I can honestly say that I have learned a lot working at EarthCorps. I have learned the importance of communication both internally and externally. Communication internally produces better departmental connection and support as well as better data which is really the lifeline of a non-profit’s outreach and financial support. External communication in the form of networking at events as well as newsletters, reports, among others to reach your supporters, both financially through individual donors and grantors, as well as the volunteers and home stays (those that host our international corpsmembers) that really make this organization a success is really non-replaceable. EarthCorps has managed to do this through structured meetings, open door policies, having good information systems and training on how to use them, as well as great processes around event coordination and consistent interaction with the community that supports the organization. The greatest thing that I have learned working at EarthCorps is that no matter who you are interacting with, you want to leave a lasting impression. An example of this, is that the high school kids that came out to volunteer for service hours, were taught the importance of what they were doing, why they were doing it, and how they can continue to make a difference within EarthCorps (through other volunteer activities) but also in their personal habits. I bet none of those kids will ever plant ivy in their backyards (an invasive plant taking over the forests) after they spent an afternoon learning the techniques and hard work it takes to untangle it from the trees and dig out the roots.
One of the things that I really liked about EarthCorps is their holistic approach to environmental service. EarthCorps does so many things; it’s hard for me to even begin to list them all. Through the Corps program they have contracts with parks to do hands on environmental restoration every day, but they also have volunteer events to do restoration which provides opportunities for the community to get involved which in turn helps promote education and support of the corps program. EarthCorps has a science component where they do forest monitoring with our resident ecologist and biologists. This program also has a community involvement component where they are taught scientific data collection and analysis. In sum, really the importance of getting the community involved in a service learning way is what really allows a larger impact beyond just doing the environmental work ourselves.

Something I realized that I didn’t really like about my internship is that I did not have much room for input. In other words, they did not need me. While it was great to learn from staff that have good processes and know what they are doing, there was not a role that I had to fulfill. I think that although I get impatient with organizations with really terrible systems, such as the non-profits I have worked with previously, that really is the place that I can have the biggest impact if they are willing to change. EarthCorps culture has a willingness to change and innovate, and I think that is why they have become streamlined, efficient and impactful.

I have definitely refined my networking and communication skills through the outreach events and volunteer leadership opportunities that I have had in this internship- and am excited for those still coming up (I will continue my internship with EarthCorps through September). I have also learned about the importance of systems and using them to be in consistent interaction with the community, not just for financial support, but for education and reporting purposes. One mistake that I think non-profits often make is only reaching out to their community when they
need money. However, it really is in everyone’s best interest to be in interaction with them constantly and let them know what we are accomplishing as an organization, volunteer service learning opportunities, information about our current corps and international program- so that when we do have our annual fundraiser, they have been involved all along and are much more likely to provide financial support. One thing I would really like to learn more about is the grant and donor process, because I just learned the basics through EarthCorps but I have not been involved in the actual grant writing process, but more the research and follow up side of it. In my Global Development Studies Capstone class that I am taking in the fall, this is a topic that we will cover, so I am looking forward to gaining skills and knowledge in that area.

The passage from Sittser’s book really resonated with me. I never really thought that creation of systems and processes, efficient use of resources, and increasing organizational performance was really a calling. After reading his examples, I think that my passion to work for those outcomes is actually a calling rather than a career. As he mentioned his personal story of how he had three different careers that evidenced his calling, I think that is an position that I may be in. With my double major of Business Administration and Global Development Studies- I really feel that I could take it anywhere. For career choices, I’m constantly thinking where I want to take my career path. I’ve always had a heart for non-profit work, but sometimes that isn’t the most lucrative profession. A lot of the people I have worked with, even here at EarthCorps, have made personal sacrifices to work in a non-profit over other organizations. I have thought that if I don’t end up in a non-profit, my degree could lead me to work in International Business, International Relations, Corporate Giving programs, Strategic Philanthropy, Governmental Service Agencies, among others. However, sometimes I feel that it’s a copout, that if my true calling is to non-profit work then I shouldn’t really be concerned about the accompanying salary,
prestige, benefits, etc. As I reflect on Sittser’s message- I see that my previous understanding of a calling was not very accurate. It isn’t as if I have to be called to work in a non-profit. Instead, I could use my skills to organize, streamline processes, in a variety of different careers. While, I probably will spend at least some time in my career path in a non-profit setting, this excerpt has shown me that shouldn’t really be my goal. Instead, as I consider positions, I should see if they are a good fit for my serving others through the skills that I have and the calling to increase efficiency to provide better service. While in my limited experience, I have seen that non-profit organizations have a strong need for more efficient processes which would enable them to serve better, this is not the only application to apply my calling. I think this realization has really been helpful to me as I consider what opportunities there are where I can provide meaningful work. I think another thing that I have realized through this is that the organizations that are in the greatest need for my calling to increase efficiency to provide better service are the ones that are struggling. As I talked with EarthCorps’ staff about the many small local environmental organizations that they joined forces with (non-profit jargon for the acquired or merged with them), it was because they did not have the processes in place to be sustainable. Thus to make the impact that I feel called to, I may have to step into struggling organizations, that are probably not going to be in a position to provide job security and benefits. However, on the other hand, I also could completely use my calling in any organization to instill processes that will produce greater good, in this political climate, a lot of government organizations and programs are going to need this skill set as their funding is being cut and scrutinized more than ever. With the understanding that your calling can use your career, I think that I can more aptly consider which career path with allow me to use my calling the best. It is somewhat ironic, but I want to use my calling to increase efficiency and impact, in the most efficient and impactful way possible.
It is somewhat difficult for me to see two distinct ways that my calling can use my career. I think that the general revelation of this excerpt to me is that my calling to increase efficiency for a greater impact can be well used in many different careers. If I had to name a way that I think my calling will use my career, is that whatever position that I am in an organization, whether that organization be EarthCorps or the EPA, I will be able to use my career to promulgate the idea that being a steward of resources, both administrative, financial and natural are really important. While I also feel that my niche is in environmental service, I think that I will be able to use my career to reach beyond a scientific standpoint, but show others that it is a Christian’s responsibility to be a steward of this good world that God has created. My position will enable me to use my calling to provide greater outreach, education, and restoration because using the organizational resources wisely will allow a bigger impact of the organizational mission to use natural resources wisely. I think that I have learned that mostly through EarthCorps as an application of classes that I have taken at SPU. I think that being in a management or operational performance position in an organization will also allow me to use my career to lead others to understand the importance of the foundational ideas that I feel are my calling, and create a larger impact that way.