believe sets sustainability professionals apart is a personal commitment to sustainable living in their own lives and professional involvement.”* Iwokrama host, Raquel Thomas (Guyana), finds that sustainability people *“have a deep sense of commitment to issues related to the environment, e.g., waste management, sustainable use of resources, conservation, climate change, sustainable livelihoods.”* This personal commitment orients an individual towards societal transformation regardless of their professional sphere of influence—whether that sphere is the sustainable development field or one that might be considered further removed from day-to-day sustainability policy development, planning and implementation. One past intern put the promise of personal commitment leading to broader changes in the world like this:

*“One has to be in touch with living sustainability and keeping their own footprint small in their day-to-day lives. If that is practiced, the convictions on sustainability will translate into action and knowledge transfer within any work environment.”*

Faisal Haq Shaheen, Business Management Analyst, City of Toronto Water, Canada (Intern, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Pakistan)

Indeed, several IISD alumni are making this connection, including Carolyn Rohaly. She was an intern with ENDA Energie in Senegal and now works as Executive Assistant to Director David Cronenberg:

*“After working on development projects since the internship, I felt like international development was another form of colonialism. I realized that it would take a long time and small steps to affect social change towards sustainability, so I decided to focus on maintaining sustainability in my own life, wherever it might take me or in whatever career I pursue... The skills I developed while overseas will be helpful in any work situation, whether or not I am in the development field. The internship taught me how to see things from other people's perspectives, and that is invaluable in any workplace.”*

The same applies for Ron Duerksen who is the Senior Marketing Manager at ALDO Group for Canada, the US and the UK. His placement was with the World Business Council on Sustainable Development in the Gulf of Mexico:

*“These internships allow people to experience career roles and take risks they normally would not be able to, or be inclined to do. They allow young people to work in environments that expand their horizons and put them in situations that are outside of their normal comfort zone...driving them to understand a different side of their abilities and personality. 'Pushing the envelope' like this helps people become better leaders in the future... I moved from activist (or being involved 100 per cent in environment/sustainable development)...to being involved on an individual level and through helping change the mindset of companies from the inside out.”*

## The Evolving Sustainability Field

Before exploring the skill set that young professionals need to succeed in a sustainability career, it is important to take a step back and examine shifts to the sustainability field in the past 10 years since the internship program started. First—and happily—there has been a (relative) mainstreaming of sustainability issues. Lani Innes, past intern and now Senior Sustainable Development Analyst with Canada Revenue Agency puts it like this:

*“Over the last 8-10 years, I do believe that sustainability has moved from the fringes to more of the mainstream. With this shift comes perhaps a more complicated environment to work within i.e., profile of issues, level and breadth of engagement and by whom, type of response needed, general expectations regarding progress.”*

Other changes to the sustainability domain in the past decade were noted by past interns and host organizations. There are three changes that deeply affect how we view the sustainability skill set and leadership in this sector. The first is that there is the need for understanding different perspectives, including skill at **managing multi-stakeholder relations**. The second is the emergence of global priorities like climate change that highlight the need for a **systems approach** to sustainability. The third is the **development of the internet** and the increasing role of information and communications technology in organizations.

### 1. Managing Multi-Stakeholder Relations

Over the past decade, an understanding has developed of how much this will be a societal challenge—across the globe, across sectors. Although the imperative has been there since the days of the Bruntland Report, there is now a deeper engagement by non-traditional actors like the private sector in supporting sustainability. There is more work being done to reconcile development and conservation, for example, necessitating negotiating across often polarized positions. Also, there are more examples of how the needs of stakeholder groups can be understood and balanced against one another. With this has come the need to navigate conflicting goals across stakeholder groups, including how “positive” solutions from one perspective may look negative from another. Furthermore, with the complex nature of systems, it is sometimes hard to envision the long-term impact of a decision. There is a need for education across stakeholder groups, and the identification of options that set out—if not win-win—then win more, lose less scenarios for all parties and the planet. Understanding and managing within the different perspectives and needs of regions and sectors has become a defining feature of sustainable development.

Interns and hosts provide insights on some of the arenas in which this is taking shape. First, social and economic goals are finding their place along with environmental issues in the sustainability domain. Tied to this, there is a deeper understanding of how the environment and poverty reduction are integrally linked, leading to shifts across conservation and development organizations. As past intern Matthew Woods writes from his experience at UNEP, *“Poverty reduction, income generation, financial sustainability as integral components of even the most biodiversity-focused activities.”* Past intern and World Bank officer, Maja Andjelkovic writes, *“Sustainable development is still frequently viewed as a purely environmental concept, but a broader understanding, one incorporating social, economic and environmental aspects, seems to be more common now than five years ago.”* Past intern Jason Switzer notes that this requires a bridging capacity of sustainability professionals: *“We need to learn to address issues at the intersection, e.g., between environment and economy or between social (e.g., conflict) and environment.”*

As conflicting needs and perspectives are confronted head-on, linked skill sets such as facilitation start to play a stronger role. Patrick Yarnell, Consultation Officer, Parks Canada, Canada (Intern, Ministry of Environment, Ecuador), writes about *“the importance of engaging all sectors and considering a broad range of complementary tools.”* Another speaks of the slow nature of change involved when dealing with multiple stakeholders, as well as the difficulty in achieving far-reaching solutions:

*“I’ve realized... changes occur slowly. It is never a ‘quick fix’ kind of problem. There are always so many stakeholders that knowing what the ‘right’ thing to do is complicated. So much more time is spent on building alliances, partnerships and networks than is spent actually doing the work that needs to be done. And what eventually gets done is always a compromise and less than what is needed.”*

To do this, it is important to bring actors to the table to discuss, and that is having ripple effects on international policy fora, as a former IISD intern points out:

*“I see greater attempts at bringing local experiences/knowledge to international fora, moving beyond the human interest story and looking at these experiences as genuine contributions to policy formulation and reform.”* Former IISD intern.

Some of the actors that are coming to the table are not ones that were engaged before and this brings with it new issue areas for sustainability professionals to understand, as well as additional skills. For example, the private sector is taking a stronger role (*“In many cases the private sector is taking the lead.”*), bringing new opportunities for sustainable development as well as challenges:

*“Today’s opportunities in the field of sustainability are focused on helping businesses reduce their environmental impact (e.g., energy and water use), and develop longer-term and mutually beneficial partnerships with the communities in which they operate.”* Brad Etlin, Senior Advisor, Government of Ontario (Intern, IUCN South Africa)

And also from 2006 intern Miranda Morgan, who completed her placement at LEAD International in the UK: *“I have been very encouraged by the role of the private sector in bringing about change. I still do not think the answers lie with them, but appreciate how quickly they can change when there is the will to do so and push their peers to do the same.”*

Alumni are recognizing that sustainability is a challenge for all sectors; and many interns are choosing to move between private, public and not-for-profit jobs as their careers advance. A third of the alumni are involved in some part of the private sector, most of whom still consider themselves sustainability professionals.<sup>11</sup> The deepening of corporate social responsibility, tied with a mainstreaming of sustainability into all sectors, has an impact on the training, development and opportunities for young sustainability professionals.

## **2. Taking a Systems Approach**

Related to the need to integrate different perspectives across stakeholder groups is a move towards systems thinking in sustainability. In the past decade, we have gained more appreciation of the resilience, fragility and beauty of nature and the interdependence and equal importance of all life forms. Further, we understand that there are feedback loops that are unpredictable, including how climate change will unfold. As a past intern notes, *“...the capacity to help*

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<sup>11</sup> 14/132 of responding interns currently work in large business, their own business or other private sector; 18/132 are self-employed consultants; 9/132 are members of a consulting firm.

*moderate the China/India GHG emission signature pathway, it seems to me, is ever more essential to global sustainable development.”*

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) confirmed that the planet's natural resources are being degraded across the board, increasing risks of nonlinear changes: "The harmful consequences of this degradation could grow significantly worse in the next 50 years". It is in this context that sustainability professionals need to operate. This was captured in the survey as the capacity to “**value integrated thinking.**” Jacob Malthouse put the challenge this way,

*“The world doesn’t easily break into categories any more...Maybe a leader is someone who can see and understand trends and risks, and take chances on ideas based on that understanding and then motivate people to achieve those ideas. Sustainability has a lot to do with understanding trends based on resource flows. It’s essentially a forward-looking discipline. Decision-makers for tomorrow, today.”*

Jacob Malthouse, Regional Liaison, ICANN, USA (Intern, UNEP Finance Initiative, Switzerland)

For sustainability professionals in the coming decade then, there needs to be a more sophisticated understanding of how natural systems operate and interact with each other, especially when exposed to increasing stress. However, this systems approach also needs to be applied to organizational systems, helping sustainability professionals identify leverage points for social change. The Environmental Leadership Collaborative reminds us that leadership development also means sharpening attitudes and perspectives through experience and exposure to new ideas:

*“...leadership development is much more than the acquisition of concrete skills and benefits. It is an entry point for individuals to become more aware of the larger systems within which they operate, and to learn how to be most effective in creating systemic change, whether their system is a company, a community, or an institution.” (p.5)*

### **3. Using the Power of the Internet**

A third defining feature of the sustainability field today is the changed role and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The World Wide Web was in its infancy ten years ago, when IISD’s internship program started. Now, it is a widely used tool, even in developing/transitional countries where internet access is still somewhat limited. According to Jeffrey I. Cole, Director of the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School Center for the Digital Future, “*More than a decade after the portals of the Worldwide Web opened to the public [in 1994], we are now witnessing the true emergence of the Internet as the powerful personal and social phenomenon we knew it would become.*”<sup>12</sup>

The internet is beginning to be used as a tool for social change, and certainly is a cohesive force for globally-dispersed networks like those engaged by the United Nations or IUCN—The World Conservation Union. It holds a great deal of promise; however it is also a tool that requires further training and understanding, especially in a developing country context. A past intern explains,

*“Information technology is continually influencing sustainability discourse. It can alter how people work and communicate, and impact information sharing, network building, and political communications. Youth are especially adept at using technology to share information. Because of its evolving nature this is an area where continued education is needed. It holds the potential*

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<sup>12</sup> *The Internet as Agent of Social Change* by Psych Central News Editor on Wednesday, Nov, 29, 2006, reviewed by: John M. Grohol, Psy.D. Source: University of Southern California. Online at: <http://psychcentral.com/news/2006/11/29/the-internet-as-agent-of-social-change/>.

*for innovative ways of working and communicating, however, accessibility remains a real issue for those in developing countries.”*

Melinda Moriarty, Policy Advisor, Environment Canada, Canada (Intern, Education Development Centre, USA)

The promise and prevalence of ICT means that knowledge management and communications are increasingly an important part of everyone’s work in sustainability. As email and websites become more common, they become a key mode of communication. Other communication mechanisms like film and radio are reaching a wider audience through the internet, providing another avenue for social change. Moreover, there is a growing need to develop new communications products and services and to integrate communications with research in order to truly bridge research, policy and action. And with communication skills being ranked both among the interns and the IISD RS team members as the most important skill set for sustainability professionals, this means that learning how to work effectively with ICT is something no young professional should ignore. Another “early years” intern who has stayed on working in a developing country notes:

*“Obviously the ICT for D [development] sector has changed hugely since my internship and today’s interns would have to be much more conversant with emerging platforms provided by these technologies for sustainability ventures.”* Katherine Hay, Senior Program Officer, IDRC, India (1998 intern, Development Alternatives, India)

### **What Does it Take to Become a “Leader” in Sustainability Issues?**

The study results thus far have given a better sense of what a sustainability leader is and how this has changed over the past decade. So, now to the demand side; is there room in the sustainability field for new leaders? Definitely, especially if it is nothing short of societal transformation that we are seeking! As Paul Hawken told young graduates:

*“There’s a big sign somewhere hanging from the heavens saying ‘You are brilliant, the earth is hiring.’ You are desperately needed...Please dream, imagine and lead. Think fearlessly. You are the people you’ve been waiting for.”<sup>13</sup>*

If young people are to take up this challenge, how does one acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that make one both a leader and a superb team member in this journey towards a more sustainable society? The team element is a key one because as the Environmental Leadership Collaborative reminds us, leadership is a societal role, not just an individual technique to improve. Moreover, the leadership of individuals has a very real impact on the state of the world, as catalysts for environmental and social change: *“leadership development—through its transformative impact on individuals—powerfully influences key environmental, sustainability and community development issues.”* (p.40)

Values were addressed in the section “what is a sustainability leader,” and cover the **implicit** knowledge<sup>14</sup> set of sustainability professionals. The following section looks at the formal knowledge sustainability professionals require; their **explicit** knowledge set. This is followed by a discussion of the **tacit** knowledge that sustainability professionals need to attain, through on-the-job learning (including an experiential learning opportunity like the internship), courses or peer-to-peer networks. The survey concentrated on a list of 21 skill sets (see Box 1 and Appendix 3),

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Hawken’s keynote address at RMIT’s Graduation in Melbourne, Australia, at Telstra Dome (December 20, 2002)

<sup>14</sup> See definitions at the beginning of the paper.

how they might best be attained (formal learning, on the job, etc.) and at what stage in their career. Exploring what is necessary at an entry and mid-level of one’s career can play a role in helping IISD develop a generational strategy which takes young people from hiring through to mid and high levels of an organization.

**Explicit Knowledge: Formal Education**

Interns with IISD were required to have a formal education background and this served them well in developing their sustainability career. Whether in environmental science or journalism, urban studies or law, the interns all came to their placements with a formal degree. The majority had training in liberal arts, followed by those with a science background (see Figure 5 for details).. Of note, there has been a 10 per cent increase in masters degrees among 2006-7 interns, as compared to other alumni. Among the 2006-7 set of interns, 61.1 per cent held a masters degree and only 38.9 per cent held an undergraduate degree. For other alumni, the split was closer to fifty–fifty (see Figure 8 in Appendix 1 for details).<sup>15</sup>

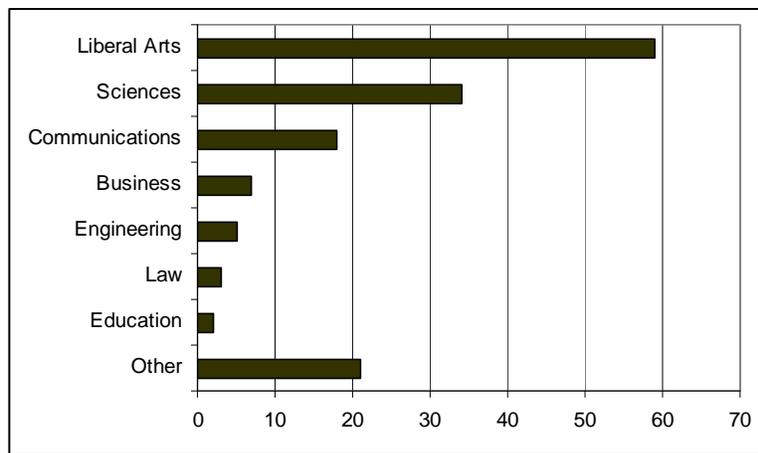


Figure 5: Primary knowledge base when starting the internship

As detailed in the section about the evolving sustainability field, understanding complexity (and showing an ability working across stakeholder groups and their interests) as well as using the internet effectively have become integral to leadership in this field. These require the ability to work across disciplines and approach issues with analytical rigour, as well as communicate effectively. All of these skill sets are enhanced through formal education. Beyond the skills they gain, for some, their formal education ignited the spark for sustainability work—and spurred them to apply to the internship program, as shown by this past intern:

*“I was drawn to sustainability issues after an environmental planner came to speak to my environmental seminar class in fourth year undergrad. I was fascinated by her career. I applied to the internship because it was directly related to my Master’s Thesis.”*

Erin Silsbe, Policy Analyst, Center for Clean Air Policy, Canada (Intern, Center for Clean Air Policy, USA)

The subject matter knowledge gained from formal education is important, but will be enhanced on the job as one engages with a specific sub-field or at a particular scale, e.g., in post-conflict issues or with forest biodiversity. When asked if they felt that the subject-matter expertise they

<sup>15</sup> Of past interns, 53.4 per cent held a masters degree, and 45 per cent held an undergraduate degree. In addition, one held a technical training certificate and one held a post-graduate diploma.

brought to the internship was adequate for the position, 57.7 per cent said yes, an additional 36.9 per cent said “not initially, but I learned enough through the internship.” Only 5.4 per cent said “no, I needed more subject matter expertise to be effective.” Of the 2006-7 interns, 66.7 per cent felt that they had enough expertise and 27.8 per cent felt they learned enough during the internship. Only one of the 2006-7 interns felt that they needed more subject-matter expertise to be effective. That approximately 1/3 of the respondents for both pools felt that they gained enough during the internship to be effective makes a strong case for an experiential learning opportunity like an internship which allows them to build on a solid knowledge base.

For the small group who said “no,” the internship may have given them insight into the knowledge and experiential gaps they had to be effective in a sustainability career. Indeed, the statistics (below) of how many interns returned to school after their placements indicates a strong life-long learning component in the sustainability field. In this respect, the internship can be a valuable tool in filling gaps in formal knowledge and identifying areas where more study is needed: *“I needed to gain more skills to be able to be in a stronger leadership position, so I went on to complete masters studies.”*

Fully 44 per cent of the 2006-7 interns plan to return to school for further education or training at some point after the internship. A third of interns from previous years have returned to school at some point, deciding that they “needed more education or training after the internship.” And almost all of the rest (60 per cent) pursued some form of further education at some point after they completed their placement: Further, 70 per cent of the undergraduates pursued another degree program after the internship. These statistics match anecdotal evidence that many of the interns wished they had already completed their second degree before being introduced to the overseas network as this would have facilitated their ability to stay on and develop their career internationally. For example, this piece of advice from a former intern: *“You have to have a masters and you really need to identify a mentor within the organization.”* A significant number have felt the need for increased specialization, which may also be a factor of the growing field of sustainability professionals. One alumna commented that *“several years ago, some general sustainability knowledge and skills were required to find work in the field. With the number of formal sustainability training and degree programs now available, specific skill/subject matter expertise is now required to find work in the sustainability field.”* That said, host Mark Halle of IISD reminds young professionals that *“five years into one’s career, academic standing becomes less important than work experience as well as how someone is able to connect issues and communicate complexity.”*

This study did not seek out comparative data to assess whether this pursuit of further higher education is unusual to the sustainability field, but it is worth noting that a number of interns and hosts understand the skill set required to be broader than in many other professions (*“Perhaps sustainability professionals are distinguished by their field of vision: longer-term and more multi-disciplinary than most”*). When asked what could be unique about sustainability professionals, many alumni pointed out the ability to work across sectors and disciplines (*“multidisciplinary capacity—science, economics, policy, communications, systems thinking, organizational structure”*). This ability to bridge disciplines or sectors (understanding of integrated decision-making, capacity to bridge disciplines and sectors) is also one of the top 10 skills identified in this study (see Box 1 for the list of all 21 skills).

So what does this the ability to span disciplines require in terms of one’s formal knowledge base? Two hosts provided insight. First, Nick Greenwood, from the International Institute for Environment and Development, argues that in order to effectively be interdisciplinary, one needs to have a strong grounding in one discipline. This is the basis for constructive dialogue across

perspectives and approaches. Without it, there is a risk of superficial boundary-spanning, without addressing the true differences between disciplines. Indeed, as they embark on their careers, many young professionals noted gaps in their knowledge of other disciplines, hampering their ability to integrate across fields effectively. Indeed, many mentioned specific knowledge-based gaps when they replied what they would train for before the placement. For example, a number pointed to increased understanding of economics and trade. Kakuko Nagatani of UNEP also offers a perspective on the trend to “*honour alternative disciplines*” within sustainability work. She argues that although it has helped open the sustainability debate to, e.g., social justice issues, it needs to be done carefully. Economics, political science, international relations backgrounds all offer something but in her view, they are being prioritized in interdisciplinary teams ahead of the natural sciences. And it is in biology and chemistry that we start to understand the complexities of ecosystem dynamics, which form the foundation for sustainable development. She encourages more people with these backgrounds to engage in the interdisciplinary debates that are shaping sustainability thinking, especially in the international field. Indeed, they are critical to grounding policy and practice in the realities of the ecosystem.

### **Tacit Knowledge: Skill Sets**

It is through a job, courses and peer-to-peer learning that a professional begins to pick up the tools for effective sustainability work. Referred to as **tacit knowledge**, this skill set is created by “doing”; by personal trial, error, reflection and revision. It includes understanding how to research and develop new policy recommendations, learning how to run a community consultation or learning how to negotiate a policy change with a decision-maker. Acquiring these skills is facilitated through shared processes (working together, mentoring and so forth) in addition to the physical transmission of written or recorded content. Based on this study, the skills of most importance to sustainability professionals are acquired primarily on-the-job, and this speaks highly of the need for an experiential learning program like an internship.

Interns and the IISD RS team were provided with a list of 21 skill sets and asked whether they were relevant, and if so, at what level they should be acquired and by what point in one’s career. They were then asked to rank the skill sets. A wealth of information was gathered about the relevance and trainability of each of these skill sets, including at what stage of one’s career they become important to master. When asked for their top three, communication skills came out on top with both interns and the IISD RS team, followed by staff and team management skills. For the interns, the ability to influence was third in the list; for the IISD RS team, it was the ability to translate complex ideas (see Figure 6).

Of these top skills, communication skills, translating complex ideas, geo-political awareness, project management and the awareness of stakeholder roles were seen as important to acquire at entry level to their careers. The interns also noted skills they wish they had trained in before their entry-level placement. These training needs ranged from presentation skills to language classes; from writing funding proposals to understanding the needs of donors; from budgeting skills to accounting procedures; and from project management tools to computer skills. The following three skills were deemed relevant for sustainability professionals at either entry or mid-career by all alumni respondents: project management, analytical rigour and a systems approach.

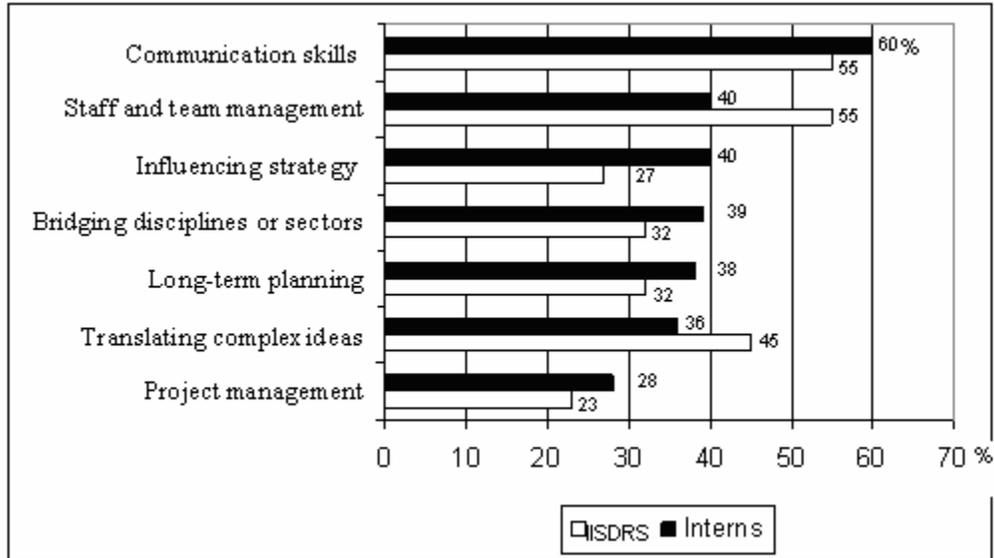


Figure 6: Top ranked skill sets for sustainability professionals, by interns and the IISD RS team

The majority of these skills were identified by both interns and host organizations as “trainable on the job.” Among the top skills, this was true of staff and team management, long-term planning, project management, the awareness of stakeholder roles, and bridging disciplines or sectors. Indeed, upon reviewing the list, host Nick Greenwood from the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) exclaimed, “*I was tempted to write entry level and on the job for all!*” Past intern, Trevor Bowden, echoed this sentiment:

*“Just a note on my selection of all skills as ‘entry level’ —I’m not sure I’m understanding when entry level ends and mid-career begins, but I think all of these skills are important to acquire asap, and should be a focus for entry level professionals. They’ll be gaps if one still doesn’t have them by mid-career.”* Trevor Bowden, Consultant (Intern, UNEP Finance Initiative, Switzerland)

This paper concentrates on three of these skill sets, with reference to others where relevant: communication skills, translating complex ideas and project management. Although project management was not one of the top three skills, it was one which was deemed relevant at entry level by interns and sparked debate around its trainability, including at what stage of a professional’s development.

### 1. Communication Skills

Excellent written and oral communication skills are critical to success throughout one’s career, and particularly in sustainability work. Engaging people will be the number one challenge—the ability to work across sectors, personality types and cultures for a better future. Raquel Thomas, host with Iwokrama, prioritized communications above the other skills for the following reason:

*“All of the above are important but at the end of the day, sustainability depends on people—so how we communicate and form strategic partnerships are important, with the element of inclusion of course.”*

On communication skills, the vast majority of interns felt that this was trainable through course work. In contrast, the IISD RS team members (whose job it is to communicate) felt it could be learned in a mix of the three modes. It is true that elements of the communication skill set can be learned, such as presentation styles or handling the media. However, a number of hosts and alumni point out that someone either has a natural ability for communications or not, and that this

natural ability will influence one's leadership potential. Mark Halle, IISD host, refines this finding, *"Although you can learn certain parts of the communication skill set, like through media training, you either have a knack for it or you don't by the time you leave university."* He also underlines their importance for success as a young professional: *"We select for excellent communication skills now. The only people who haven't done well on the internship with us here are people who don't have those skills."* Past intern Lauren Haney agrees,

*"I think communication has emerged as one of the most important skills in this field. People are listening now—the political and social climate has changed—and communicating these ideas to people effectively is absolutely essential."*

Lauren Elizabeth Haney, Environmental Planner, North of 60 Development, Jacques Whitford / AXYS Environmental Consulting, Canada (Intern, UNEP-Grid Arendal, Norway)

To the communications skill set, past interns note a number of specific areas they would seek training in; ICT and web development, proficiency in a second language, presentation skills (including *"effectively presenting in a group situation without technology, i.e., power point, handouts"*), desktop publishing and media relations.

Not only do young professionals need to learn to communicate the substance of their work effectively, they also need to learn how to communicate with others. Host ASB-ICRAF, Sandra Velarde, emphasizes that some interns have trouble navigating some of the softer communication skills, including diplomacy. Learning what to tell to whom, understanding confidentiality as compared to transparency, being assertive, an ability to facilitate constructive dialogue—these are all key aptitudes for sustainability professionals. Another host echoed this point about the softer side of communication: *"A sustainability professional needs well-developed mediation skills. This is something that can be learned with time and experience, but it is very important. With them, misunderstandings can be set right between groups before they develop into serious problems."*

This is related to **Influencing Strategy**, a key skill set for sustainability professionals. This is the understanding of leverage points and how to promote change. As was discussed earlier in the section about how the internship shaped the careers of young professionals, this is picked up even at an entry level. That said, most labeled it as a mid-career skill set. Particularly, it was noted that the ability to truly understand the system and influence it is something that comes with experience, deep knowledge of sustainability issues and a strategic network of contacts.

## **2. Translating Complex Ideas**

The ability to "translate" complex or scientific issues into simple and clear messages is a hallmark of the sustainability skill set. Of course, it is linked to communication skills, but merits its own category as it has become ever more important in the past decade. Climate change, linking poverty and conservation, ecosystem management and other sustainability issues require ever greater ability to convey core messages without losing scientific integrity. This is critical because, as Jean-Marc Coicaud of UN University explains, *"Sometimes you get style without substance, when there is really nothing behind the talk. If people are not able to manage complexity, they must upgrade their knowledge base in order to progress (credibly) in their career and advance sustainability."* A past intern agrees, having learned precisely that during the six months: *"[I realized] the need for continuous learning and improvement of my knowledge and skills... [I also discovered] the importance of my technical background as a means to communicate effectively on complex issues."*

Being able to communicate across science, policy and practice to different audiences has become ever more important as sustainability has moved to an action agenda:

*“A general shift away from defining/explaining the problem to providing real and practical solutions as public awareness slowly grows.”*

Matthew Woods, Technical Advisor, UNEP, Kenya (Intern, UNEP, Kenya)

Translating complex ideas is also at the heart of young professionals' work. Gillian Martin-Mehers, now with IUCN and formerly with LEAD, sees this as a key learning opportunity for young professionals; figuring out how to sequence information and give it new meaning, and then report on it in a meaningful way. She notes that there is a module on systems thinking available from LEAD, which could help understand core concepts and better communicate them.

### **3. Project Management**

Project management involves the process of setting and delivering project goals, objectives and tasks. As well, it involves achieving results and measuring success against a set of objectives. This was a skill set that came up repeatedly and with mixed results. Project management, including fundraising, emerged as a skill that young professionals wished they had had training in to be effective working on sustainability issues. Related was the ability to plan for the long-term and the more immediate need to understand staff and team management. Further, most interns marked project management as an “entry-level” requirement when asked in the survey.

In contrast, the majority of hosts saw this skill as necessary for mid-career professionals. In particular, this was the case as it relates to the management of teams of professionals around a project—a common mode of working for IGOs and NGOs. However, hosts seem to be giving more project management duties to recent interns, as will be detailed in the upcoming section, “What *Can* Be Learned in Just Six Months?” Most respondents feel that project management is a skill to be learned “on the job,” including 2/3 of the interns. Indeed, regardless of where interns are in a team, observing and learning how to support a project helps advance sustainability, as issues are increasingly addressed in a team environment.

Host Kakuko Nagatani of the UN Environment Program provides some guidance on how to proceed. She agrees that it is something you learn on the job, however remarks that this makes it vulnerable to the leadership of one's superiors. One is going to pick up the style and the methods that are used in the office, with a first exposure to project management likely to be formative in shaping one's own style. As such, she recommends integrating training on widely used project management tools into the pre-departure orientation for interns. This would provide the intern with basic knowledge, empowering them to be an immediate asset to their host organization. Specifically, she notes logical framework analysis, monitoring and evaluation methodologies, stakeholder mapping, the problem-objective tree and media communication. Of note, LEAD has a training cd-rom on project management as well as developing project proposals. They could be good resources. Also Mark Halle, of IISD, suggests that IISD might make available templates for budgeting and project management to interns during the briefing sessions. Surprisingly, such financial skills as well as donor and client relations are seen as less relevant in all survey groups. This contrasts with the reality that host organizations put forward, where it is a critical skill set. From host interviews, it is clearly an area young professionals need to be exposed to early in their career.

An understanding of project management is also important from another perspective. It helps an entry-level professional gain a birds-eye view of the larger projects or programs they are contributing to. As ASB-ICRAF host, Sandra J. Velarde, points out, “*Being able to see how your*

*‘small piece’ fits into the bigger picture is very helpful in feeling like you are working towards broader impact.” This is linked to an understanding of leverage points and plan for the long-term. Indeed, alumnus Jacob Malthouse learned exactly that during his six months placement with the UN: “That I could be a productive part of an international team by getting things done and focusing on the goals I was given while also keeping an eye to how to be a part of where the organization was growing.”*

### **What Role can IISD Play in Fostering Leadership?**

The second half of this paper looks at the potential and actual role of IISD in shaping the sustainability careers of young people. How should IISD’s programming for young professionals evolve? Is the core internship model still valid? These questions are the subject of the next two sections. In the final section, the paper considers other options for strengthening IISD’s young professionals programming. For example, what opportunities are there to link across networks, e.g., across current interns, alumni and the IISD RS team members? Is there more IISD could be doing for mid-career professionals? The Environmental Leadership Collaborative helps organizations like IISD think about the support they might offer beyond entry-level:

*“Leadership development programs that support people at different stages of their careers help create a **pipeline** of support that begins with youth and follows through to veteran leaders. This pipeline offers a series of opportunities that individuals can access throughout their careers when they need different types of leadership support, from mentoring networks as a young environmentalist, to job resources when beginning a career, to time for reflection and recharging in the later stages of a career.” (p.5)*

Why should IISD be involved at all? There are clear benefits to IISD from its young professionals programming. A 2005 study<sup>16</sup> confirmed that the program has:

- increased IISD’s reach: including, amplifying its presence, enhancing its reputation, and strengthening institutional relationships;
- given IISD and its partner organizations access to a hand-picked talent pool;
- increased the scope and amount of work in some of IISD’s program areas and improved IISD’s ability to execute similar programs;
- engaged youth in sustainable development in a tangible way, through a set of standardized and commended program components; and
- brought in new funding for projects in several program areas.

### **The Benefits from IISD’s Core Program Model**

This section addresses the question; is IISD’s internship model working? This research study opened a dialogue with hosts and interns about the focus and value of the IISD young professionals programming. From their experience and knowledge of other young professionals’ programs, they were asked to share their preferences for the program. Options included shifting to mid-career professionals, orienting placements around a smaller range of issue areas, focusing the majority of placements on the private sector.

Interns and hosts were asked whether a change in emphasis was warranted and, if so, what kind of a shift. For the most part, the hosts as well as the interns found the current model useful both for developing the intern’s career as well as contributing to sustainable development. As seen in

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<sup>16</sup> Young Canadian Leaders for a Sustainable Future: Value to IISD (2005).

Figure 7, most respondents replied that they wanted the program to maintain the same four core attributes, which will be addressed in detail below: (1) a focus on **entry-level professionals**. They encouraged (2) **placements with intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations** who (3) work on a **range of issue areas** (climate change, trade, communications, natural resource management). (4) Lastly, the focus on **skills development** is seen as intrinsic to these choices.

### 1. A Focus on Entry-Level Professionals

One compelling reason for maintaining entry-level placements is that skills and knowledge are acquired rapidly at this stage of one’s career. It is the time when young people develop patterns of thinking and work that they will carry through their working life. As such, hosts are especially attuned to their potential role as mentors and this makes them increasingly willing to invest time and effort in the internship. At a younger age, Canadian interns tend not to have family and other obligations. This makes it easier for them to take a risk at staying in a country, even without a job, or to take a short-term contract if it is made available to them. The contacts they develop through the internship can take them in many different directions, and being young they are less invested in which of these they take on or don’t. There is work in sustainable development, but the majority of opportunities are dependent on being “in the right place at the right time” to seize the moment. Furthermore, at an entry level, these opportunities are either hidden to outsiders (by virtue of being informal, short-term contracts) or highly competitive and therefore difficult to secure without significant experience. It can be a vicious cycle, as one past intern relates:

*“I think the focus on entry-level positions is key because it is very difficult for someone without experience to find entry-level opportunities. The internship really got my career going.”*  
 Alexandra Baillie, Student, Harvard Business School, USA (Intern, IUCN – The World Conservation Union, South Africa)

Another writes that the placement gave access to career opportunities:

*“I had a very hard time breaking into the sustainability work world upon graduation, but the internship really opened doors.”* Melinda Moriarty, Policy Advisor, Environment Canada, Canada (Intern, Education Development Centre, USA)

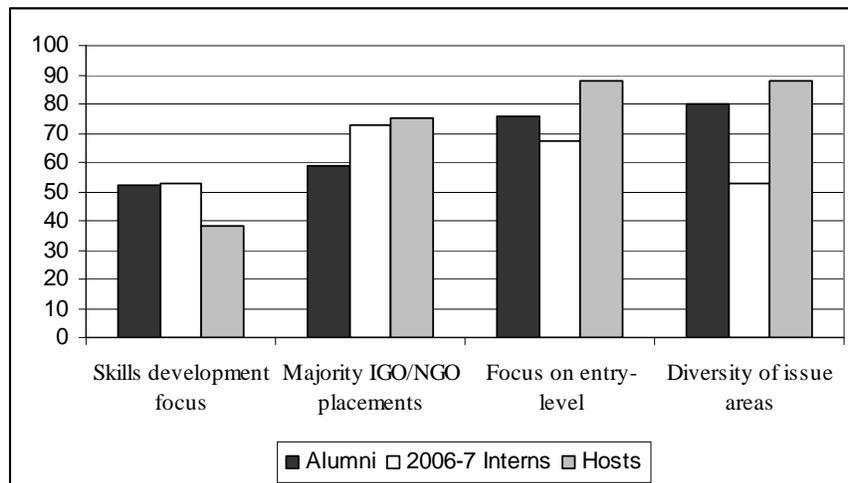


Figure 7: Shape of the IISD internship program (top-ranked responses)

What is appealing for both interns as well as hosts is the extent to which an early experience like an internship can shape the career of a young professional. Interns learn about themselves and their own strengths, often one of the first times these have been tested in a workplace. This self-

reflection—including about one’s leadership style—is remarked upon by many past interns. For example:

*“I think I have a more action-oriented and creative type of leadership to generate ideas as opposed to leadership that involves being in charge of a group of people.”*

Sharon Buteau, Student (Intern, WBCSD, Switzerland, 1998)

*“I learned about new cultures and adapting to new people, situations and places. Because there is less [media] infrastructure..., there was more potential for me to grow. For example, I was able to write for a national newspaper in South Africa.”*

Ada Chan, Marketing Coordinator, Vancouver Chinatown BIA Society, Canada (Intern, Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa)

Furthermore, being exposed through the peer network to a whole variety of positions around the world gives young professionals the sense of freedom in defining their own role in the movement. Past interns-turned-hosts Dagmar Timmer and Alyson Slater observe:

*“The internship is the first step in a journey that will highlight the kind of jobs we like doing, what excites us, what leaves us numb. What this internship taught us—and what we look forward to sharing back—is that the world is full of people working on [sustainability] issues and that it’s about finding the right fit for you, both in terms of the topic and the type of work and work environment. Starting to define that niche is the greatest gift an internship can offer.”<sup>17</sup>*

The leap in self-confidence for those who have a successful entry-level placement can pay dividends, as Xavier Cattaranich writes: *“I had relatively weak self-confidence when I went into the internship [at Iwokrama in Guyana]. Afterwards, I felt like I could accomplish anything. I learned how to apply, in a practical fashion, much of the theoretical knowledge I had learned in university. The increased self-confidence increased my leadership potential, and enabled me to skip a rung on the ladder when I was offered my first job upon returning to Canada (Project Coordinator with Katimavik).”*

But even frustrations serve a purpose in this experiential learning model:

*“I learned that I was...much more results-oriented than process oriented. Also, that my leadership potential is directly related to my ability to win people over to a common cause. This process requires a huge effort in understanding how others perceive things and what their motivations are.”*

Leslie Paas, Consultant, Distance Education Laboratory, Brazil (Intern, Graduate Department of Production and Systems Engineering, Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil)

Other interns may find an area of passion during those six months, pursuing further education to contribute more fully to that field. Victoria Ballance shares her experience:

*“My internship required business and entrepreneurial skills as well as an ability to engage stakeholders and develop strategies that met the needs of unique groups and individuals. I developed a real appreciation for the role of stakeholder engagement and stakeholder relations in achieving sustainability goals. Upon my return I decided to get my MBA at the Schulich School of Business—one of the few schools that offer a specialization in Business and Sustainability. I was fortunate enough to study with David Wheeler who was a pioneer in the area of stakeholder engagement. I now work in oil and gas and use these stakeholder skills everyday.”*

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<sup>17</sup> IISD Alumni Inside (Winter 2004), p. 3.

Victoria Ballance, Associate Consultant, RMC & Associates, Canada (Intern, Association for Better Land Husbandry, Kenya)

Do interns at an entry-level have the skills and knowledge to contribute to the host organization? Host organizations gave a resounding “yes”! They credited the selection process for supporting talented young people and felt that overwhelmingly, the interns they worked with were of a very high caliber and ready to take on the challenge of six months of intensive work.

Host organizations expressed particular reservations about **shifting the program towards mid-career professionals**. There is usually a higher level of expectation that accompanies a mid-career internship. Some hosts commented that in their experience, mid-career professionals who are participating in short, low-remuneration placements arrive with a stronger expectation that the internship will turn into longer-term employment. This expectation can result from personal or professional sacrifices related to participating in an internship at this stage of one’s career. The attendant pressure can be difficult for the host organization, especially if the host is a non-profit without the security to keep the intern. With this in mind, some of the hosts suggested that mid-career professionals explore other options for making a move to an IGO or NGO, especially one based overseas. One option is through a secondment. There still is a defined need for training of mid-career professionals. A suggestion made by some of the older alumni as well as hosts is for shorter professional development opportunities hosted by IISD. Training modules already produced by IISD, or through its partner organizations like LEAD International, could serve as the basis for these skills development trainings. An IISD RS team member explains that these would be appealing to people like her whose training has been largely “on the job” since leaving university:

*“I would welcome the opportunity to take a training course at IISD, learning skills that I don’t have time to acquire during my busy work day. For some mid-career professionals, their workplace might pay for this training opportunity.”*

The findings indicate that there is scope for further research both on the opportunities for mid-career training as well as on the cycle of learning that takes place between the formal and experiential learning environment. Four related ideas emerged from the surveys and interviews:

- An existing opportunity for professional training—which can be strengthened—is through **peer-to-peer networking** across past and current interns. Already 16 past interns are (or have been) official hosts to interns. Furthermore, 14 per cent contributed to internship briefings or debriefings.
- A significant number of hosts and interns thought it would be useful for IISD to prepare **tutorials on its current research**.
- An element of this learning exchange could be through **providing the opportunity for public presentations** on the work of their organization. This was seen as valuable by more than a third of the alumni, as well as 50 per cent of the hosts.
- Hosts at IISD, IIED and the Lake Balaton Development Coordination Agency all commented that an internship provides young professionals with an unusual **opportunity to pursue their own agenda within an organizational framework**, and under guidance. This is something that could be capitalized on.

## 2. Placements with IGOs and NGOs

The second question was whether to maintain a focus on placements with NGOs and IGOs. Again, there was strong support for the current model and even to extend the diversity of placements towards smaller not-for-profits in developing countries as well as rural areas in Canada and the private sector. The skills that interns acquire are transferable across sectors,

including from the not-for-profit to the private sector. As interns see the range of options in the sustainability field, and the possibility to move between sectors, the inclination to do so may increase—enriching multi-stakeholder processes through shared understanding. The transferability of skills facilitates young professionals to bridge sectors throughout their career, a clear trend in the alumni surveyed. Indeed, it is a recommended path by some:

*“Seek out non-traditional work experiences and give you the chance to innovate or use a new set of skills. You’ll stand out both in the sustainability field and in more traditional fields where others’ experiences are more linear.”* Shauna Troniak (2004 Intern at the World Bank, USA)

Generally, the ease of movement across sectors was seen as the case—and examples attest to it. That said, switching sectors is not always successful, as Ron Duerksen explains:

*“I felt I needed private sector experience to then later contribute more effectively in the Sustainable Development field. I then found it difficult to be hired back at the manager level in environment/sustainable development organisations. Organisations did not see the relevance of my private sector experience.”*

Ron Duerksen, Senior Marketing Manager at ALDO (Canada, US, UK), Canada (Intern, WBCSD-Gulf of Mexico)

By concentrating placements on NGO and intergovernmental organization placements, interns often have more opportunity to delve into a variety of tasks and be involved in strategic discussions. A focus on NGOs and IGOs is also important from another perspective, in Kakuko Nagatani's view:

*"In the development of a sustainability leader, it is critical to spend time working with and/or for NGOs. Understanding a not-for-profit environment is very important especially if one later goes to work in the private sector or government. It helps understand the pressures these organizations can be under as well as the vision they have for other parts of society. Also, early exposure to international organizations or NGOs can act as an 'invisible hand' pulling people into a line of work that they might not normally have considered."*

### **3. Diversity of Placements across Issue Areas**

At present, interns work on a wide cross section of research and communications projects, in climate change, trade, resource management, biodiversity protection, indigenous people's rights, gender in development and so forth. The diversity of issue areas is seen as a benefit to the program. Almost unanimously, interns and hosts encouraged IISD not to narrow the focus, in large part because early exposure to the breadth of issue areas informs young people's understanding of sustainability as well as their role in achieving it. They point out the rich dialogue that occurs across placements. During the six months, the interns benefit from peer learning across a variety of issue areas, helping them make links they might not otherwise have done. Alumni then go on to work in a diversity of jobs across skill bases, issue areas and around the world. As such, after the internship, this 300-strong alumni network continues to expose young professionals to a wide range of career opportunities and perspectives in sustainable development. There were some suggestions of issue areas that IISD might consider for a concentration of placements or a special focus within the program. These include climate change adaptation, AIDS, trade and environment, sustainability in developing regions and public participation strategies. However, one past intern suggested exploring a model where IISD would narrow the number of countries and issues, so that by end of orientation training, everyone has what they need to be effective on day two of their posting. This could also benefit the interns in

creating a solid network in-country to draw on during their placement, as there is in Switzerland where multiple hosts are based.

#### 4. Focus on Skills Development

The focus on skills development is seen as critical, and this is even more so when one considers the survey findings that many of the core sustainability skill sets are learned primarily on the job as opposed to through course work. In addition, what makes for good communication skills or facilitation skills does not shift much with time, supporting this emphasis in the program:

*“I don't think the basic skill set changes that much. The knowledge base and hot button issues are changing but what one needs to make a difference (communication, networking, project management) doesn't.”*

Melina Laverty, Senior Program Officer, American Museum of Natural History, USA (Intern, IUCN Mesoamerica, Costa Rica)

Learning and applying an advanced skill set during the placement is central to what hosts and interns consider to be IISD's **professional value proposition** in its internship program. Popular impressions of internships are that work skills include fetching coffee and making photocopies. But for IISD, only a few of the interns ever had that kind of experience. Some of the hosts are worried that an increased emphasis on skills acquisition and substantive learning may place significant pressure on interns. Nevertheless, they recognize the tremendous value to their own organization that an intern brings who can practically hit the ground running—contributing in a very real way to projects. For example, Matt Woods was an intern with the Great Apes Survival Project (GRASP), a flagship species global partnership for biodiversity conservation based at the UN Environment Programme. During his six months, he helped to ensure the successful repatriation of two captive gorillas from Nigeria into Cameroon, thus facilitating the warming of frosty cross-border relations.<sup>18</sup> IISD interns are able to contribute substantively, linked perhaps to the ten percent increase in the number of participants holding a masters degree. The competitive selection process means that, as one host put it, the “*cream of the crop*” is being placed with their organization. Host Mark Halle of IISD agrees that “*for each placement, we get to select great people from an excellent pool of candidates.*”

A number of the hosts asked whether there is enough responsibility put on the shoulder of the host to mentor the intern and provide the kind of skills development expected from an internship—as distinct from an entry level staff position. They encourage discussions with the host organizations, to encourage hosts to design a training plan for the placement that transfers a host's own areas of expertise. This could include, for example, how the organization chooses to focus among competing priorities; how to develop multi-partner budgets; preparing a funding proposal; and stakeholder facilitation. A past intern argues that placements differed greatly in their ability to provide the kind of structure that interns need to develop skills for a sustainability career:

*“I cannot think of any particular skills gained during the internship. Indeed, I felt that there was a large discrepancy in my year between the experiences of different interns with some working on major projects, while others had more mundane tasks. If the goal is to create youth leaders, then these experiences either need to be homogenized or explicitly merged in the debrief to emphasize leadership and other desirable skills.”*

Most hosts and a number of alumni emphasized that the selection of hosts needs to be based largely on their capacity to offer interns a strong learning environment. Certainly, this is the case

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<sup>18</sup> From Matt Woods' profile at <http://www.iisd.org/interns/>.

for the vast majority of hosts IISD works with, and those who have not been able to do so do not benefit from continued placements. That said, it could be useful to reopen the question of how much time a host has to mentor the intern actively.

The question was raised about **whether six months is enough time for the internship**, or if there would be benefit in extending it. Certainly, the six month period was established for good reason, not the least of which is the amount of funding made available under the federal government's YES program.<sup>19</sup> There are also ways in which hosts have extended the placements from a few weeks to many months. Some organizations with adequate resources (e.g., IISD and IIED) “*go on assumption that it will be extended by us, especially if they are able to raise project funds.*” But for many interns, the placement itself is six months. And most of the answers to “what did you learn in six months” come back to the strength of an entry-level placement in providing an accelerated learning experience. This is further discussed below.

### **What Can Be Learned in Just Six Months?**

Six months may seem like a short time, but at the beginning of one's career, it can result in incredibly intense learning. When asked what she learned in the six months, past intern Helen Baulch wrote:

*“I gained a large amount of knowledge in the topic area itself, as well as skills in developing grant proposals, in facilitating meetings, organizing conferences, communicating complex ideas to varied audiences. I learned a huge amount, and vastly added to my professional skills.”*

Helen Baulch, PhD Student, Trent University, Canada (Intern, IUCN – The World Conservation Union, Sri Lanka)

Interns participating in the program often have limited work experience, certainly in the field of sustainability, and none have related overseas work experience. Also, most had never worked in a non-governmental organization before—one which operates in a not-for-profit mode. When past interns were asked about what they took away from the internship, their learning crossed multiple dimensions:

**1. Sustainability knowledge**, including one intern who wrote, “*I learned much more about the role of the private sector and the triple-bottom line.*” Because of the diversity of placement areas, some learned about trade and investment, still others on climate change adaptation. A number identified gaps in their knowledge base that they addressed by returning to school or through specialization.

**2. Specific skills** including project management, facilitation and communication (including “*how to convey scientific information to a general audience*”). Skills in donor relations and proposal development were brought up by many. One 2006-7 intern wrote: “*I am...learning how to work in a financially constrained institution.*” Communication skills were mentioned frequently, including increased abilities with information and communication technology. A show of how much can be learned in a short time, Alyson Slater of the Global Reporting Initiative wrote: “*I had no prior communications training or courses. I am now a communications director! I learned everything I know about publications, network communications, speaking, advocacy, endorsements, web, etc., during my internship [in 2000 with WBCSD].*” These skills are largely transferable across jobs and sectors, an important consideration: “*Particularly when we consider*

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<sup>19</sup> Out-of-province health insurance is also a concern, as the cost increases dramatically after six months.

*that most individuals will change jobs several times throughout their career, I think that most skills are, and have to be, transferable.”*

**3. Work experience**, especially in a non-profit environment, e.g., about the complexities of running an international organization, or how to succeed in a bureaucratic environment. One wrote simply, *“problem solving, agility, patience.”* For many, the learning revolved around bridging cultures, disciplines or sectors. The interns also benefited from an organic model of mentorship with their host. Hosts commented on their desire to fulfill this role for the intern. And whether through close, informal work contact or—in the case of busier hosts—more limited but still educational interactions, many of the past and present interns commented on how they benefited from the relationships they developed at their workplace. Indeed, many interns picked someone in their workplace as the individual they identified as a sustainability leader, and commented on what they learned from their work style or grasp of the issues.

**4. Insights about working overseas** and coming at sustainability work from a global perspective, including for many across north and south issues. One called it, *“development in practice.”* Those working in developing countries gained perspective on the unique challenges faced by sustainability professionals in other parts of the world: *“I learned about the sustainability and technical difficulties that developing countries...have to deal with on a daily basis.”* Another pointed out that their *“work/life experience in a post-conflict environment...has been critical to my career development.”* Interns also learned something about being Canadian in a global context, which one past intern summarized as: *“[During the six months, I learned] how westernized I am. I learned a lot about what my weaknesses are and how well I can be diplomatic.”* Several used the term “ambassador” to denote their feeling of responsibility to Canada. Some may even feel “more Canadian” than before, as described by alumna Letia Cousins, *“You become a Canadian when you leave Canada. I’m Inuk and I felt very Canadian and very proud to be talking to indigenous people in Africa, to learn about their cultural language and traditions and to talk about mine.”*<sup>20</sup> Most interns took away added knowledge about the country and culture they worked in. One learned: *“fluency in Spanish, history of Argentina and political-economic crises, social movements in Latin America...”* And on a lighter note, it teaches something about patience and adaptability, as Sheldon Tay, a past intern with Prisma (El Salvador) shows: *“I can eat about anything. Especially food I didn't order but got because my local language skills were not nearly as good as I thought they were.”*

The specific skills interns learn in their six months “on the job” are related to the tasks they engage in to support their host organization. The survey asked about the mix of tasks. Interns were provided with a full list of possible tasks and asked to check all of the boxes that most closely match their major tasks during their internship. The major tasks have remained consistent across the years: communication strategy (2006-7 interns 52.9 per cent, alumni 41.2 per cent); website redesign and/or management (2006-7 interns 58.8 per cent, alumni 51.3 per cent); organize and/or support meetings or conferences (2006-7 interns 76.5 per cent, alumni 66.4 per cent); and write or edit research papers or other institutional publications (76.5 per cent of all interns). The full list included: support fundraising activities; translation; manage multiple projects; lead research efforts; write major paper(s); newsletter management; network coordination; and carry out stakeholder consultations. Many of the interns helped manage networks of colleagues from around the world, including contributors to a joint paper or ongoing peer networks. Respondents could also list “other” tasks and a number of them did so.

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted from “You Become Canadian When You Leave Canada: Interview with Letia Cousins” By Maja Andjelkovic in IISD Alumni Inside (Winter 2004), p. 7.

Interestingly, there was a much higher perception of being tasked (among other things) with administrative duties among 2006-7 interns than other alumni. However, most host organizations said that the shift has gone away from “fetch coffee and tea, photocopy” towards substantive input to the organization or project. It may be that there has been a subtle shift in what interns consider to be “administrative”, especially when considered in light of the parallel shift in emphasis among the 2006/07 group towards more project management duties. Béatrice Riché, reflecting on her 2006-7 internship with the Forest Conservation Program at IUCN – The World Conservation Union, points to this shift in her cohort. In her view, work now ranges from developing funding proposals which are then funded, to managing a multi-partner project, to coordinating the writing of a multi-authored paper, to supporting the organization of a conference. Some hosts have put interns in charge of developing and fundraising for work that they would carry on after the six month placement.

Some additional important shifts seem to have occurred in emphasis across placements between current and past interns; the opportunity for field work, the involvement in developing organizational strategies, and the chance to represent the organization externally. First, there is a very notable increased **emphasis on field work** during the six month period, including international travel. Béatrice Riché wrote about the value that can be gained from this, “*During my internship...I traveled a lot and had to meet and interact with local communities, governments, NGOs and companies from all over Africa. I learned a lot about how I can interact with people of varied cultures, and how I can take a leadership role in international project management and meetings.*”

The 2006-7 interns seem to be increasingly involved in projects core to the mission of the organization. There has been an increase in interns reporting that they are involved in the development of **organizational strategies**. Related, **strategic and representational duties** have seen a rise, including media relations, donor relations and representation of conferences and external meetings. Another 2006-7 intern wrote of the benefit from having to work in this capacity with her superiors: “*I feel more comfortable communicating my ideas and opinions around my more senior colleagues than I anticipated. I think my ability to confidently communicate my ideas and opinions will enhance my leadership potential.*”

Of course there have always been interns with responsibilities matching those described above, but it seems that hosts are engaging the young professionals more and more in core areas of work. When interns are able to take that added responsibility and run with it, they are rewarded with the development of a skill set far beyond what is usually attained during an internship. The hosts also gain from the contribution these young people make to their organizational goals. There are a few things going on here that are worth bearing in mind for IISD. First, the high quality of interns paired with a long-term relationship with the hosts means that, unlike in many internship programs, hosts *can* expect tremendous results within the six months from the intern. Related, as the hosts work with IISD over time, they build trust that the interns will be able to take on tasks beyond the scope of a usual internship. Further, the organizations may be growing alongside the internship program. The International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development or IISD’s office in Switzerland may have had different needs ten years ago than they do today.

## The Value of an Overseas Experience

The IISD program sends the majority of its interns overseas to developed as well as developing/transitional countries.<sup>21</sup> As such, it is worth exploring whether the overseas component of the program is important in the development a sustainability leader: how does it link to the essential skill and value set? Does it provide additional credibility and ability to work in the sustainability field?

First, as noted in the discussion about the value of an entry-level internship, it is clear that being overseas can jumpstart one's career prospects through contacts that would have been nearly impossible to get on your own. Risa Schwartz, now Counsel with the Ontario Ministry of Environment wrote that her 1998 internship with the World Trade Organization in Geneva did just that: *"Suddenly, I was working in a job and living in a city where I had not, even remotely, pictured myself. The best part about the internship is the contacts that you are able to make in such a short time. I know that this internship gave me opportunities that would have taken me a lot longer to get on my own."*<sup>22</sup> Jean-Didier Oth, now Second Secretary (Development) for CIDA in South Africa, agreed: *"This internship gave me an incredible opportunity [to work with IDRC in South Africa] and gave me that first credible overseas working experience."*

Even when one continues outside the sustainability field, an overseas experience can provide a launching pad for one's career. Michael Field, self-employed Programmer at FieldCo Inc. in Canada, was an intern with Funredes in the Dominican Republic in 1999. He points out how this was the case for him: *"As a programmer with international experience, prospective clients do not hesitate to work with me [whether] I am overseas or local... My business is now an international business—I have clients in Latin America, the USA, and Europe... Work experience overseas provides invaluable knowledge of other cultures and languages that help us all through life."*

Secondly, as will be discussed in more detail below, working overseas can strengthen one's commitment and contribution to the sustainability field. Past intern, Jason Switzer, wrote that his experience working with communities around the world provided him with a benchmark for project impact, something he was able to convey to others:

*"You connect everything you do on specific issues in developed countries to specific individuals or communities or projects that you worked with, evaluated, or learned about. That is your litmus test for impact - is what I am doing ultimately going to help those people. And that gives you great leverage when try to help other people connect to the need to take action on things."* Jason Switzer, Analyst Climate Change and Energy, Shell Canada (Intern, IISD, Switzerland)

Interns who are aware of the specific challenges and opportunities of a region will continue to benefit that region, even if they return to Canada. UNEP host Kakuko Nagatani explains,

*"Sustainable development in a region like Latin America and the Caribbean can only be achieved by placing more allies inside and outside the region. We need more professionals who understand our reality, our challenge and are willing to work for a common goal."*

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<sup>21</sup> In the early years of the program, a few interns worked at IISD's Winnipeg, Canada office for their placement, with some international travel provided. Even they gained an international perspective through their interactions with other interns in overseas placements.

<sup>22</sup> From Risa Schwartz's profile at <http://www.iisd.org/interns/>.

There are clear benefits from Canadians working overseas. However, a concern in the past has been whether the internship creates a drain of sustainability professionals out of Canada, with a majority of these young people deciding to spend the rest of their career overseas. The statistics from this study do not bear this out: it's neither as serious an issue as feared nor is it a "brain drain" issue. Over half, 57 per cent, of the interns came back to Canada right after the internship and 61 per cent of all past interns now live in Canada. Many of the interns, 65 per cent of them, spent longer than the six months of the internship overseas—some for a number of years, some after first returning to Canada. In contrast, only 40 per cent of past interns are currently living overseas, many of them pursuing further education in, e.g., Sweden or the United Kingdom. A number of those studying overseas now had returned to Canada for a period of time after their internship.

As these statistics reveal, the idea that going overseas is a one-way trip is misleading, although it is true for some. But so is the idea that once someone is back in Canada, they will stay in Canada. Working overseas can create an ease of movement between Canada and overseas, as young people seek knowledge and experience to enhance their career and contribution to sustainability. A number of the interns are considering short (or longer) moves overseas again at some point in their career, now that they have that initial exposure and experience to build on (e.g., "*I want to work abroad in the future, but make Canada my base.*"). Indeed, there are many pathways once one has a first international experience, as these stories will attest. And for a return to Canada, the overseas experiences these people bring positively influence national sustainability work as well as Canada's international development work. When they come back, some continue to work on international issues, but based in Canada. For example, alumnus Hugo Cameron spent from 1997-2004 working at the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD) in Switzerland. He then worked on trade issues with the Government of Tanzania. In 2005, Hugo returned to Toronto and is now working with the International Lawyers and Economists against Poverty (ILEAP) in assisting African governments on trade negotiations.

Others decide to engage locally upon their return, bringing their global mindset to a Canadian issue. Risa Schwartz, mentioned above, worked for over two years with the World Trade Organization in Geneva in the Trade and Environment Division. She returned to Canada to work as a lawyer for the Ontario Ministry of Environment. Risa was able to translate her international experience in trade and environment issues and international negotiations. She now works on the inter-jurisdictional team, which focuses on providing legal advice on issues ranging from climate change to trade advice focusing on the NAFTA. Another example is that of Gwen Healy, whose skills and insights from her placement with the University of the Arctic in Norway gave her a new perspective on familiar problems: "*[Before going away,] I thought I had an understanding of circumpolar health just because I came from the region, but this was not the case.*" Upon return to Canada, Gwen worked with the Nunavut territorial government as a Health Promotion Specialist where she was able to use her experience to develop programs such as the Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative and Care Close to Home.<sup>23</sup>

Like Hugo, some interns take the opportunity of being overseas to work both in developed and developing/transitional country contexts. For example, Daniel Cohn did his internship in Switzerland with UNEP's Finance Initiative. Subsequently Daniel worked for a year in Rwanda with Right To Play, setting up a project to train teachers to sensitize their students against HIV/AIDS. He later consulted with CARE Canada on HIV/AIDS and youth issues. Now he is working in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo. As Grants Manager for the International

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<sup>23</sup> Excerpted from "Healing the World," Jordan Gold's interview with Gwen Healy, IISD Alumni Inside (Winter 2004), p. 6.

Rescue Committee, he focuses on donor reporting, compliance, and monitoring support for projects in primary health care; civil society and community development; primary education; emergency water, sanitation, and shelter; and support for survivors of gender-based violence. Being in a developing/transitional context can help interns learn how to remain adaptive despite challenging, resource-constrained conditions:

*“While working in a developing/transitional country, you learn how to maximize resources, which is essential when working on sustainability issues.”* Carolyn Rohaly, Executive Assistant to Director David Cronenberg (Intern, ENDA Energie, Senegal)

Being able to draw on ten years of interns’ career paths shows the non-linear nature of overseas work and the tremendous benefits that stream from that first overseas experience, both for the intern as well as the nation. The majority of respondents felt that working overseas increased the influence or leverage they have on sustainability issues. Indeed, a number pointed out the credibility gap if someone works on global sustainability issues without overseas experience—especially if they come from a developed country like Canada:

*“It is absolutely... essential to have experience in other countries, especially in developing countries to be taken seriously in the international community on sustainability and development issues... a professional with experience only in their country can come across as naïve... or even arrogant when trying to work or negotiate on sustainability and development issues.”* (Former IISD intern)

Overseas experience provides a broader understanding of sustainability issues, and, as Jason Switzer commented, it helps ground-truth the “effectiveness” of one’s future work on sustainability issues by providing a benchmark for one’s sustainability impact. This “litmus test” helps move sustainability issues forward nationally as well, as this past intern Faisal Haq Shaheen argues, *“It allows you to be more representative and critical of issues that take place, especially in the North.”*

An overseas experience enhances one’s capacity for innovation: *“[As] you travel and work, you are more exposed to new ideas and different ways of thinking about issues, which you can then transfer to your work and communicate to others.”* Also, *“we continue to carry and draw on the ideas and perspectives of all those we have worked with.”* And these stories can spur innovation in others: *“Stories from other places are always compelling and in this movement, it is very much about the ability to pull people out of the here and now, to a vision of the future. So I think that having international stories to tell (best practice, lessons) proves to be very influential.”* Beyond drawing on comparators, the broad network and contacts one acquires in overseas work helps increase one’s leverage on issues at home and abroad. Furthermore, the network overseas might be higher level than one could have in Canada: *“While not fair, I feel that foreigners are often afforded more respect and thus more influence and possibilities.”*

The overseas working experience is also seen as relatively unusual in Canada, which many commented adds to its value back home. However, marketing one’s overseas experience can still prove to be a challenge in Canada, with the job-seeker having to do a lot of the “translation” between their skill set overseas and how it fits in with the workforce nationally. An excellent primer both on moving overseas but also on moving back to Canada is Jean-Marc Hachey’s *The BIG Guide to Living and Working Overseas* (2005). He argues that the skills and attitudes are beneficial but that they require this kind of translation. Past intern Andrew Robinson agrees, having just completed a Canadian job search after seven years working in Switzerland, France and Kenya:

*“I put a strong emphasis on my adaptability, quick learning capacity, bridge building and cross-cultural sensitivity. I marketed myself as a big picture thinker—someone who wants to understand the context, challenges and constraints in which we work. I also put forth my social and ethical drivers for the work I do. My current employer certainly saw these benefits. However, many individuals and Canadian based organizations and companies initially had a hard time seeing where I fit in. As my career progression has been non-linear and unconventional—in Canadian terms—I found I needed to sell myself harder when given the chance. In my experience, the added value of overseas experience is under-appreciated in Canada—certainly Western Canada.”*

Andrew Robinson, Aboriginal Relations Coordinator, BC Hydro (1999 intern, World Business Council on Sustainable Development, Switzerland)

Sustainability challenges are increasingly global in nature and an international perspective helps young people be innovative in how they find solutions. Overseas experience at an early age provides the foundation for a strengthened sustainability movement globally. Whether working internationally (for example in a Canadian embassy) or at home, professionals with an international outlook and transferable skills from overseas employment contribute to a better equipped and more inventive Canadian workforce on the path to sustainable development.

### **Opportunity for Deeper Engagement with IISD’s Young Professionals**

In terms of IISD’s role in fostering sustainability leaders, this paper has looked primarily at the shape of the internship program. IISD is also interested in exploring the opportunities for moving beyond the internship, deepening its support of young professionals as they progress from entry to mid-level of their career. This interest flows naturally from the success of the internship, and a clear entry point is to strengthen the relationship between alumni and IISD. As noted, the alumni work across a range of sectors now, many in leadership roles in Canada and overseas. The internship’s program manager at IISD, Carolee Buckler, explains: *“We are constantly bumping into... alumni in various international negotiation meetings, workshops, and consultations and we continue to work directly with them on variety of sustainable development issues.”*<sup>24</sup> It will be important to build on such informal and formal channels for a closer relationship with IISD and between young professionals involved with IISD. Recommendations have been provided to IISD directly, based on this study. Suggestions include more opportunities for short-term or even volunteer engagement with IISD on specific projects. Consultancies and joint research are both possibilities. To date, 21 alumni have been consultants or staff of IISD since completing the internship.<sup>25</sup> This would be of benefit both to IISD and to the young professionals as there is a strong fit between the alumni’s areas of expertise and that of IISD. This is particularly true in the areas of capacity-building and training, network management, natural resource management, and knowledge management. In addition, a third of the interns listed each of climate change, corporate social responsibility and poverty and environment as an area of expertise.

Tied to this, there is interest in mentorship of young professionals by those working with IISD. The suggestion is to link interns (and even alumni) with senior staff who share their area of specialization, to support their intellectual development as well as advise on how one sets out to build a career in that issue area. This would respond to alumni requests, including: *“[Mentor] relationships are so important for... advice on how to advance one’s career, and having connections to make the advancements happen over the following years.”* When asked for one

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<sup>24</sup> IISD Alumni Inside (Winter 2004), p.2.

<sup>25</sup> 15% of past interns are self-employed consultants or own their own business.

“big idea” for the internship program, past intern Elisabeth Gilmore wrote that she desired more career guidance and ongoing support from established sustainability professionals:

*“There was little discussion about how your career goals meshed with the internship or how it could lead you to the type of career that you wanted. Giving the participants more interaction with mid-level and senior professionals in their field would be helpful.”*

Elisabeth Gilmore, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Engineering and Public Policy, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA, USA (Intern, The International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO), Norway)

Besides closer relationships between IISD staff and young professionals, many of the alumni expressed an interest in mentoring young people themselves. Relationships among past interns—or between past and current interns—certainly exist but they are ad hoc. Three-quarters of the respondents are in *personal* contact with other past interns.<sup>26</sup> When asked to estimate how many people, an impressive 20 per cent of these respondents answer that they are still in touch with more than six past interns. An additional 11 per cent stay in contact through the listserv alone. Only 14 per cent of the 168 respondents to this question are not in touch with *any* past interns.

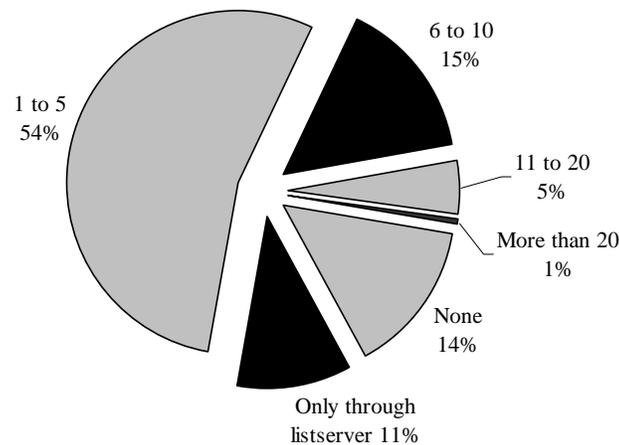


Figure 8: Number of connections past interns have with each other

Although connections are being made across years, this can be done much more systematically with those who are willing. Although 59 per cent of the respondents say their contacts are with people from their own year, 31 per cent cite that their contacts are predominantly from other years.<sup>27</sup> With the newly updated information about alumni’s areas of expertise, skill sets and job profiles, there is the potential for an exciting exchange of knowledge and experience within the alumni network. Furthermore, an IISD Reporting Services staff member encouraged the exploration of a joint community of practice across the IISD internship alumni and IISD RS team members and alumni. With their shared international perspective, engagement with sustainability work, and similar experience level, this could be another exciting proposition.

<sup>26</sup> There were 147 respondents to this question in Survey 2.

<sup>27</sup> The other 10 per cent replied “Don’t Know.”

## Conclusions and Recommendations

New ways of thinking are required for the sustainable development of Canada and the world. In order to secure the foundations of sustainable development into the future, we need to engage young people and prepare them to continue the world's work towards sustainability, building on what has been learned and bringing their own vision and research into action. IISD can play a pivotal role in this, by building on its internship program as well as developing additional training and engagement opportunities for young professionals as they embark on a sustainability career. This study shows the value of IISD's core model and the skills and attributes required by sustainability professionals, including the global outlook that results from overseas experience.

The desire for interns to be engaged with IISD, coupled with the fact that almost 80 per cent of alumni are still involved in sustainability work, provides numerous opportunities for IISD as it moves forward in defining its relationship with young professionals. The study also opens the door to further investigation. For example:

- Given the shift to thinking about leadership as a team effort, how can training for team work and team management in the sustainable development field be reinforced? What are the recognition and reward systems for teams? And is it possible to sustain the leadership dynamic in a team, beyond an individual project? Or does the concept of leadership become more fluid, attaching itself to different combinations of individuals and actions as circumstances require? **IISD should investigate further the leadership by team modality, and build this into its efforts to develop the next generation of SD leadership teams.**
- Many interns mentioned the transferability of the skill set across sectors. For some, the transition has been a smooth one. For others, it has been difficult to prove to employers that the skills gained in the non-profit world translate to the corporate sector or vice versa. **In this era of multistakeholder relations and partnerships, IISD should review how to better demonstrate the value of experience gained in one sector to another.**
- Corporate trends suggest that employees are more loyal to a profession than an organization<sup>28</sup>. It may be true in the sustainability field as well, where we see many of these young professionals committed to sustainability rather than a company or organization per se. Their mobility across countries and sectors, and their transitions in and out of formal education, are telling. What are the implications for hiring practices and indeed for new organizational models that would address leadership progression as distinct from career progression? **IISD should work more closely with the human resources and organizational management communities to understand how to use career mobility as an asset to furthering sustainable development.**
- Many of the alumni expressed an interest in receiving further training through IISD, in particular in the issues on which IISD works. And hosts too noted that there is still an expressed need for mid career development. How can the life-long learning cycle best be supported for emerging sustainability leaders? **IISD should review how to support relationships and learning for the cohort of leaders it has already begun to foster through the internship program.**

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<sup>28</sup> Dr. Kimiz Dalkir. Netcorps Knowledge Management Seminar, Montreal 2007

- Respondents identified values and aptitudes, such as a capacity for innovation and a personal commitment to a sustainable lifestyle, as distinguishing features for leadership in sustainable development. IISD’s program may select for these characteristics in its recruitment process. Which then begs the question—for those young professionals that have not demonstrated these aptitudes or values, how does one foster them? At what point in a young person’s education and learning can one begin to introduce these capacities and commitments? **IISD should look to its partners in the formal education sector to explore how to foster values and aptitudes as part of sustainability education.**
- IISD’s program has, for a decade, concentrated on young Canadians. But equally important is the need to provide a similar experience to young professionals from other countries, and especially those from developing and transitional countries. Are the skills for sustainability leadership universal? Is IISD’s model for transferring and enhancing those skills appropriate for young professionals from other countries? **IISD should conduct an extensive feasibility study and map potential international partners to lay the foundation for an expansion of our work:**
  - **to bring young professionals from other countries into IISD’s program; and**
  - **to establish a consortium of leading international sustainability organizations to coordinate next generation leadership training as a larger global initiative.**

The high regard that people have for IISD and its youth programming came through very clearly in this study, whether through conversations with the host organizations and other partners or in the survey data. Policy Advisor with Environment Canada and past intern Melinda Moriarty enthused: *“I feel that the initial investment in this [internship] program is paid back to society ten fold by the opportunities and skills it offers youth and their resulting contribution and commitment to the goal of sustainability.”* Further, as IISD’s President David Runnalls emphasizes, the benefits of this leadership training flows both to the young people themselves as well as to the planet: *“The [internship] program has been instrumental in cultivating a generation of young leaders with a global outlook and concern for the environment.”* The study produced a better understanding of how young leaders are formed and what skills are needed in the sustainability field today. This study has been produced in the hope that it sows the seeds for another 10 years of empowered young people to join the 300 strong alumni network in contributing to the well-being of our planet and its people.

## Acknowledgements

This research was made possible through a special grant of the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) in January 2007. Many thanks to all of the young professionals who contributed in depth to the surveys, sharing their ideas on what it takes to succeed in the sustainability field as well as their reflections on IISD's internship program. It's been fascinating to read your stories and be buoyed by your passion and the paths you have taken in life. Your candor and vision are both appreciated. A big thank you to the hosts who have given their time twice for this study—once in nurturing the young professionals you see described in these pages and once in sharing your insights about how sustainability careers develop and how IISD can support this. We are also grateful to the experts that spoke with us about their experiences with young people and training programs. Thank you to the IISD team for its contributions and support to the research, writing and editing, including Carolee Buckler and Noelle Depape. A particular thanks to Noria Neuhart for how she managed the administrative elements of this project with efficiency and a great spirit. To the donors of the internship program, we express gratitude that you believe strongly in formative experiences for young people. We look forward to continued collaboration and to bringing new partners into the fold.

Lastly, the internship would not be the success it is without the continuity in management it has enjoyed. So, special thanks go to Carolee Buckler, the long-standing program manager. She was named by several alumni as the sustainability leader they most admire. Her leadership has been instrumental in the success of the program through her professionalism as well as her personal interest in interns' careers, as Jennifer describes:

*“Carolee...is truly exceptional and a major reason for the success of the IISD program. She has continued to support me in my career long after my internship ended in the spring of 1999.”*

Jennifer Otoadese, Centre Manager, Centre for the Study of Global Governance, LSE, United Kingdom  
(1998 intern, UNEP, Kenya)

## Appendix 1: Survey Methodology and Respondents

Two sets of surveys were conducted using **Survey Monkey**, an online polling tool (www.surveymonkey.com). The surveys were open between February and March 2007. The skill and value sets identified by the team were tested across two groups; interns and young professionals involved in IISD’s Reporting Services team, referred to in this report as the IISD RS team.

The **core survey group** was the set of interns, with separate surveys conducted of past interns and those participating in the 2006-7 internship.

For the purposes of this research, the young professionals working for IISD’s Reporting Services served as the **control group**. For this survey, a third of the staff posted responses (28 of 74, or 38 per cent). Besides validating the interns’ responses on the skill and value sets for sustainability professionals, the IISD RS survey results open the door for a closer relationship between the internship alumni and young professionals working with IISD RS. They also benefit the IISD Reporting Services management.

Besides exploring the sustainability career path, the **first survey** also sought the advice of the interns on the shape of the internship program, including whether a shift in focus is desirable.

A **second survey** was also conducted of the interns, seeking their ideas on how to strengthen the internship alumni network as well as the relationship between past interns and IISD as a whole. The full text of the surveys can be found in Appendices 7 and 8.

The survey results are statistically significant. Analysis shows that the survey groups represent the population as a whole, based on the response rate as well as the gender mix. All surveys had significant response rates. 208 of the 311 interns (67 per cent) responded to Surveys 1, 2 or both.<sup>29</sup>

The **internship years** are also well represented. The average response rate by year was 47 per cent for Survey 1 and 59 per cent for Survey 2. There was a notably stronger response on Survey 2 from internship years 2001, 2004 and 2005. See Table 2.

	Survey 1	Survey 2		Survey 1	Survey 2
<b>1997</b>	46%	59%	<b>2002</b>	44%	59%
<b>1998</b>	46%	49%	<b>2003</b>	38%	53%
<b>1999</b>	50%	58%	<b>2004</b>	63%	72%
<b>2000</b>	35%	50%	<b>2005</b>	52%	72%
<b>2001</b>	33%	76%	<b>2006</b>	59%	45%

Table 2: Response rate by internship year

<sup>29</sup> 23 of the 311 alumni are considered “missing” as there is no up-to-date contact information for them, so the adjusted response rate was 72 per cent (208/288).

In terms of the **gender mix** for the alumni, the survey group is very representative. 37 per cent of the alumni are male; 40 per cent of alumni who responded to Survey 1 are male. 62 per cent of the alumni are female; 60 per cent of the alumni who responded to Survey 1 are female.

Interns had **formal training** before they started their placement, with 60.3 per cent pursuing further education after completion. See Figure 9 for the highest level of training before starting the internship.

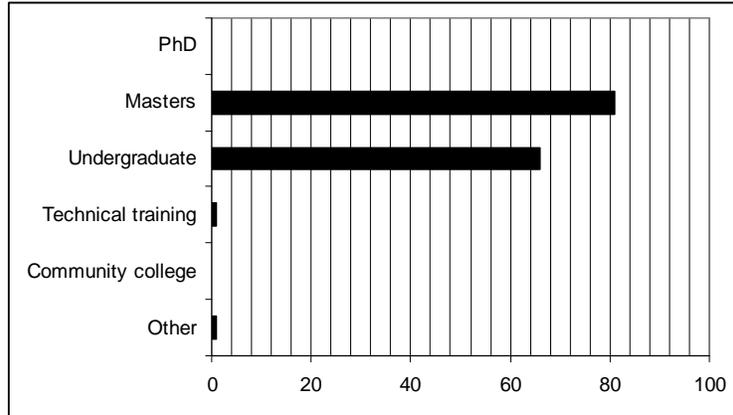


Figure 9: Highest level of training before starting the internship

## Appendix 2: List of Interviews

### Interviews with Host Organizations (February - March 2007)

**Gábor Molnár**, Managing Director,  
Lake Balaton Development Coordination Agency (LBDCA)  
Hungary  
Web: [www.balatonregion.hu](http://www.balatonregion.hu)

**Kakuko Nagatani-Yoshida**, Coordinator, Division of Early Warning and Assessment  
UNEP Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean  
Panama  
Web: [www.rolac.unep.org](http://www.rolac.unep.org)

**Mark Halle**, Director -Trade and Investment, and European Representative  
International Institute for Sustainable Development  
Geneva, Switzerland  
Web: [www.iisd.ca](http://www.iisd.ca)

**Raquel Thomas**, Director of Training and Resource Management  
Iwokrama International Centre for Rain Forest Conservation and Development  
Georgetown, Guyana  
Web: [www.iwokrama.org](http://www.iwokrama.org)

**Sandra Velarde**, Acting Global Coordinator, Alternatives to Slash-and-Burn Programme  
ICRAF – The World Agroforestry Centre  
Nairobi, Kenya  
Web: [www.asb.cgiar.org](http://www.asb.cgiar.org)

**Asbjørn Torvanger**, Senior Research Fellow  
Centre for International Climate and Environmental Research – Oslo (Cicero)  
Oslo, Norway  
Web: [www.cicero.uio.no](http://www.cicero.uio.no)

**Malena Sell**, Programme Officer, Environment & Agriculture  
International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD)  
Geneva, Switzerland  
Web: [www.ictsd.ch](http://www.ictsd.ch)

**Nick Greenwood**, Human Resources Manager  
International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)  
London, UK  
Web: [www.iied.org](http://www.iied.org)

**Gillian Martin Mehers**, Conservation Learning Coordinator  
IUCN - The World Conservation Union  
Gland, Switzerland  
Web: [www.iucn.org/cec](http://www.iucn.org/cec)  
(Formerly, Director, Capacity Development, LEAD International - Leadership for Environment and Development)

Additional Interviews (February - March 2007)

**Katherine Madden**, Manager, Capacity Building  
World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD is also an IISD host)  
Geneva, Switzerland  
Web: [www.wbcsd.org](http://www.wbcsd.org)

**Sarah Kinnie**, Coordinator, Employment and Internships  
Environmental Careers Organization (Canada)  
Calgary, Canada  
Web: [www.eco.ca](http://www.eco.ca)

**Jean-Marc Coicaud**, Acting Head  
United Nations University Office to the United Nations  
New York, USA  
Web: [www.ony.unu.edu](http://www.ony.unu.edu)

**Guy Follen**, Environmental Advisor, Canada-China Cooperation on the Management of  
Environmental Sustainability  
Canada School of Public Service  
Ottawa, Canada  
Web: [www.myschool-monecole.gc.ca](http://www.myschool-monecole.gc.ca)

**Terri Willard**, IISD Associate (Formerly, IISD Project Manager – 1996-2005)  
Winnipeg, Canada

Focus group and / or interviews with IISD staff in Winnipeg, Canada:

**David Runnalls**, President and Chief Executive Officer  
**Heather Creech**, Director, Knowledge Communications  
**László Pintér**, Director - Measurement and Assessment  
**Sue Barkman**, Director - Development and Community Relations  
**Carolee Buckler**, Project Manager, Knowledge Communications  
**Noëlle DePape**, Project Officer, Knowledge Communications - Youth Programs  
**Donna Huffam**, Media and Communications Officer

March 2007 focus group with former IISD interns: **Monica Dominguez**, **Michelle French** (also, Publishing Officer, IISD). March 2007 focus group and informal discussions with 2006-7 interns: **Angeline Gough**, **Jennifer Allan**, **Gweneth Thirwell** and **Liz McDowell**. Informal email and in-person discussions with former IISD interns: **Andrew Robinson**, **Jacob Malthouse**, **Jason Switzer**, **Michelle Laurie**.

### Appendix 3: Skills of Sustainability Professionals

This is the list of 21 skills identified as important to sustainability professionals at entry, mid-career or leadership positions.

1. **Staff and team management** (with the ability to delegate and manage complex tasks and competing priorities)
2. **Long-term planning** (orientation to and planning for longer-term outcomes, as compared to an immediate-results orientation)
3. **Project management** (process of setting and delivering project goals, objectives, tasks, timelines, results and assessment against objectives)
4. **Financial skills** (understand the organization's bottom line, budget development—including cost estimates—and other fiscal responsibilities)
5. **Donor or client relations** (management of donor or client relations, including reporting skills)
6. **Communication skills** (excellent written and oral communications skills, proficiency in a second language)
7. **Translating complex ideas** (ability to "translate" complex or scientific issues into simple and clear messages)
8. **Analytical rigour** (including the ability to frame appropriate research questions or policy advice)
9. **Knowledge management** (literacy in electronic communications, virtual collaboration and other knowledge management skills)
10. **Influencing strategy** (understanding of how to influence and promote change, including what it means to be a "change agent" for sustainability)
11. **Awareness of stakeholder roles** (understanding the roles of different actors in sustainability, including the importance of involving stakeholders in decision-making)
12. **Geo-political awareness** (understanding of the geo-political context in which you are working)
13. **Facilitation skills** (skilled at mediating different interests, including good listening, clarifying, questioning and responding skills)
14. **Network management** (ability to foster and manage strategic external partnerships, networks and alliances; organize compelling meetings / conferences)
15. **Systems approach** (ability to think about systems, both ecosystems and social systems)
16. **Understanding global institutions and processes** (understanding the modes of operation for major global institutions—e.g., UN, World Bank—and how to engage with them)
17. **Understanding private sector** (understanding the modes of operation for major private sector actors and how to engage with them, understanding the economic dimensions of sustainability)
18. **Managing unpredictability** (skilled at operating under adverse or unpredictable conditions, e.g., field work, difficult or changing political landscapes, scientific uncertainty, etc.)
19. **Bridging disciplines or sectors** (understanding of integrated decision-making, capacity to bridge disciplines and sectors)
20. **Bridging cultures** (adept at working outside of one's own cultural context or community, including in another country or culture)
21. **Managing diversity in the workplace and socially** (effective interaction on a social and professional basis with people of differing backgrounds: gender, race, culture, values, attributes...)

In Survey 1, all respondents were asked to select the top 5 attributes for a sustainability leader, by number of respondents in each category:

	All Interns <sup>30</sup>	Alumni	2006-7 Interns	IISD RS
Communication skills	82	74	8	12
Influencing strategy	55	50	5	6
Staff and team management	54	48	6	12
Bridging disciplines or sectors	53	46	7	7
Long-term planning	51	45	6	7
Translating complex ideas	49	43	6	10
Project management	38	29	9	5
Geo-political awareness	36	31	5	5
Awareness of stakeholder roles	35	32	3	5
Bridging cultures	30	28	2	6
Systems approach	26	24	2	1
Network management	23	19	4	6
Analytical rigour	23	18	5	4
Understanding global institutions and processes	22	18	4	3
Facilitation skills	20	18	2	8
Managing unpredictability	18	16	2	5
Donor or client relations	18	15	3	4
Knowledge management	14	12	2	1
Managing diversity in the workplace and socially	13	9	4	1
Understanding private sector	12	11	1	1
Financial skills	10	10	0	3
<i>Total Respondents</i>	<i>136</i>	<i>119</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>22</i>

Table 3: Ranking of skills for a sustainability leader

<sup>30</sup> 2006-7 interns as well as other alumni.

<i># of respondents</i>			<i># of respondents</i>		
Communication skills	Entry	95	Staff and team management	<i>On the Job</i>	82
Translating complex ideas	Entry	80	Long-term planning	<i>On the Job</i>	67
Geo-political awareness	Entry	78	Project management	<i>On the Job</i>	66
Project management	Entry	71	Awareness of stakeholder roles	<i>On the Job</i>	64
Awareness of stakeholder roles	Entry	65	Bridging disciplines or sectors	<i>On the Job</i>	57
Bridging disciplines or sectors	Entry	45	Influencing strategy	<i>On the Job</i>	49
Long-term planning	Entry	39	Geo-political awareness	<i>On the Job</i>	46
Influencing strategy	Entry	34	Translating complex ideas	<i>On the Job</i>	45
Staff and team management	Entry	14	Communication skills	<i>On the Job</i>	43
	Respondents	158	Respondents		158

Table 4: Respondents who marked “entry-level” and “on-the-job” for the top skill sets

## Appendix 4: Beliefs, Aptitudes and Values of Sustainability Professionals

This is the set of 15 key beliefs, aptitudes or values of sustainability professionals.

1. **Global mindset** (includes looking beyond local and national boundaries as well as understanding responsibility as global citizens)
2. **Rooted in community** (a sense of self-worth and rootedness in one's own culture and community)
3. **Thirst for global awareness** (seek out knowledge of world affairs and cultures and realize the interconnectedness of the world)
4. **Equity** (concern for disparities and injustices, a commitment to human rights and to the peaceful resolution of conflict)
5. **Sense of urgency** (desire to move from awareness to knowledge to action, appreciation of finite nature of the planet's resources)
6. **Passion for sustainability** (sense of hope and a positive personal and social perspective on the future)
7. **Capacity for innovation** (encourage decision-making across disciplines, understand interdependence between environmental, economic and social systems, open to new ideas, appreciate role of human ingenuity, challenge the status quo)
8. **Embrace a learning culture** (striving to continually improve quality of life and your skills)
9. **Accept trade-offs** (among conflicting goals and long-term perspective or complex nature of systems which make it difficult to see the positive or negative impacts of decisions, long-term thinking)
10. **Tenacity** (honour commitments, self-motivated, have a “can-do” attitude, see the bigger picture and longer term)
11. **Warmth in human relationships** (outgoing individual, personable, able to develop close relationships quickly, sense of humour, desire to work in partnerships)
12. **Respect for diversity** (value different ways of working, different cultures and mindsets – while appreciating that humans have universal attributes)
13. **Science as part of the solution** (recognition that technology and science have a lot to offer but alone cannot solve all of our problems)
14. **Value integrated thinking** (whole systems thinking, appreciation of the resilience, fragility and beauty of nature and the interdependence and equal importance of all life forms, valuing biodiversity)
15. **Commitment to a sustainable lifestyle** (personal acceptance of a sustainable lifestyle and a commitment to participation in change, appreciation of the importance and worth of individual responsibility and action)

In Survey 1, all respondents were asked to select the top 3, based on their perspective. The ranking below is based on actual respondents, not percentages:

	All Interns	Alumni	2006-7 Interns	IISD RS
Capacity for innovation	67	54	13	13
Global mindset	52	45	7	7
Passion for sustainability	40	34	6	6
Equity	31	25	6	6
Tenacity	30	25	5	5
Commitment to a sustainable lifestyle	27	26	1	1
Warmth in human relationships	26	23	3	3
Accept trade-offs	25	21	4	4
Rooted in community	21	20	1	1
Respect for diversity	21	15	6	6
Value integrated thinking	20	20	0	0
Sense of urgency	19	14	5	5
Embrace a learning culture	19	15	4	4
Science as part of the solution	17	14	3	3
Thirst for global awareness	12	8	4	4
<i>Total Respondents</i>	<i>131</i>	<i>116</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>22</i>

Table 5: Ranking of top beliefs, aptitudes and values of sustainability professionals

## **Appendix 5: Further Reading**

**Build an International Employment Profile** by Jean-Marc Hachey, Transitions Abroad Magazine (March/April 2005), web:  
[www.transitionsabroad.com/publications/magazine/0503/build\\_an\\_international\\_employment\\_profile.shtml](http://www.transitionsabroad.com/publications/magazine/0503/build_an_international_employment_profile.shtml)

**Building Leadership Capacity for the 21st Century: A Report from Global Leadership Scans** by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, web:  
[www.wkkf.org/Pubs/CCT/Leadership/WKKF.LeadScan\\_00312\\_03800.pdf](http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/CCT/Leadership/WKKF.LeadScan_00312_03800.pdf)

**Education for Sustainable Development Toolkit Version 2.0: Reorienting Education**, web:  
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## Appendix 6: Where Are They Now?

The following is a sample of the jobs and studies past interns are now engaged in. All positions are in Canada unless indicated otherwise.

Philip	Akins	Coordinator	BC Lions Society for Children with Disabilities
James	Allan	PhD researcher	Cardiff University, UK
Heather	Arnold	Program Manager	Earth Day Canada
Victoria	Ballance	Associate Consultant	Rockwall Management Consulting (RMC) & Associates
Helen	Baulch	PhD Student	Trent University
Diana	Biggs	Student	ESCP-EAP European School of Management, UK/Germany
Giselle	Bouchard	Water Quality Specialist	Environment Canada
Roxanne	Breton	Grade 4 Teacher	Van Belleghem School, Winnipeg
Sharon	Buteau	Student	
Ada	Chan	Marketing Coordinator	Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Area (BIA) Society
Karl	Cox	Environmental Coordinator	Diavik Diamond Mine, Northwest Territories
Melanie	Desrochers	Research Professional	Centre for Forest Research (CEF)
Ron	Duerksen	Senior Marketing Manager	ALDO (Canada, US, UK)
Christopher	Evans	Masters of Science Candidate	Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA
Jimena	Eyzaguirre	Policy Analyst, Climate Change Impacts & Adaptation	Directorate - Natural Resources Canada
Michael	Field	Self-employed Programmer	FieldCo Inc.
Kelly	Friesen	Teacher	
Melissa	Garcia Lamarca	Sustainability Coordinator	Concordia University, Montreal
Jordan	Gold	Director, Sustainability	Architext
Ian	Griffiths	City Planning grad student	University of California, Berkeley, USA
Lauren Elizabeth	Haney	Environmental Planner, North of 60 Development	Jacques Whitford / AXYS Environmental Consulting
Faisal	Haq Shaheen	Business Management Analyst	City of Toronto Water
Katherine	Hay	Senior Program Officer	International Development Research Centre (IDRC), India
Vita Teresa	Hoyles	GIS Analyst	Northwest Territories Metis Nation and stay at home mom
Carol	Hunsberger	Doctoral Student	Carleton University, Ottawa
Lani	Innes	Senior Sustainable Development Analyst	Canada Revenue Agency (CRA)
Mohamud	Khalif	Acting Head, Medium Term and Investment	Islamic Corporation for Insurance of Investments and Export Credits

		Insurance Division	(ICIEC), the Islamic Development Bank
Anya	Knechtel	Communications Officer	The Pembina Institute
Michelle	Laurie	Knowledge Management and Communications Officer	World Conservation Union (IUCN), Switzerland
Alexandre	Laurin	Analyst, Parliamentary Information and Research Service	Library of Parliament, Ottawa
Alison	Lobsinger	Policy Advisor	Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
Francois	Malo	Economist	Public Finance
Jacob	Malthouse	Regional Liaison	Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), USA
Kathryn	Martell	Senior Project Officer, Provincial Nature Programmes	The Land Conservancy of British Columbia (TLC)
Thad	Mermer	Associate Information Officer	United Nations Environment Programme - Division of Technology, Industry, and Economics, France
Tricia	Mitchell	Senior Program Coordinator	Great Lakes
Sarah	Mohan	Student	School of Oriental and African Studies, UK
Laurent	Morel-a-l'Huissier	Strategist	Foreign Affairs Canada
Melinda	Moriarty	Policy Advisor	Environment Canada
Jean-Didier	Oth	Second Secretary (development)	Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Pretoria South Africa
Jennifer	Otoadese	Centre Manager, Centre for the Study of Global Governance	London School of Economics, UK
David	Piechota	English Teacher	Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, Japan
Shaun	Prodanuk	Junior Engineer	
Daniel	Ricard	PhD candidate	Dalhousie University
Andrew	Robinson	Aboriginal Relations Coordinator	BC Hydro
Renata Rubian	Rodrigues de Araujo	Programme Analyst, Asia Pacific Regional Centre	United Nations Development Programme, Sri Lanka
Carolyn	Rohaly	Executive Assistant	Director David Cronenberg
Adam	Rostis	Policy Advisor	Government of Nova Scotia
Nikki	Skuce	Program Director	One Sky
Alyson	Slater	Strategy and Communications Director	Global Reporting Initiative, Netherlands
Erin Michelle	Smith	PhD Candidate	King's College London, UK
Udai-Ram	Srinivasan	Intern	Industrial Wire Products

Jason	Switzer	Analyst Climate Change and Energy	Shell Canada
Duane	Taylor	Consultant	
Dagmar	Timmer	Consultant	Resourceful Solutions Consulting
Heather	Tompkins	Lab Technician, Department of Geography	Lakehead University
Robin	Urquhart	Graduate Student	
Damon	Vis-Dunbar	Communications Assistant	International Institute for Sustainable Development, Switzerland
Jennifer Joy	West	Research Fellow	Centre for International Climate and Environmental Research - Oslo (CICERO), Norway
Matthew	Woods	Technical Advisor	United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Kenya

## Appendix 7: Survey 1 on Skills for the Sustainability Professional

This was the survey conducted of all IISD alumni. Core questions about the sustainability skill set remained the same for the survey of 2006-7 interns as well as the IISD RS team. In addition, the 2006-7 interns were asked about the tasks they performed during their placement as well as their career plans.

### Section 1 - Introduction

Thank you for taking this survey! It asks about the knowledge, skills and attributes needed to work effectively on sustainability issues from entry level to leadership positions, as well as skills gained from sustainability work that can be transferred to other work environments. IISD wants to assess its work with young professionals and what its future programming should consider. Your responses will help us to shape the program. Definitions for this survey:

- "**Sustainable development** is a concept emphasizing the need to establish a balance between, and ultimately an integration of the economic, environmental, and social concerns." (Skills to Last definition)
- A **sustainability leader** views and carries out their work through an economic, social and environmental lens with an appreciation for the finite nature of our planet and the need for social justice. They make proactive decisions, are innovative in how they put together knowledge and skill sets, and they influence decision-making often at multiple scales from local to global.
- **Overseas** refers to any country that is not Canada.
- **Developing / Transitional** includes all countries other than those in Western Europe (including Scandinavia), Canada, United States, Australia, New Zealand, Japan.

### Section 2 - About You

1. Your full name and title (Mr., Ms., Dr.)
2. Your current job title, organization, country
3. Your age (24 and under, 25-30, 31-35, 36-40, Over 41)
4. Gender (Male, Female)
5. Where did you do your internship? (Host Organization, Country)

### Section 3 - About Your Career Development

We want to learn about your career choices: what have you done since university, since your internship?

6. What sector were you working in during your internship? Where are you *now*? What other sectors have you worked in or studied at *since* the internship? Please mark all that apply.

Sector	Sector during internship	Current sector	All <i>other</i> sectors you've worked in / studied at since the internship
Business / Private Sector			
Small NGO			
Medium to Large NGO			
Research organization (think tank)			
Employed at academic institution			
Student at academic institution			
Government			

Intergovernmental Organization, e.g., UN, the World Bank			
Self employed consultant			
Member of consulting firm			
Other _____			

7. Where have you lived during and since your internship?

	Developing/ transitional country	Developed country	Mix of developed, transitional and developing country	Canada
During your internship				
After your internship				
Currently				

8. Has your career path changed as a result of the internship? If so, how? Check all that apply.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| No, my career path did not change                                       | I decided to work in a developing / transitional country |
| I decided I needed more education / training and returned to school     | I decided to work at the local/community level           |
| I decided to work in the private sector                                 | I decided to work in the academic sector                 |
| I decided to work in the public service (federal/provincial government) | I started my own consulting firm                         |
| I decided to work in an NGO   | I started my own business                                |
|   | Other (please specify)                                   |

9. Are you still working directly on “sustainability” issues? (Yes, No)

10. If you no longer work on sustainability issues, why not? Please mark the one response that most closely matches your reality (a number may apply to you).

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| I found other work I was excited about   | I never saw myself as a sustainability professional: the internship was an opportunity to apply my (e.g., communications) skills to the sustainability field       |
| I am still peripherally involved in sustainability issues (as part of my work)     | I believe in changing organizations from within and am applying my sustainability skills to a workplace that is just starting to engage with sustainability issues |
| I was disillusioned  | I am volunteering on sustainability issues   |
| I tried to find work in the sustainability field but couldn't in a good time frame | Other (please specify)   |
| Lifestyle questions moved me in another direction (e.g., finances)                 |  |
| I didn't have the skills or knowledge for the work                                 |  |

11. Do you believe the internship has “fast-tracked” your career development (typically from entry-level through to increased responsibility / leadership roles)? Yes, No, Don't know

#### Section 4 - Formal Knowledge and Skills

In this section, we'll explore the first elements of a skill set: your formal education and substantive knowledge base.

12. How would you best categorize your primary knowledge base when you started the internship?

Law  
Business  
Communications  
Liberal Arts (including social sciences)

Sciences  
Engineering  
Education  
Other (please specify)

13. What was the highest level of training you had *before starting* the internship?

Community college certificate  
Technical training certificate  
Undergraduate degree

Masters degree  
PhD  
Other (please specify)

14. As an intern, how much knowledge of the specific sustainability issues your host organization worked on (e.g., trade, climate change) did you bring to the position?

Significant subject-matter expertise  
Moderate subject-matter expertise

General sustainability knowledge  
Little or no sustainability knowledge

15. If you had little or no knowledge on sustainability, did you bring technical skills, e.g., communications, legal expertise? (Not applicable, Please describe: \_\_\_\_\_)

16. Did you feel that the subject-matter knowledge you brought to the internship was adequate for the position?

Yes

Not initially, but I learned enough during the internship

No, I needed more subject-matter expertise to be effective

17. Have you decided to “specialize” in a subject area to enhance your career since the internship? (FYI - not necessarily as a result of the internship) (Yes, No)

18. Why did you make that decision? What did you specialize in? What did you do to pursue that specialization?

19. Did you pursue further education at any point *after* the internship? If so, in what form? (No, I didn't, Yes - please describe: \_\_\_\_\_)

### **Section 5 - Learning on the Job**

This section looks at the skills and competencies best learned on-the-job, through mentorship, through targeted training and peer-to-peer networks.

20. Below are a set of competencies that are important and can probably be learned over time through work experience, mentorship and other training.

(A) To progress in a sustainability career, at what point do the following skills or attributes become important to acquire? In the first three columns, please select if the following skills are important at an entry-level or mid-career professional. Mark one column only for each skill in the list.

(B) Then, in the final three columns, please note the *primary* way in which you have (or could have) received training on this skill. Mark one column only for each skill. The choices are: **“on the job”** (through the projects you’re carrying out, mentorship by others in your organization, etc.), **“peer-to-peer”** (through a network outside of your workplace – a community of practice, a network on sustainability issues, listservers such as the IISD alumni network), **“through courses”** (online or in person workshops & training courses).

To sum up, for each row (skill set), make sure you mark one response in the first three columns and one response in the last three columns. It's a key question so take your time with it.

	Entry-level	Mid-career	Not relevant	Trainable on the Job	Trainable Peer-to-Peer	Trainable Through courses
Staff and team management (with the ability to delegate and manage complex tasks and competing priorities)						
All skills were listed with descriptions, as above and in Appendix 3. See question 21 for the short version.						

21. Of this list, what are the top 5 attributes of an effective sustainability leader?

Staff and team management	Facilitation skills
Long-term planning	Network management
Project management	Systems approach
Financial skills	Understanding global institutions and processes
Donor or client relations	Understanding private sector
Communication skills	Managing unpredictability
Translating complex ideas	Bridging disciplines or sectors
Analytical rigour	Bridging cultures
Knowledge management	Managing diversity in the workplace and socially
Influencing strategy	
Awareness of stakeholder roles	
Geo-political awareness	

22. Are there other skills for sustainability professionals that are important?

23. What was the type of work you were tasked with as an IISD intern? Please check all of the boxes that most closely match your major tasks.

Administrative duties	Newsletter management
Carry out stakeholder consultations	Organize and/or support meetings / conferences
Communication strategy	Represent your organization/ government/ business at conferences and external meetings
Write / edit research papers or other institutional publications	Support fundraising activities
Develop organizational strategies	Support policy development and negotiations
Donor relations	Translation
Field work	Website redesign and/or management
Lead research efforts	Write major paper(s)
Manage a project	Other major tasks:
Manage multiple projects	
Media relations	
Network coordination	

24. Did you gain any specific skills and knowledge from the 6 month *internship* itself?

### **Section 6 - Values and Attributes**

We come into a position with a set of values, motivations, beliefs, commitments, attributes which can be revised over time and with experience. For these questions, short answers or bullet points are welcome.

25. What drove you to work on *sustainability* issues? or to apply to a sustainability internship?
26. For those who have chosen to work internationally for a longer period than the internship, what are some specific personal characteristics or motivations that drove you to stay overseas?
27. What did you learn *about yourself* during your overseas work and/or internship, including about your leadership potential?
28. Who is one individual working on sustainability that you admire and why? What makes them a great *leader* (skills, attributes, values)?

29. Most of you are probably familiar with the idea of a *tipping point*, or an “idea epidemic,” much like we seek on sustainability issues: a handful of special people play an important role in starting these epidemics. Mavens are the research experts; Connectors are those with connections to decision-makers; Salespeople are those with the ability to craft and communicate messages. Which of these personality types are you most like? (Maven, Connector, Salesperson)

30. What is the personality type of the leader you identified in question 28? (Maven, Connector, Salesperson)

31. Please mark the 3 most important beliefs, aptitudes or values of sustainability professionals, from your perspective? (In the survey, full descriptions were given, as in Appendix 4.)

Global mindset	Accept trade-offs
Rooted in community	Tenacity
Thirst for global awareness	Warmth in human relationships
Equity	Respect for diversity
Sense of urgency	Science as part of the solution
Passion for sustainability	Value integrated thinking
Capacity for innovation	Commitment to a sustainable lifestyle
Embrace a learning culture	Others?

32. Since the internship, what has happened to your notion of how social change (towards sustainability) occurs? And how you see your role in social change? (For example, moved from activist to...; giving attention to leverage points like business; realized that it takes people throughout society; think that we need to understand some key research gaps; no longer believe sustainability is possible; new idea of what “radical” means or of what an “activist” is, etc.)

### **Section 7 - Value of an Overseas Experience**

IISD sends young people overseas every year. We want to know whether you believe this emphasis in the program is justified.

33. How are the skills you developed while overseas – either during the internship or afterwards – helping you where you work now (overseas or in Canada)? Are there specific skills or knowledge sets that are the most valuable? (Not applicable - I have not worked overseas, Please comment: \_\_\_\_\_)

34. If you chose not to stay abroad after your internship, why did you return to Canada?

- There was not a work opportunity overseas
- There was a work opportunity in Canada
- I went back to school
- Other (please specify)

35. If you did not stay overseas, were there any skills, traits or knowledge areas that you felt you lacked, which caused you to return to Canada?

36. How have you “marketed” the value of your overseas experience back in Canada or in another country? Was your experience seen as a benefit or was its value questioned? (Not applicable, Please comment: \_\_\_\_\_)

37. Can you list some skills that distinguish a successful professional working on sustainability issues in a *developed* country from someone working in a *developing / transitional* country? Are there additional or different attributes that you apply and learn when working in a developing / transitional country on sustainability issues?

I have never worked in a developing / transitional country

No - I think they're quite similar

Yes - here are some: \_\_\_\_\_

38. Do you think that working overseas changes how much influence or leverage you have on sustainability issues?

### **Section 8 - Future of the IISD Youth Leadership Program**

39. Please list some of the “best” education and training (short in length, distance / online) programs in Canada for sustainability work and why. Web links are useful.

40. If you had to do it over again, what two things would you have trained in before the internship? (Training in: \_\_\_\_\_, Training in: \_\_\_\_\_)

41. The youth leadership program may shift focus and add value in the coming years. Please check your top preferences.

Maintain focus on entry-level professionals

Shift focus to mid-career fellows

Maintain placements with IGOs/NGOs

Focus the majority of placements on the private sector

Maintain diversity of placements (trade, climate change, communications, etc.)

Focus placements on one issue area (e.g., just climate change, trade, or poverty reduction)

Maintain focus on skills development

Provide tutorials on IISD's research (e.g., IISD's model investment agreement)

Provide opportunities for participants to do their own research

Provide public opportunities for interns to share their knowledge at the end of their placements

42. Are there other options you'd like IISD to consider?

43. If you selected to focus placements on just one issue area (e.g., climate change, trade), please state which area: \_\_\_\_\_

44. What training do you think IISD could integrate into its *pre-departure orientation*?

45. What is one “big idea” you have for improving the youth leadership program?

### **Section 9 – Some Final Thoughts**

Thanks a lot! You're on the last page.

46. Is it possible to determine a unique “sustainability” skills set? Are there skills, values or attitudes that you believe *distinguish* sustainability professionals from other professions (e.g. mediation, teaching at high school, marketing)?

47. What is one piece of *advice* from your own experience or that of colleagues and friends for someone who wants to progress (promotion to mid-level, i.e., about 5 years experience) in their career?

48. Do you have any reflections on changes (if any) to the sustainability skill set over the past number of years? This would be particularly helpful to us if you completed your internship some years ago and have continued working on sustainability issues.
49. We may want to quote you in the final report. Are you comfortable with your responses being attributed to you? (Yes, No, Other - please comment: \_\_\_\_\_)
50. Thank you very much for all of your insights! Do you have anything you'd like to add? You can also contact us at [iidsurvey@gmail.com](mailto:iidsurvey@gmail.com).

## **Appendix 8: Survey 2 on Strengthening the Alumni Network**

This survey was conducted of both IISD alumni and 2006-7 interns, primarily to collect up-to-date contact information. As they were just finishing their placements at the time of the study, tenses were changed for the 2006-7 interns. They were asked what they hoped to gain from the alumni network, rather than how they had benefited from the network to date. No second survey was conducted of the IISD RS team.

### **Section 1: Contact Information Update**

Please complete the following questions:

1. Please enter your full name.

Title (Mr., Ms., Mrs., Dr....)

First name

Last name

Last name during internship (if different) or type N/A

2. Please indicate your internship year.

3. What is your home address? (Mailing Address, City, Province / State, Country, Postal Code / Zip)

4. Would you like to provide other, more permanent contact information?

No thank you - this is fine.

Yes - here it is (e.g., c/o parents): \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is your work address? (Title and Department, Organization / Institution, Mailing address, City, Province / State, Country, Postal code / Zip code)

6. What is your email contact information? (Work: \_\_\_\_, Personal: \_\_\_\_, "Permanent" (even if same as Personal): \_\_\_\_\_, Preferred email for alumni listserver: \_\_\_\_\_)

7. What is your phone contact information? (Home phone: \_\_\_\_, Mobile phone: \_\_\_\_, Work phone (direct): \_\_\_\_, Work phone (other): \_\_\_\_\_)

8. What is your fax number (if any)? (Fax number: \_\_\_\_, Attention to: \_\_\_\_\_)

9. Is your profile information up to date on the IISD website (Open it in a separate window. If no, please contact [iidsurvey@gmail.com](mailto:iidsurvey@gmail.com) with updated information) (Yes, No, Have not checked yet)

### **Section 2 - Strengthening the Alumni Network**

10. In what way(s) have you continued to be involved with IISD? Mark all that apply.

As a supervisor of a 2006/07 intern

Assisted with intern recruitment (promoted the program, encouraged individuals to apply, etc.)

As a supervisor of an intern from previous years

Contributed to internship briefings or debriefings

As a consultant to (or staff of) IISD

Subscribe to the IISD YCLSF listserver

Attended IISD events, e.g., conferences, receptions  
Written letters of support for the IISD program, e.g., to members of parliament

Acted as a reference for other interns  
Other (please specify)

11. What is your current area of expertise? (knowledge area, skill)

12. Below are IISD's major areas of focus. Please indicate which, if any, you have significant expertise in based on your research or employment.

Capacity building and training

Climate change and energy

Corporate Social Responsibility

Economic policies, including tax and subsidy reform

Knowledge management and communications

Measurement and assessment

Multilateral SD negotiations

Natural resource management

Networks and partnerships

Poverty and environment

Security issues

Trade and investment

Youth and SD

13. Are there other issue areas you hold expertise in that could be of interest to IISD?

14. Please estimate how many interns you are still in touch with?

I'm not in touch with any past interns

6-10

Only as a subscriber to the listserv

11-20

1-5

More than 20

15. Are they predominantly from your year? (Yes, No, Don't Know)

16. Name up to five former interns you are most frequently in touch with.

17. How would you summarize your use of the YCLSF listserv?

I read it occasionally

I use it to make connections with past interns in my field of work / city

I actively use it in my job searches

I am not on the listserv currently

I post notices on the listserv

Other (please specify)

I use it to stay in touch with interns from my year

18. What is the value of IISD's 400 person alumni network to you, e.g., social interaction, work opportunities, expert knowledge on issues, country-specific advice, etc.?

19. What specific suggestions do you have for strengthening the network, e.g., more information provided, occasional receptions in major cities, etc.?

20. What specific suggestions do you have for strengthening your individual relationship with IISD, e.g., more opportunities for alumni to work on IISD projects, access to job and consulting opportunities?

21. Are you a member of an online professional network? (LinkedIn: \_\_, TakingIT Global: \_\_, Other (please specify): \_\_)

22. Do you have any other comments?