

Speaker Biographies

2018 Symposium on Sustainability: Engaging, Enabling and Empowering Our Sustainable Future

Public Lecture – Coal, Climate and Environmental Backlash

Mr. Nick Mullins – energy transition advocate, author

Mr. Mullins is a 9th generation Appalachian and a former fifth generation coal miner, who seeks to increase awareness related to Appalachia's jobs-versus-environment dichotomy. An energy transition advocate and author of the blog [The Thoughtful Coal Miner](#), he hopes to inspire deeper conversations on the relationship between activists, corporate interests, and rural working-class communities as well as raising awareness toward an understanding of the political motivations of mining communities. His presentation looks at community reactions to both environmental activism against surface mining practices and the coal industry's response through public relations campaigns and the "War on Coal" rhetoric. Mr. Mullins is a 2016 graduate of Berea College where he received his B.A. in communications with additional focuses in Appalachian studies, sustainability and environmental studies. His writing and commentary [have been featured in a variety of publications](#) including *Yes! Magazine*, *Audubon Magazine*, *The Hill*, *The Washington Post*, C-SPAN's *Washington Journal*, NPR's *The World* and many others. Mr. Mullin's work has includes two cross-country public outreach tours and the short documentary *Coal Mined*. In addition, he is among those interviewed in the 2016 documentary, *Blood on the Mountain*.

Presentation of the Live Green! Awards for Excellence in Sustainability

Merry Rankin, Director of Sustainability, Iowa State University and Sustainability Coordinator for the City of Ames

Merry Rankin is Iowa State University's inaugural Director of Sustainability, responsible for coordinating Iowa State University's sustainability initiatives and serving as a central resource for collaboration and information. Through a partnership with the City of Ames, she also assists in the facilitation of community sustainability planning and implementation. Prior to coming to ISU, she worked for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, working with the Recycling Technical Assistance Team and overseeing the Department's statewide volunteer program – Keepers of the Land, and also Iowa State University Wildlife and Fisheries Extension Service. Merry has a B.S. in General Business and an M.S. in Wildlife Biology, both from Iowa State University and has completed international environmental human dimensions research in India, Costa Rica, Australia, and South Africa. Outside of work, Merry serves on the Board of Directors for Worldly Goods and Wheatsfield Cooperative.

Lia Gomez, Director of Sustainability, Government of the Student Body

Lia Gomez is a junior at Iowa State University majoring in environmental science and minoring in food and society. She also serves as Director of Sustainability on the executive cabinet of Iowa State University's Student Government. "Although my position encompasses an expanse of objectives, my main goal is to initiate dialogues, initiatives and actions that, in turn, catalyze the all encompassing, multifaceted components of sustainability," she said. "In a way, my position is no different than planting seeds -- the seeds being facets and insight regarding sustainability. My hope is that those "seeds" take root and grow."