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Growing together

By Mike Purdy

OPINION EDITOR & DISTRIBUTION MANAGER

Students walking through the Greek quad this summer may have noticed something peculiar taking shape. Upon further observation, they soon see that a huge chunk of the southeast corner has become an enclosed garden space, complete with an abundance of leafy greens, quirky fencing, and raised beds prepared for harvesting and planting. Behind this creative urban agricultural project is IPRO 314: "U Farm IIT", a student-led initiative aimed at growing the community around fresh, local produce and actively working toward a more sustainable future.

With the rapid rise of urban agriculture in major cities throughout the United States, the IIT U Farm project has materialized on campus at a pivotal moment in Chicago's new era of sustainable endeavors. Originally the brainchild of Rodger Cooley, Adjunct Professor of Landscape Architecture and faculty advisor for IPRO 314, and the organization Engineers for a Sustainable World (ESW), the current garden plot is now more than an idea, it is a tangible, edible reality. "It just keeps growing and growing", Cooley said.

Once the space for the future garden had been secured on the quad (at the site of the former APE house), last year's freshman architecture students designed creative fencing units to form its boundary.

Although some of these fences have been removed or repaired since the U Farm's inception, they still remain the most unique and visually appealing aspects of the area, drawing the gaze of many a passer-by.

The summer IPRO 314 team gathered in a circle on the quad's grassy field for the first time on June 4, many of its members inexperienced with urban agriculture but eager to learn and get their hands dirty. Few class sessions were held indoors as this was certain to be a "hands-on" experience (not to mention the beautiful Chicago weather). The IPRO split into three major teams, each concerned with a distinct aspect of the urban farming process – construction/maintenance, community engagement, and communications. The construction group quickly went to work on the development of multiple raised vegetable beds, which were subsequently filled with soil and compost and then planted. This team primarily spent its time in the workshop cutting, drilling, filing, and painting, ultimately laying down the physical foundation of the U Farm.

Involvement with the community is an essential element of many urban farming projects, and IIT's U Farm is no exception. Throughout the summer, IPRO 314 worked closely with Growing Power, a non-profit urban agricultural organization out of Milwaukee whose Chicago branch at Iron Street farm is only a short distance from IIT, across the river on the near Southside. Erika Allen, daughter of urban farming pioneer Will Allen, runs the plot at Iron Street and was (and still remains) a major contributor to the project here on campus. Providing horticultural education, community outreach opportunities, and generous donations of plants and compost, Erika and Growing Power are to thank for much of the U Farm's success thus far.

Over the summer, members of IPRO 314 were able to make a positive impact in the external Chicago community through volun-

teer work and mentorship at other local gardens. Some of these places include SEED at Dunn Tech Elementary, the Chicago Lights Urban Farm, The Princeton Veggie Box, Lake Parc, and Wentworth community garden.

Ripe cherry tomatoes, beets, and other veggies are now being plucked from the IIT garden site as daily harvests reveal a plentiful inaugural growing season for the U Farm project. Watermelon, corn, beans, carrots, Swiss chard; a variety of local, organic produce is being grown right in our backyard, and it's only going to get better from here.

As the fall IPRO picks up where the summer team left off, many new facets of the urban farm will be explored. According to Cooley, woodchips are soon to be laid down, followed by the construction of a hoop house for an extended growing season, an on-site compost bin, and perhaps an aquaponics pursuit depending on whether or not IIT facilities can find a proper space. A business plan is also in the works, outlining a potential farmer's market, vegetable sales to fraternity and sorority chefs, and a partnership with Sodexo. "We are starting to get noticed more," Cooley states, "and this in turn has engaged more departments and developed many connections."

As the IIT U Farm continues to generate interest and expand, it should be no surprise to students when more garden spaces begin popping up around campus; whether on rooftops or vacant parking lots, the more green space the merrier. The IPRO 314 initiative has provided a big step forward in terms of sustainability at IIT, but more importantly, it has served to unite communities through positive, holistic, and innovative urban farming practice.

SAF restraints: 'No cause for concern'

By Ryan Kamphuis

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Last semester our campus recorded an increase in activities which made student life more exciting. This rise in activities however, shrank our Student Activities Fund (SAF) resources, most specifically our 'buffer,' which had been maintained for quite some time. Finance Board resorted to asking student organizations to cut back on their budgets. Thus far organizations have given back significantly and as a result we are sure of having enough funds to sustain events this semester. We have realized that it is time to regulate more the flow of SAF funds until it is stable. To ensure there is not a repeat of this situation ever again, much emphasis will be placed on our guidelines, and we will be a little more stringent on budget allocations henceforth. This situation is not one that should draw too much concern since most of the semester's budgets were already allocated last semester. In light of this, Finance Board is however, still committed to funding in the interest of student organizations and campus life. Thank you.

Emmanuel Klu
Chair, Finance Board

For the last two weeks, students all over campus have been talking about the Student Activity Fund, and the rumors that after increased spending last semester, the Fund had run dry.

As can be seen in Finance Board Chair Emmanuel Klu's statement above, more money had been spent by student organizations last semester than was expected, leading to the SAF being overspent and its buffer being cut into.

However, Finance Board has taken action to ensure that there is enough money in the fund for student organizations to propose for and be awarded funds this semester - these actions are highlighted above.

How does this all affect the average student, though? In truth, it really doesn't. Due to the efforts of the Finance Board when it became clear that IIT's student organizations were going to use more of the SAF than was anticipated, there is still a fairly sizeable SAF to be allocated this semester, even if it isn't as big as it has been in the past.

While a smaller SAF could lead to organizations having less money to work with and fewer events happening on campus, Student Government Association President Kelly Lohr is able to say that she, "doesn't believe there will be a noticeable difference in the amount of programming that happens this semester." Lohr believes that, "they [Finance Board] are doing their best to assure that campus life is still as vibrant this year, as ever before."



Photos courtesy of U Farm IIT