

OPINION

Maybe it's just me or...
Pg. 2

CAMPUS

SigEps get national
recognition for
scholarship & manpower
Pg. 4

SPORTS

Intramural tournaments get
competitive!
Pg. 7

TUESDAY

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Opinion 2
Campus 3
A&E 5
The Slipstick 6
Sports 7

Sustainability forum covers alternative transportation

By Elizabeth Mauban &
Brock Auerbach-Lynn
TECHNEWS WRITERS

The monthly Sustainability Forum, hosted by the Office of Campus Energy and Sustainability on Friday, February 24, provided an interesting perspective of future models for sustainable transportation.

Said Al-Hallaj, co-founder and Chairman, AllCell Technologies, presented options for a model of transportation based on cleaner personal vehicle transport. Even though the United States currently has a lower dependence on foreign oil than in the past, gas consumption is rising and prices continue to fluctuate, generally moving higher. As oil is a finite resource, this is troubling for our future.

To ease this “oil addiction,” we need to explore a wide variety of alternatively-fueled vehicles. Fully electric vehicles or those using a combination of gasoline and a rechargeable battery are commercially available and the purchase of those vehicles is on the rise. Even cars earlier considered “micro-hybrids” which shut off when the car is stopped, can reduce oil consumption by 5-8%. Small vehicles, such as scooters, can be used for shorter trips which do not require a full-sized vehicle.

As an expert on fuel cells, Al-Hallaj discussed a project he worked on in Jordan utilizing solar energy to put less stress on the power grid. While it worked well in that environment, it is not an easily commercialized concept—especially in locations with less sun.

On the other side of the debate, John Lankford, coordinator of the Neighborhood Bikeways Campaign at Active Transportation Alliance, suggested that we invest in a future less dependent on cars by using alternative transportation, biking and walking. However, we must design our cities accordingly so that these activities are easy and affordable. We can start by making streets which are less devoted to cars and more focused on pedestrians and bikers. A study done in Portland showed that 60% of people would rather use their bikes than drive if it was safer and easier to do so.

Chicago has, in the past, implemented protected bike lanes (those that are curbside, with a buffer of road markings/poles and parking separating them from traffic) and buffered bike lanes (those separated by signage between traffic and curbside parking). Another idea is to use neighborhood greenways—residential streets having markings, signage, and traffic-calming tactics that make car traffic unable to pass through every street and easier for residents of the area to simply bike from place to place. The idea is to make a safe corridor for bikes to cross.

Striking a balance between these two models is probably the best option going forward. In situations when one absolutely requires a car, such as for moving or traveling long distances, Lankford suggested that we use electric vehicles. While integrating cleaner cars is certainly a good start, we must begin building infrastructure which reduces our need for cars and price correctly in order to inspire a change in people's mode of transportation.

The next sustainability forum will be held Friday, March 30, 2012. The topic will be the water-energy-food nexus. For more information, please email campussustainability@iit.edu and keep reading TechNews!



Photos by Christina Noonan

SGA Votebox: motorcycle parking, Reading Week

By Utsav Gandhi
CAMPUS EDITOR

The Illinois Tech Student Government Association (SGA) would like to thank the TechNews readers for responding to last week's article, “SGA VoteBox: Keeping track of trending topics, updates,” and for continuing to provide some excellent input regarding projects you think the SGA should take up! VoteBox (sga.uservoice.com) continues to receive a high level of traffic and a lot of excellent suggestions made it onto the radar of the executive board, as well as the concerned IIT administration. This is an excellent example of student input directly bringing out campus-wide administrative and policy changes, for the betterment of the student body itself.

In late October of last year, Nick Pangere suggested the following: “I want motorcycle-only parking spaces in the main lot. Then motorcyclists won't take up a whole space

in the lot. There is a huge diagonal line area by the L stop that is perfect, but when I park there I get an “invalid space” type parking warning. Just spray-paint a little motorcycle there, stop ticketing us, and both commuters and bikers will be happy!” An entirely valid point there, the SGA believes—which is why three votes were all that was needed to invoke a response from the SGA President, Elnaz Moshfeghian. She announced the great news: “The Parking Office will be putting a couple of motorcycle spots in lots D1, D2, and A3 come April (once the weather is nicer!)”

A hugely popular suggestion was the introduction of a “Reading Week” on campus. This would be a week off prior to finals for the purpose of studying or completing final projects. How awesome does that sound?! Students often complain that the crucial moments of the penultimate week are spent completing homework assignments or turning in projects. Eyoel Asfaw, VP of Academic Affairs, responded: “The IIT academic calendar is set 4 years in

advance, so before a change like this can be made, many factors have to be taken into consideration. In order to have a week of no classes before finals, it would either require moving the start/end date of classes, or removing some vacation days from the semester. Some suggestions to think about are having a reading period which would be one or two days before finals, making it easier to accommodate. It's also possible to request professors not to assign work during the last week of class. We are meeting with the registrar to discuss these ideas and will let you know as the conversation progresses. Until then, let us know what your thoughts are and if you have any alternative ideas.” As he said, any and all suggestions are welcome!

The SGA wishes to highlight the following two suggestions, as they are especially worthy of being followed up and will surely provoke more input. The first is an idea shared by Anthony Sulli, which has received 33 votes in a matter of just two days. He suggested, “Al-

low Greek's student IDs to scan in MSV and SSV as guests without sign in process.” If you are Greek yourself or are a resident in the halls with Greek friends, you will likely echo his suggestion. Get online to vote! This would be a matter which can be possibly followed up with Housing, the Greek community and Access (Hawcard) Services, so just a few more votes will set this rolling.

Katie Peters suggested, “Change the MyIIT Portal pictures. The pictures currently on the portal are of students or professors most people do not recognize. Instead, the pictures should be changed to recognizable pictures of the school, featuring events or places that make our school quirky and unique.” Agree with Katie? We certainly do!

Any of the issues highlighted above can be found easily on the VoteBox website. Visit sga.uservoice.com and type the keywords of the issue you wish to provide input on in the Search box on the main page.