

Newsletter of the **Center for Sustainability and the Environment** at Wells College.



The EPA Green Power Partnership (GPP) was created in 2001 to protect human health and the environment by increasing organizations' voluntary green power use to advance the American green power market and develop those renewable electricity sources. Since GPPs inception, the voluntary market has grown by nearly 5,000% — partners' use represents nearly 40% of the US voluntary green power market. Wells has been a Green Power Partner for several years and we recently updated our calendar year 2019 report. At the annual meeting of the New York Coalition of Sustainability in Higher Education, we reported that Wells is one of only 21 NYS GP Partner schools and among only 8 schools in the state to purchase 100% green power for our electrical needs.

Carrying On Despite COVID-19

It is a measure of just how disruptive the COVID-19 pandemic has been on normal functioning here at the college that we are combining our Spring and Summer *Wellspring* issues.

We successfully offered several of our scheduled sustainability presentations and events in Spring 2020. We hosted two of our five *Sustainability Perspectives* series presentations. On February 3, Fernando deAragón, director of the *Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council*, kicked off our spring semester, presenting "Getting Where We Need to Be: The Imperative of Sustainable Transportation", offering a multifaceted view of the environmental, economic and social benefits of various modes of alternative transportation. On February 10, Tomasz Falkowski, postdoctoral fellow at the *Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future* at Cornell, returned to provide an interesting look at "swidden" agriculture, also known as "slash-and-burn", a practice employed by indigenous Mayan farmers in southern Mexico which has unexpected social and ecosystem service benefits. Tomasz first presented on his doctoral research at Wells in 2014, almost exactly five years to the day of this visit.



In early February, Terence Cryan, Chairman of the Board of *Ocean Power Technologies*, returned to campus to present "Can Harnessing the Power of the Ocean Change the World?" in the *Sustainable Business* speaker series. Terry provided an update on his company's technologies that harness the endlessly renewable power from ocean wave energy. Terry was one of the first presenters in the then-newly-created *Sustainable Business* speaker series in March 2015, a fruitful collaboration between the *Sustainability Center* and the *Sullivan Center for Business and Entrepreneurship* (see new *Sustainable Business* minor, pg. 2).



We hosted two *Sustainability Film* screenings. On February 19, we showed the film "Blue" about the many deleterious impacts humans are having on the ocean and how we must and can change our unsustainable practices. On March 4, we hosted "Two Degrees – The Point of No Return", which dramatically demonstrated the future impacts of unchecked increases in greenhouse gas emissions and efforts to keep global temperatures under the two-degrees-Celsius increase we are currently on track to exceed.



These were the events we held before Spring Break – the time when COVID-19 roared ashore in the United States, especially into New York State, wreaking havoc on life as we knew it. At that point, the world changed, perhaps forever in some ways. While the college grappled with how to deal with the impacts of COVID-19, it first extended Spring Break by a week, and eventually was forced to make the painful decision to close the campus for on-site instruction through the remainder of the semester.



Given that campus closure, we regretfully canceled all the presenters in the *Sustainability Perspectives* and *Sustainable Business* series and nixed further *Sustainability Film* screenings. We are sorry to have been unable to learn more about the *Finger Lakes Climate Fund* from Gay Nicholson, or the impact of climate change on sports from Sandra Steingraber, or the state of the recycling industry from alumna Jennifer Porter '98, or the entrepreneurial composting operation developed by Wells alumna Tanzania Roach '99, or about sustainable urban landscape practices from Nina Bassuk. We will seek to reschedule all of these interesting expert presenters during 2020-21. We are also sorry that the *Wells Campus Greens* were unable to mount their planned *Earth Week* observance this year.



While we eventually grew more confident in using online hosting platforms to create our own educational "webinars", we didn't avail ourselves of this option this spring to host speakers virtually. However, given the uncertainty about bringing speakers to campus in the Fall, when we reschedule our series events, we may opt to offer these sustainability talks on-line, which has the added advantage of opening up opportunities for others to "attend" - something alumni have requested - and even to record talks for later viewing. So the COVID-19 pandemic is proving to be a mixed blessing. It has forced us to become more "tech-savvy" and think differently about how to offer the knowledge of our sustainability experts to our campus – and wider - community.

When the campus closed, like all other Spring courses, the SUS 195 *Critical Thinking about Sustainability* and SUS 385 *Psychology of Sustainability* classes shifted immediately to "remote learning" for the remainder of the semester. For *Critical Thinking about Sustainability*, students peruse a list of sustainability-related "eligible events" and choose six to attend; they must do additional research on the sustainability topic presented in the event and write a guided reflection paper.

continued on page 4

In this issue:

Student Sustainability Accomplishments	2
Academic program modifications	2
New Sustainability-themed courses	2
RecycleMania 2020 Results	3
Wells College Seed Exchange adapts to COVID	3
COVID-19 impacts, continued from page 1	4
Sustainability Center Outreach Activities	4

Student Sustainability Accomplishments

The student/faculty duo of Jackie Allen '20 and Dr. Susan Tabrizi, professor of Politics, swept three of the categories in this spring's *Be Your Own Boss (BYOB)* business idea competition - *Grand Prize*, *Social Impact* prize, and the *Most Sustainable Business* prize - for their concept for the *Lansing Lunchbox*. The pair have been working extensively this Spring to provide support for food insecure families in the Lansing NY area. Professor Tabrizi is even following her passion for community sustainability; she stepped down from her faculty position at the end of this academic year to work full-time to further refine the program.



If you needed proof that students who “clean up” in the *BYOB* competition go on to do great things, Patience Korpo Koenig '22, environmental science major and sustainable food systems minor, was named a winner of the *Global Impact Challenge* during the 25th United Nations Youth Assembly in February. Patience won \$1,000 in seed funding to help her develop her idea for *PK Eco Storage*—which repurposes old shipping containers, outfitting them with solar powered refrigeration to prolong the shelf life of produce grown in her home country of Liberia. Patience also won the *Social Impact* prize and the *Most Sustainable Business* prize in the 2019 *BYOB* competition.



Academic Program Modifications

A number of sustainability-related academic programs were modified and one new minor was approved.

Environmental Science was revised to 1) make the best use of what faculty are actually teaching that is most relevant to the field; 2) ensure adequate enrollment in courses that are offered; 3) increase the attractiveness of the major to students and improve ease of transfer pathways for students from community colleges; 4) add a course in climate science to reflect the importance of the topic in modern environmental science. ENVR 204 **The Climate System** (3 sem. hrs.) was added to the Environmental Science major requirements and added as an elective for the minor.

Sustainability major changes: MATH 151 Statistics was removed as a requirement and replaced by ANTH 231 *Culture and Water*, which was formerly an elective. FNIS 285/SUS 285 *Indigenous Environmental Activism and Resistance* (see description below) was added to major electives. WGS 285 *Gender, Environment, and Sustainability*, which is no longer offered, was removed from the list of major electives.

SUS 385 **Psychology of Sustainability**, delivered as a special topics course in Spring 2020, has been approved as a permanent Sustainability course offering, and cross listed as Psychology 335. This course is a requirement of the Sustainability major and an elective for the Sustainability minor.

The **Sustainable Food System** minor now requires completion of either FOOD 201 *Introduction to Gardening* or FOOD 202 *Introduction to Cooking!*

Sustainable Business minor approved - Academic justification for creation of this new program was that this minor would enable stronger connections among several departments in the College (e.g., Sustainability, Sociology, Psychology, Economics, and Political Science). This minor would be open to business majors and non-majors. Minor description: The minor in sustainable business integrates the world of business with the environmental, social and cultural aspects of sustainability. Students gain understanding of the impacts of business on society and the challenges and opportunities associated with creating socially responsible businesses. Required courses include:

- | | |
|---|---|
| SUS 101 Introduction to Sustainability | BUS 100 Principles of Business |
| BUS 201 Principles of Management | BUS 365 Business Sustainability & Social Responsibility |
| BUS 306 Business Ethics (see description below) | BUS 203 Social Entrepreneurship |
| SBS 290-390 Internship in Sustainable Business | |

One additional elective course from among:

- | | |
|--|--|
| BUS 250 Innovation and Creative Problem Solving | PSY 306 Organizational Behavior |
| ECON 325 Ecological Economics | ECON 326 Energy and the Economy |
| ECON 255 Political Economy of Globalization | ENVR 340 Sustainable Agriculture |
| PSY 335/SUS 335 Psychology of Sustainability | SOC 277 Social Inequality: Class and Ethnicity |
| POLS 213 Sustainability and Comparative Environmental Policy | |

New Sustainability-Themed Courses

Several new courses were developed and approved for delivery during academic year 2020-21:

BUS 306 Business Ethics - This course explores foundational concepts of ethics and discusses application to contemporary business and sustainability issues. Students will discuss, debate, and critically analyze the practical application of these concepts to issues such as corporate social responsibility, ethical supply chains, and workplace leadership issues like inclusion and diversity, sexual harassment, and whistleblowing.

This *First Nations and Indigenous Studies* (FNIS) class was approved for Fall 2020 and will be cross-listed with Sustainability. **Indigenous Environmental Activism & Resistance** will be taught by Dan Hill, a member of the Heron Clan of the Cayuga Nation and a former member of the *Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force*, who will provide first hand knowledge of Indigenous frameworks that are not offered in



our current curriculum and life-long knowledge of traditional approaches to addressing climate change.

PSY 285 *Special Topic: Disaster and Resilience* Disaster is the crisis, trauma is the result, and resilience mitigates these two. Psychologically there is little difference between a natural disaster (hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, viruses) and a human caused disaster (war, genocide, colonization, capitalism, climate change, sexual violence). Emotions of helplessness, captivity, terror, being overpowered, are intensely experienced whether a “natural” or “human” caused disaster. While government policies and actions differ in responses to disasters, psychological coping and resilience follow similar pathways to recovery for short-term, long-term, and chronic trauma. This course will focus on the psychological processes involved in resilience for coping with and recovering from disasters. We will pay particular attention to the intersectional aspects that intertwine “natural” and “human” disasters.





RecycleMania 2020 Results

Wells did quite well again this year in several categories in this friendly competition and benchmarking tool for college recycling programs. Over an 8-week period each spring, colleges report the amount of various recyclable materials and landfill trash collected each week and participants are ranked in various categories. This year's competition began February 2nd and was slated to end March 28th. Due to COVID that closed most campuses in mid-March, the competition period was shortened to only 5 weeks, ending March 7. Below is how Wells stacked up:

The **Diversion** category combines trash and each of the core recyclable materials, plus food organics to determine a school's recycling rate as a percentage of its overall waste generation. Posting a 45.746% recycling rate, Wells ranked #46 nationally out of 145 participating schools, and came in at #3 among 17 New York schools reporting in this category. This rate represented an 11% reduction from our all-time high 2019 recycling rate of 51.39%, but we were not surprised to see a reduction in our recycling rate, given the substantial changes in global recycling markets this past year.

In the **Per Capita** category, schools compete to see which can collect the largest combined amount of paper, cardboard and bottles and cans on a per person basis. Wells ranked #11 out of 190 participating schools, and ranked #1 out of 18 participating New York schools. At 22.678 pounds of recyclables per person, our *per capita* rate was significantly down from our 2019 high of 39.548 pounds of recyclables per person, which we also attribute to the global recycling market collapse that necessitated us to re-educate our community to stop recycling most single-use plastic items starting in Fall 2019. Our national and statewide rankings were unchanged from 2019, signaling that participating institutions faced similar recycling challenges this year.

In the **Waste Minimization** category, schools compete to see which can produce the **least** amount of recyclables, food organics, and trash on a per person basis. This competition focuses on efforts to reduce the total amount of waste generated overall, including recyclables. In this category, more is decidedly **not** better. Wells ranked #168 out of 173 participating schools, posting a whopping 134.93 pounds per person; we ranked #18 among 19 New York State schools. We are diverting a lot of material to recycling or compost processing – which is good! - but as a community, we still generate WAY too much total waste.

In the **Total Recycling** category, schools collecting the most total pounds of recyclables score the best, so tiny Wells can never be in the top tier. For reference: #10 ranked SUNY Buffalo collected over 1 *MILLION* pounds of recyclables in this 5-week period. In sharp contrast, Wells came in at #146 out of 221 participating schools, collecting 41,146 pounds of recyclables. We placed #17 among 21 NY schools, holding our own considering we are by far the smallest NY school to compete. Surprisingly, even with a 3-week shorter competition period than in 2019, we collected significantly more recyclables this year (2019: 32,775 pounds, which last year found us ranked at #181 nationally and #17 statewide).

In **Food Service Organics**, results are based on points allotted for quantities of organic material donated to people, fed to animals, used as biofuels, or composted. Out of 140 schools reporting in this category, we scored #11 nationally and #3 among the 16 New York State schools. We earned 20.53 points from our efforts to divert food waste to compost collection and to recycle used fryer oil for biofuel. As good as these numbers are compared to other schools, it means we still waste too much edible food.

Wells participated in **E-waste electronics recycling**, which tracks the amount of computers, printers, TVs, and other consumer electronics collected. Only 24 schools competed in this category this year, which is likely due to the shortened competition period (last year, 148 schools participated). Wells came in #7 nationally, reporting 525 pounds of total e-waste (0.78 pounds per person) and we ranked #3 among the four participating New York State schools.

Wells participated in the **Game Day Basketball Challenge** for the first time. Spring recycling intern Brittany Anderson collected and weighed trash, recyclables and food waste at the end of the final women's team home game against Penn College on February 22. Only 29 schools participated in this competition; Wells ranked #13 nationally, posting a 71.91% recyclables diversion; we were #1 in NY.

While we welcome public recognition of our recycling efforts, *RecycleMania* is more useful as it provides a valuable annual snapshot of our progress and points out areas needing attention, like minimizing our waste generation and addressing unnecessary food waste. Wells' successful showing again this year is a tribute to several campus departments – Facilities, Wells Dining, and Information Technology – who established and maintain great recycling infrastructure systems our campus community has rallied to support.

Wells College Seed Exchange Adapts to COVID

This year, due to the great work of intern Kaya Perry '22, the *Wells College Seed Exchange* had more seed than ever to distribute. In 2019, we had ~1,800 packets of seed donated to us; Kaya obtained more than 3,250 packets of seed from 18 seed companies to distribute.

Kaya organized the seeds in an old card catalog in the Library and publicly opened the exchange on February 25 by sending notices to the community through various electronic channels. We request that *Seed Exchange* patrons enter contact info in a "seed sign out" book so we can assess how many folks we serve. Starting in February, our sign-out book started to fill up with entries, and up to March 20, when the campus closed due to the COVID pandemic, 45 individuals had visited and scooped up garden seeds. But we knew there was still a **lot** of seed left in the exchange, with no way to access it. Center director Marian Brown cleared with Librarian Carol Henderson to be let into the Library to "liberate" the remaining seed inventory. Marian took home three full bags of seed packets and re-set up the *Seed Exchange* on her dining room table. She created an on-line spreadsheet listing the remaining inventory of hundreds of seed packets and invited patrons to email her their "mail order" requests that she would sanitarily package and send out, updating the inventory after each order. This mail order seed system allowed us to greatly extend our Exchange outreach. She posted to various regional listserves including *Sustainable Tompkins*, *Moravia Garden Club*, and the *Tompkins County Human Services Coalition*. Seeing heightened interest by folks wishing to start "COVID Victory Gardens", she posted info about the exchange to a new *Tompkins Mutual Aid* contact group specifically formed to address COVID concerns and connect those in need with sources of support. In 2019, the seed sign-out book showed 62 patrons using the exchange (although we know that probably more visited to take seed but didn't leave their name). This year, added to the 45 patrons visiting the Exchange in person, 78 mail-order requests meant we supported over 120 patrons (plus we gained a vastly expanded patron email list for future exchange notices). Once mail order requests ceased, the rest of the seed was passed on to *Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County*, which distributed seeds at food pantry pickups.





Center for Sustainability and the Environment

Marian Brown, Director
Wells College

170 Main Street

Office: 213 Zabriskie Hall

Aurora NY 13026

Phone: 315-364-3304

E-mail: mbrown@wells.edu or
sustainability@wells.edu

We're on the Web:
www.wells.edu/sustainability



Wells Center for
Sustainability and
the Environment



@Wells Sust Center

Sustainability is a decision-making framework for continuous improvement that mindfully takes into account the social, environmental, and economic impacts of our choices.

COVID-19 impacts, continued from page 1

Three of those six reflections were due before Spring Break, so only three events remained for each student in the course to “attend”. In a “normal” semester, we only allow two of the six papers to cover webinars – four of the eligible events must be on-campus events, like *Sustainability Perspectives*, *Sustainable Business*, and relevant *Science Colloquium* talks, to encourage attendee engagement with the speakers. With the cancellation of on-campus sustainability events, we loosened that restriction such that all remaining “eligible events” were those that could be accessed virtually, including related film titles downloadable through our Library and topical webinars hosted by a diverse array of external organizations. This allowed students to still “curate” their own learning in a wide variety of sustainability-related areas, like recycling, composting and waste management, sustainable food systems, climate change, environmental justice, sustainable business practices, and the circular economy.

The lively in-class discussions during the first block of SUS 385 *Psychology of Sustainability* shifted to an asynchronous, posted discussion questions/response format. Students were assigned to lead class “discussions”, posting their own thought-provoking questions based on the readings. The class team projects, selected before Spring Break, became “feasibility studies” – what would the team have done *IF* they could have completed their project, applying what they learned about human psychology to shift behavior to be more sustainable. Teams identified sustainability challenges including reducing shower times, inciting reusable beverage mugs in the GRIND Café, and educating peers about more sustainable menstrual products. Hopefully, some projects can be implemented in the future.

Wells offered a number of summer on-line courses to continuing students. SUS 101 *Introduction to Sustainability* was offered, with the class modified to be delivered in a virtual, asynchronous format, with in-class lectures pre-recorded for access on the students’ schedule. Adapting this course to online delivery now will help if courses must continue in or move abruptly to a “remote learning” format in Fall. Making this course available as an online option could prove useful if the college can offer summer classes to others outside the institution, as our Sustainability major is one of only about a dozen such programs offered in the state. So, COVID has forced us to adapt and think outside the box. But it also opened up some opportunities for us to do what we do differently, perhaps even better!



Sustainability Center Outreach Activities

The steering committee of the *New York Coalition for Sustainability in Higher Education* (NYCSHE) named Marian Brown, *Sustainability Center* director, to be its representative to the conference planning committee for the *State of NY Sustainability* conference, to be held at Cornell. Originally, the conference was to be held live in Ithaca in October, but due to COVID, the conference will move to a virtual platform. The NYCSHE liaison provides insight and advice to the organizing committee; Brown has served on the conference planning committee for the past three state conferences. For NYCSHE’s annual meeting in June, Brown presented on the collective impact of participating NYS schools in three national sustainability programs: *RecycleMania*, *EPA Green Power Partnership*, and *AASHE STARS*. Wells participates in all three programs. Brown explained to the virtual audience that the one year collective impact of just the eight schools that choose to buy 100% green power—including Wells—is the single-year purchase of over 612 MILLION kWhs of electricity generated from renewable sources—primarily from wind, but also from solar and biomass.



Brown joined the *Cayuga Climate Action* community activism group and now heads that group’s Education committee. She organized a Community Solar information session on March 10, featuring Chris Carrick, energy program manager for *CNY Regional Planning and Development Board*. COVID forced the postponement of a planned *Climate Smart Communities* presentation and a co-sponsored *HeatSmart CNY* workshop at the OpenDore Museum in Sherwood. Brown has been invited to join an Energy Committee, a partnership between the *Council of Independent Colleges and Universities* (CICU) and the *NYS Energy Research and Development Authority* (NYSERDA) to increase education about sustainability programs offered by the state and connect campuses that are at the beginning of their sustainability journey with those that have more experience. The Energy Committee in particular will identify and address emerging energy issues and opportunities for private colleges.



Citing her subject matter expertise in both sustainability and institutional procurement, Brown was invited by AASHE staffers to review presentation proposals related to sustainable purchasing for the Fall 2020 conference of the *Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education*. She was also asked to evaluate the three dozen submissions for the Campus Sustainability Achievement category for universities and colleges with over 10,000 FTE. Brown was invited to present on Wells’ work during *Greening USA’s* annual meeting on May 1st. Titled “*The VIRTUAL Big Tent: - Advocacy in Challenging Times*”, each presenter was asked to explain what we normally do, how we are adapting our work to COVID, and what recommendations we offer for other CNY sustainability advocates moving forward.

Brown proposed to write a monthly *Sustainability Stars* column to run in the *Auburn Citizen*, showcasing area businesses and organizations that have incorporated more sustainable practices in their operations. The concept was accepted, and her first column detailed the environmentally responsible viticulture practices and sustainable business activities employed by *Treleaven Wines/ King Ferry Vineyards*. Her second column showcased the many sustainability practices utilized by the *Pure Market* group in Auburn. The column was suspended during COVID, but hopefully can resume now that Central New York has moved into Phase 4 of the COVID “Pause” reopening plan.