Wells earns Marks of Distinction

Second Nature, the national organization providing oversight of and support for colleges and universities working to reduce their climate impact and develop climate resiliency, awarded Wells College two Marks of Distinction this year. We were awarded one mark for President Gibralter’s signing Wells on to participate in the We Are Still In campaign, expressing our support for the Paris Climate Accords and registering our objection to the Trump administration’s plan to pull the U.S. out of this vital international agreement. Our second mark came for our “On Track” status of reporting our greenhouse gas emissions, filing our Climate Leadership progress report, and completing our Climate Resilience Assessment. This latter report was an interesting exercise, looking at the likely impacts of climate change on our campus and surrounding community. In particular, using climate impact projections for upstate NY, more “severe storm events” are likely due to climate change, so we need to work to harden our infrastructure (buildings, roadways, bridges) against flooding. We noted that FEMA Flood Zone maps identify two locations along Route 90 that could potentially impact egress from the campus; we need to plan for alternate exit routes. The college and village are already working together to address issues with our drinking water plant; the incidence of potentially toxic Harmful Algal Blooms affecting our potable water is on the rise, due in part to warming lake temperatures and nutrient loading from heavy rainfalls. We also note the likelihood of much higher summer temperatures, which may point toward the need to create community cooling stations for vulnerable local populations and to develop plans to relocate staff from uncooled buildings on summer “high heat” days.

Great collaborations

We kicked off our Spring Sustainability Perspectives series with a bang. We invited in Carl Lipo and Pam Mischen from the Sustainable Communities masters program at SUNY Binghamton, which offers a new pathway for Wells students interested in pursuing sustainability studies at the graduate level. The duo talked about their research work on Easter Island (also known as Rapa Nui), long considered a “case study” of societal collapse from overconsumption of natural resources by the local population. Lipo’s research thoroughly debunks that notion; his findings strongly suggest that the early Polynesian settlers lived well within their environmental means. His work studying the giant carved stone statues, called Moai, for which Easter Island is famous, suggest that the islanders worked closely to move the statues from quarry sites to the edges of the island, where nearly a thousand of them stand today. Lipo’s research into the mechanisms the Islanders employed to move these massive Moai was profiled in the fascinating Nova special titled “The Lost Secret of Easter Island”.

In April, the Center for Sustainability collaborated with assistant professor of English Dan Rosenberg (far right in photo), who coordinates the Visiting Writers Series, to bring to campus two authors of the newly published volume of ecojustice poetry called “Ghost Fishing”. Editor and contributing poet Melissa Tuckey (second from left) was joined by poet Mukoma Wa Ngugi (far left) for an evening of readings from the book. To commemorate the event, Rich Kegler, director of the Book Arts Center, and student Kate Casler ’20 (second from right) designed and produced a set of beautiful broadsides featuring poetry from the volume enhanced by nature woodcuts.

Environmental Science professor Niamh O’Leary and Center director Marian Brown collaborated with David Flaten, professor of History at Tompkins Cortland Community College, to develop a proposal to share a Fulbright Scholar visit between our two campuses. With support from the Fulbright Outreach Lecturing Fund, Dr. Jana Müllervá (left), a plant biologist from the Institute of Botany at the Academy of Science in the Czech Republic, traveled to upstate NY from the University of Colorado at Boulder, where she was finishing her year of study. In late April, Jana provided a variety of talks and guest lectures for classes at TC3 for two days, and spent her final day at Wells, offering a guest lecture for Niamh’s Climate Science class and delivering the final talk in our spring Sustainability Perspectives series.
Losing two of our own

Don’t get too worried—these losses are only temporary. Two stalwarts of our Sustainability program are taking well-earned sabbaticals during the upcoming academic year.

Milene Morefi, professor of Psychology and Sustainability, will be on a sabbatical in the Fall. At the AASHE Sustainability Professionals Retreat she attended last summer, Milene was invited to become a mentor in a new Mentorship Program that AASHE has initiated. Mentors help mentees develop feasible goals with tangible outcomes that leverage their expertise, and provide ongoing support and guidance during the term of the project. Milene also plans to work with Wells faculty contributing coursework to the sustainability program to do curriculum mapping of the major’s required and elective courses to identify gaps and overlaps to improve the curricula and better prepare our Sustainability majors.

Niamh O’Leary, professor of Environmental Science, will also be on sabbatical leave next year, planning to work with The Nature Conservancy on various environmental projects, as well as do some traveling with family.

These two faculty leaders were the primary architects of the Sustainability academic program and they co-wrote the proposal to interim president Tom deWitt to create the Center for Sustainability and the Environment. We’d like to think that Niamh and Milene can breathe a sign of relief that both the academic program and Center for Sustainability are well on their way. Take a restful break, ladies!

Hands-On Learning

The Indigenous Psychologies (PSY 330) class served up a delicious demonstration of local indigenous dishes: Three Sisters Soup (made with beans, squash, and hulled white corn), and Roasted White Corn Flour Mash with local maple syrup. Both recipes were made with corn flour from the Iroquois White Corn Flour project at the Ganondagan State Historic Site in Victor NY. The squash featured winter squash harvested from the raised planting beds next to Sommer Center, which were built by the Spring 2017 Introduction to Gardening class. The squash seeds were saved from winter squash used as natural decorations for President Gibralter’s Fall 2016 Inauguration. And speaking of those raised beds, this spring’s Introduction to Gardening class started plants from seeds obtained from the Wells College Seed Exchange; the seedlings were started in the Zabriskie Hall greenhouse and on the last day of the course, the class transplanted their young plants—tomatoes, peppers, herbs, squash—into these garden beds.

The beginning of the end...

... or is this the end of the beginning of our students’ life journey? Whatever the case, the end of the semester is always marked by a flurry of presentations of internship projects and senior theses.

Senior Angela Paul did a January internship with Sheffield’s Seeds in nearby Locke NY to fulfill the requirements for her Sustainable Food Systems minor. Rick Sheffield had a Chinese client looking for Nipa grass seed, a salt-tolerant plant that grows in the Southwest. The plant was used by native peoples as a food source for thousands of years. In the 1970s, Nipa grass was thought to be extinct; it was then rediscovered by University of AZ researchers. Angela’s internship spilled into the spring semester as she struggled with language barriers to communicate with a potential Mexican seed source. Angela’s Environmental Science senior thesis involved evaluating strategies to enhance photosynthesis in food crops to increase yields.

Carley Legg ‘18, Environmental Science major and Sustainability minor, was part of the Ethnographic Experience in Hawaii (OCS 300) class that spent much of January exploring the islands.

Mauricio Macias Chavez ‘18 pored over invoices and researched suppliers for his analysis of foods purchased by Hallmark, our new food service contractor. General Manager Mark Robinson was very forthcoming with invoices for all food purchased in February. Mauricio created our new baseline of the percentage of foods meeting the Real Food Challenge’s very rigorous criteria.

Wellspring

Eliza Schwab was one of three Business majors presenting sustainability-related senior theses. Her talk was titled “Sustaining the Family Business”. Eliza, a Sustainability minor, also received the Susan W. & Pike Sullivan Entrepreneur Award. Scott Litvin presented “Global Ethical Issues in Accounting” and Olga Babitchouk discussed “Measuring Perception and Reaction of Different Generations Towards GMOs”.

Eric Hartmann ‘18 did his internship analyzing the fibers in the coats of Icelandic sheep owned by retired professor Dr. Margaret Flowers.

Leticia Hatch ‘18 created a First Nation and Indigenous Studies archive in the Library. Leticia was a leader in both the Wells Campus Greens and FORCES clubs.

And last, but certainly not least, our very first Sustainability major graduate, Jonathan Mills, presented his senior thesis on the ethical, moral and social issues that could arise from the use of the new gene editing tool, CRISPR, to alter the characteristics of human offspring. His talk explored the potential for this new technology to lead to less human diversity and perhaps even usher in a new era of eugenics practice.
**We’ll drink to that!**

Earlier this semester, the Center for Sustainability partnered with the student management team of the GRIND Café to purchase a quantity of reusable beverage containers to give to those who don’t have one (or more appropriately, those who don’t remember to bring theirs, since everyone—incoming students and new hires—receives a reusable beverage mug when they first arrive at Wells). The GRIND discounts beverages served into one’s own container, so this free mug distribution helps further encourage that practice. No more excuses, people!

Kevin Miles, professor of Business and GRIND team advisor, shows off the new free mug.

---

**Seed Exchange Liquidated!**

Last Fall, we solicited donations of seed from over 50 seed companies. When our Seed Exchange opened to the public in mid-February, the repurposed card catalog in the Library was stocked with just under 2,000 packets of seed donated by over two dozen companies. The value of donated seed exceeded $5,500! By mid-April, more than 75 local growers had claimed free seed and our cabinet was completely cleaned out! The last organization to come acquire free seed was the Cayuga-Seneca Community Action Program, which supports community gardens throughout two counties.

Librarian Susan Gloss demonstrates dispensing smaller amounts of seed.

---

**Print ReLeaf continues**

Our Information Technology group continues to work with Toshiba Print Management, the company with whom they contract to provide our network printers, to implement the Print Releaf program. Based on the number of pages Wells prints, for every tree’s worth of paper consumed, the Print Releaf reforestation partner our campus community selected, U.S.-based Trees Water & People, will plant a certain number of trees. Since July, Print Releaf certificates sent to us indicate that we have printed 649,617 standard pages. That paper usage equates to 78 trees that Print Releaf will add to the reforestation project on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

---

**We were RecycleManiacs!**

Wells again fared respectably in RecycleMania, the friendly competition among colleges and universities to see who can recycle the most. In Total Recycling, which charts the total pounds of recyclables collected during the 8-week contest period, Wells is never going to take top honors against big schools, but we held up our end, collecting 34,742 pounds of recyclables (including compostables), beating out other, much larger New York schools like Hartwick and Colgate. In the Diversion category, we ranked 51st out of 170 participating schools, with a 44.8% rate of separating recyclables from landfill trash; we were third among New York schools. This is actually a decline from last year, when we posted a 54% diversion rate. Where Wells really showed to advantage this year was in the Per Capita category, where we ranked 12th nationally, collecting 34.18 pounds of recyclables per person. We led the field of 17 participating New York schools in this category. This was a huge leap upward from last year’s results, when we posted only 12.67 pounds per person. The RecycleMania organizers noted this remarkable increase and asked to what we attributed this change; we honestly could not point to any new efforts netting us this result. We lost ground in RecycleMania in the Waste Minimization category. While we are doing an excellent job diverting 45% of our recyclables out of landfill trash, we are still generating WAY too much waste overall: we posted 104.71 pounds per person of combined landfill trash and recyclables over the 8-week period! That’s nearly 14 pounds per person per week! We need to work to bring that figure way down! In Food Organics, we collected 19 pounds of compostables per person, up slightly from our 2017 figure of 18.57 pounds per person. There are two schools of thought about this Food Organics category: diverting compostables from landfill trash is certainly worthwhile, but higher compostables collection numbers may also signal there is more food waste being generated. We need to beef up our efforts to minimize food waste; this semester’s Weigh the Waste educational campaign (see more below) may help in that regard.

---

**Treasure-y, not Trashy...**

At press time, we are still collecting, weighing and sorting items students chose to leave behind during our annual Trash2Treasure move-out collection. We redirect non-perishable foods to both the new campus Food Pantry and to the King Ferry Food Pantry. We redirect still usable costumes, housewares and room furnishings to the Bargain Basement reuse space in the basement of Main, and we restock the RUMPS Room in Macmillan with gently used office and school supplies. 900+ pounds already!

---

**Shining a Light on Reuse**

At the annual Awards dinner in May, we noted that the Student Life staff had again reused items from their apparently voluminous stash of decorative items (silk flowers, plastic plates, glass containers) to create lovely centerpieces for each table. We also noted this year that they used reusable LED tea lights instead of actual candles. Well done, folks! This is a great, subtle demonstration of the power - not to mention the significant cost-savings! - of creatively repurposing items like these.

---

**Weighing our Waste**

Working with Dining manager Emily McCabe, senior Kianna Anderson did her Psychology thesis on campus food waste. On several Fridays, Kianna set up a weigh station in front of the dish room entry, getting her peers to stop and properly separate their food waste. Kianna measured and tracked changes in food waste behavior. She created reminder signage for the dishroom about proper compostables separation, and she also posted weekly performance statistics. We noted that in the days following Kianna’s weigh-ins, there was improved compostables diversion in the dishroom.

---

**Print ReLeaf**

(Typically, a certificate due to the number of pages Wells prints, for every tree’s worth of paper consumed, the Print Releaf reforestation partner our campus community selected, U.S.-based Trees Water & People, will plant a certain number of trees. Since July, Print Releaf certificates sent to us indicate that we have printed 649,617 standard pages. That paper usage equates to 78 trees that Print Releaf will add to the reforestation project on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.)
Sustainability is a decision-making framework for continuous improvement that mindfully takes into account the social, environmental, and economic impacts of our choices.

In May, we held a reception to honor graduating senior Jonathan Mills (third from left), the first major in our Sustainability degree program; he elected to minor in Environmental Science. On hand to celebrate were two students graduating with Sustainability minors. Shania Dauphainais (far left), majoring in Environmental Science and minoring in Sustainability, was awarded the Cayuga Watershed Prize in Environmental Studies. Shania has been a leader of the Wells Campus Greens and FORCES clubs and was the Aurora Farmers Market manager in 2016. Yequarah Conner (center, in red) expects to graduate in December with a major in Business and double minors in Sustainability and Sustainable Food Systems. Flanking our graduating seniors are some of the faculty contributing courses to the Sustainability program: Marian Brown, director, Center for Sustainability (3rd from left); Kent Klitgaard, professor of Economics and Sustainability (5th from left); Laura McClusky, professor of Sociology (4th from right); Niamh O’Leary, professor of Environmental Science (2nd from right); and Milene Morfei, professor of Psychology and Sustainability (far right). Now that we are a full four years into our Sustainability academic program, it’s terrific to see more students partaking of our unique offering. Not pictured are three other seniors graduating with sustainability minors: Angela Paul (Sustainable Food Systems); Eliza Schwab and Carley Legg (Sustainability). See more about each on page 2.

Wells FORCES club members have started seedlings of pollinator plants in the Zabriskie greenhouse this spring, intended for transplantation later this year into a new pollinator garden at Long Point State Park, just down the road. FORCES, which is short for Friends of Recreation, Conservation and Environmental Stewardship, is an ongoing collegiate partnership with staff from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. FORCES clubs perform volunteer service at area state parks like litter cleanups and trail maintenance. At the Awards dinner in May, FORCES was recognized with the award for Outstanding Volunteer Service, proving once again that this student organization is a [positive] force to be reckoned with.