OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY
CAMPUS SUSTAINABILITY FUND

# Environmental Learning Experiences for Undergrads - Progress Report

## Email

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## Project Manager Name

Nasiha Rashid

## Requested Metrics

Metrics:

# of people on core project: 1 director UA staff (Colin Waite) 1 program coordinator UA staff (Mariah Kuehl) 1 Environmental Educator UA staff (Nasiha Rashid) 1 Marketing Coordinator UA staff (Rowan Cassarly)

Lyndale:
# hours spent on project: 310 student contact hours working with PreK-8th grade students seeing a total of 3,136 students this school year from August-May.
Contact hours with other UA organizations: 4 hours with Compost Cats
Contact hours with UA students: 4 hours with Compost Cats over the course of the year
# of community events: 4: Tumamoc Hill (3 contact hours), Coyote Trail Ecology Day (3 contact hours), Cooper Earth Day (4 contact hours), Family Nature Day (4 contact hours),
# of partnerships on the project: 4: Tumamoc Hill (Elise Gornish), Compost Cats (Kenzie Jackson), ECE cohort (Sung eun) , PIF (Ernesto Somoza)
Total # of hours working this year (August-May): Over 600 hours worked

Samantha:
# of hours spent on project: 150 student contact hours working with PreK-8th grade students seeing a total of 2,547 students this school year from August-May
Contact hours with other UA organizations: 4 with Compost Cats
Contact hours with UA students: 4 hours with ECE Cohort for Family Nature Day
# of community events: 5: Tumamoc Hill (3 contact hours) Coyote Trail Ecology Day (3 contact hours), Cooper Earth Day (4 contact hours), Family Nature Day (4 contact hours), PCC Northwest STEAM day (4 contact hours)
# of partnerships on the project: 3: ECE Cohort (Sung eun), PIF (Ernesto Somoza), Tumamoc Hill (Elise Gornish)
Total # of hours working this year (August-May): Over 600 hours worked

## Project Accomplishments

Both interns were featured in our May newsletter, highlighting their accomplishments throughout

their internship and how this CSF internship has helped shape their skills and future career goals.
Both interns had a chance to write articles about desert topics they were passionate about that were featured in the Catalina Foothills magazine: Desert Leaf. Lyndale wrote three articles: Bird Migration in the Sonoran Desert, The Power of Winter Rain, and The Dangers of Rodenticides. Samantha wrote one article: Mule Deer in the Desert.
Lyndale has been working with our Marketing coordinator Rowan this year and has produced several social media posts for the Cooper Center. Among six posts about a variety of topics from desert related content to new merch at Cooper, Lyndale gained 840.2K views, 444 interactions and 13 new followers.
Samantha participated in our Family Nature Day out at Cooper that is geared toward 2-5 year olds and assisted with setting up and interacting with the ECE cohort at the University who were running the activities. She was also there to assist staff while they led some TUSD PD sessions in the fall. She also helped table at the Pima STEM event for 4th-8th graders, showing and talking about Sonoran Desert skulls, furs, and tracks to over 100 students.
Both interns helped assist with Cooper Center programs this year. They aided Cooper staff in a variety of programs for PreK- High School students. They helped with classroom management and lead parts of the programs. By the end of the year both Lyndale and Samantha felt comfortable leading the entirety of some programs, like our neighborhood walk (designed for K-2nd grade), our garden rotation (talking about the five seasons, compost and seeds) our snake presentation (holding the snake and assisting with hand sanitizer for the students) and our 4th/5th grade Sonoran Synergy program (leading a group of their own related to the ecosystem with Cooper staff present). Both Samantha and Lyndale had bigger roles in our Earthkeepers program (for 4th/5th grade) this year as well and helped with not only program set up but leading parts of the booklets and activities that are geared toward ecological understandings and deepening feelings for nature. 89% of the students they interacted with this year were title 1.
Both interns participated in community events this year. At the Coyote Trail Ecology Day they helped teach kinder and 1st graders about Sonoran Desert plants and animals. During our Cooper Center Earth Day event both interns helped with setting up and driving the van for people to be able to come to our site.They interacted with guests and helped clean up the event as well. We had several community partners they interacted with at the event including Compost Cats and Ben's Bells. Both interns helped with an event we hosted on Tumamoc hill where they showed people how to make seed balls and explained different plants and animals. There were over 1,000 community members on the hill that day.
Both interns participated and assisted with several classroom visits this year to schools like Los Amigos, Gale, Erickson, Utterback, Wright, Liberty, and Hudlow. Helping bring the desert to the classroom with story times, seedballs, skulls/furs and plant specimens.
We also had a winter community night hike at Cooper that both interns were able to attend and help guide over 100 community members through the west mountains with flashlights and facts.
Returning for a second year through the CSF internship gave Lyndale and Samantha the opportunity to build on their personal and professional goals with intention. Both entered the year hoping to deepen their connection to the Sonoran Desert, strengthen their public speaking skills, and gain confidence in leading environmental education programs. Through the internship at the Cooper Center, they not only met those goals but exceeded them, becoming trusted leaders whose passion for the desert was evident in every interaction with students.
One of the successes of the internship was creating space for each intern to explore their interests and grow into their unique strengths. Samantha reflected that the experience "increased my confidence and ability to try new things." Teaching students initially felt intimidating, as she was "nervous and overthought about what to say," but through practice, feedback, and mentorship, she

developed an engaging teaching style and discovered a passion for sharing topics such as skeletal remains with students. By the end of the internship, that growth had helped shape her future plans, reinforcing her desire to pursue a career in forensic pathology or anthropology. Similarly, Lyndale embraced increasing leadership responsibilities throughout the year and found that the experience solidified her future aspirations. As she reflected, "It was an opportunity that gave me so much room for growth... My experience at Cooper was nothing I could get from a college classroom and has given me the utmost confidence in my ability to pursue my future career." Their reflections speak to the lasting impact of the internship in developing environmental educators and the ways it helped discover their strengths, build confidence and find a direction for their future aspirations.

## Next Steps

Yes, this project will continue in a similar capacity next year, with expanded opportunities for mentorship of our San Miguel High School interns while also supporting continued growth in our programming capacity. The collaboration between the University and San Miguel interns created meaningful opportunities for Lyndale and Samantha to develop as mentors, sharing their knowledge and experience with high school students while building their own leadership skills. This past year, the Cooper Center served more than 4,000 students, a milestone made possible in large part by the interns' ability to take on leadership roles in both on-site and off-site programming. Their contributions allowed our team to increase the number of classroom visits to schools, expand our reach throughout the community, and strengthen our capacity to connect more students with meaningful environmental education experiences.

Both Lyndale and Samantha were also instrumental in improving the accessibility trail at Camp Cooper. They dedicated several days to paving sections of the trail to make it wheelchair accessible, resulting in a significant improvement in our ability to deliver inclusive programming. In addition, they helped create shaded gathering spaces along the trail, a much-needed enhancement that will benefit future visitors especially as we host more community events. The accessible trail will continue to serve learners with disabilities in the coming year, and the work they invested ensures that all learners have the opportunity to connect with the Sonoran Desert in an equitable and impactful way that aligns with our mission.

## Challenges Faced

The initial challenges we faced were related to the structure of the internship during its first year. However, by the second year, we had developed a framework that was more conducive to supporting interns' personal and professional goals. Beginning with a foundation that allowed interns to share their aspirations and desired outcomes from the experience set both the interns and our team up for success.

## Media/Links

Articles they wrote Lyndale:

Sonoran Sage Magazine - Bird Migration Article

Sonoran Sage Magazine - Rodenticides Article

Sonoran Sage Magazine - Mule Deer Article

U of A Teacher Appreciation Month Article

U of A Cooper Center for Environmental Learning Website

Cooper Center Instagram

## Recommendations

We would like to explore additional opportunities for interns to collaborate with the Compost Cats program, which maintains the 5 Seasons Garden at the Cooper Center. The University is home to several groups dedicated to sustainability, environmental stewardship, and environmental education, and we hope to strengthen connections with these organizations in the coming year. With the support of CSF interns, we aim to create more collaborative learning opportunities that enrich the internship experience while further advancing our shared environmental goals.