When newspaper reporters around the central United States are writing about an earthquake, they call Michael Hamburger. When area high school students collect high-quality data through the PEPP Earthquake Science Program (of the Princeton Earth Physics Project), they have Hamburger to thank. When tsunamis, earthquakes, and other natural disasters strike far-flung places, Hamburger is reliably at the center of community efforts to understand what happened and to respond with assistance. And when students and faculty realized Indiana University was falling behind on the critical issue of environmental sustainability, Hamburger stepped up. IU Bloomington established its model Office of Sustainability five years ago, but the groundwork was laid by a task force he co-chaired, which issued a forward-looking strategic plan in January 2008.

“This turning point for Indiana University captures the essence of Professor Hamburger’s remarkable ability to transform ideas into action in ways that will have a lasting impact on not only his discipline and our academic community, but also in a larger public arena,” according to Bill Brown, IU Bloomington director of sustainability, and Jeanne Sept, professor of anthropology and former dean of the faculties. “Michael’s vision, tireless energy, and collaborative genius have inspired, engaged, and demonstrated service leadership at its finest.”

As a scientist who studies earthquakes, Hamburger embodies public service in his academic and professional life. His research in large-scale dynamics of earthquake generation has helped provide the context for understanding and mitigating hazards in the Philippines, Central Asia, South Pacific islands, and the central United States. In Indiana, he has participated in the Governor’s Earthquake Advisory Panel, made presentations to Indiana emergency responders’ conferences, and served on a steering committee for the U.S. Geological Survey’s (USGS) National Seismic Hazard Mapping Program. He has collaborated with the USGS Hazards Center in Colorado, developing a research project that promises to provide predictions of earthquake-triggered landslides in near-real-time.

Hamburger helped organize and present campus-community forums in response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the 2005 Kashmir earthquake, and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, providing context and content to a community eager for understanding and setting the stage for fundraising in support of disaster response and reconstruction. In 2013 he collaborated with photographer Osamu James Nakagawa on an exploration of scientific and spiritual impacts of the 2011 Japan earthquake and tsunami, part of the “Imag(in)ing Science” exhibit at the Grunwald Gallery of Art.

Hamburger is the author of more than 60 papers, articles, and book chapters, including extensive publication on service-related topics such as earthquake safety, risk from the Midwest’s New Madrid Fault, seismology education in K–12 classrooms, and the development of effective university sustainability programs. His research in seismology and volcanology has included fieldwork around the world as well as a recent project involving deployment of 140 seismic instruments across the Midwest.

A member of the American Geophysical Union, the Geological Society of America, and the Seismological Society of America and a fellow of the Geological Society of America, he has contributed to several research consortia, including the Incorporated Research Institutions for Seismology and the EarthScope Initiative, and has had a special engagement with the National Science Foundation-sponsored UNAVCO Consortium, which provides support for scientists using GPS and satellite radar to study Earth processes.

Hamburger played a key role in resolving a dispute over university-owned woodland near Griffy Lake north of Bloomington, resulting in the establishment of IU’s first Research and Teaching Preserve, a nationally recognized network of natural areas encompassing nearly 1,600 acres in seven parcels. He received the IU Bloomington Distinguished Service Award for 2012–13. The IU Student Sustainability Council honored him by creating its annual Michael Hamburger Award for Sustainable Action in 2012.