

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



We have begun our comprehensive campus sustainability assessment using the *Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System (STARS)*, in which Wells earned a GOLD rating in 2017. Using our 2021 academic catalog and including curricular changes approved by faculty during the year, we inventoried the number of courses with sustainability-focused or sustainability-related content. We were very pleased and quite surprised to find a 30% increase from our 2017 STARS assessment. Currently, 27% of all our courses meet this criteria for incorporation of sustainability thinking and practice. *Well done, all!*

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Sustainability Scholars Clean Up in Honors Awards

During the 2021 Honors Convocation, held virtually in May, our sustainability academic program scholars walked away with a number of top academic honors. The **Sustainability Prize** is awarded to a graduating senior majoring in sustainability. This prize is given to the student who has demonstrated consistent excellence in the knowledge and skills necessary to understand the multifaceted origins of and solutions to environmental, social and economic problems. This year, there are four graduating Sustainability majors who all – in their own unique way – met and exceeded those prize award criteria. All four of these terrific Sustainability majors are ending their Wells career with great GPAs, all within a few points of one another. So, we awarded the Sustainability prize this year to all four of these students. They are:



Dana Grover, a Sustainability major with a Management minor, completed her degree requirements this past December. Dana worked for a season as the *Aurora Farmers Market* manager, and she was on the *GRIND Café* management team. Dana did her sustainability internship with *Heat Smart Tompkins*, a non-profit organization promoting cleaner, more efficient heat pump technology for heating and cooling homes and businesses. Dana's capstone project followed on from that internship as she took a deep dive to explore the potential to integrate heat pump technology into buildings here at Wells. Given her experience and knowledge in this area, Dana notified us that she has been hired as an Energy Analyst. Dana was also inducted into the Wells College chapter of **Phi Beta Kappa**, which recognizes students for academic excellence, breadth of study outside the major field and knowledge of mathematics or science and of a language other than English. Also taken into account are the character, achievements, originality, and breadth of interest of each candidate.

Brittney Meade, who double majored in Sustainability and Business, also interned as a Market Manager for the *Aurora Farmers Market* for one season where she became interested in local farm-to-table opportunities. Brittney further explored her growing passion for enterprises utilizing locally-grown produce with her Business internship in which she structured a business plan for a restaurant focused on using local sources of supply. Brittney carried that early work in both her Business and Sustainability internships into her Sustainability capstone, in which she conducted a market analysis, researched possible regional produce suppliers, and identified sources of start-up funding to get her farm-to-table restaurant concept off the ground. Brittney was also awarded the **Outstanding Business Major** prize, and the **Susan W. Sullivan and Pike Sullivan Entrepreneurship Award**.



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Wells Urges Strong Climate Action

President Jonathan Gibraltar joined other institutions to sign a higher education sector letter to incoming President Biden to pledge support for a strong 2030 U.S. climate target pursuant to the Paris Agreement. Wells was one of only 21 liberal arts institutions out of 75 collegiate signatories to endorse the letter that reads in part: *Through our curriculum, research, and operations, we will continue to be engines of innovation driving climate solutions in this country, and around the world, in the years ahead. We know that we need to address the climate crisis at the pace and scale it demands. Climate science, much of which is generated at our institutions, tells us that the United States must adopt an emissions reduction target that will place the country on a credible pathway to reach net-zero emissions by 2050. We, therefore, call on the administration to adopt the ambitious and attainable target of cutting our nation's greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% below 2005 levels by 2030... Higher education institutions are well-positioned to continue accelerating the nation's climate progress with your strong national leadership.*

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

March 24, 2021

Dear President Biden:

We, the undersigned higher education institutions, applaud your administration's demonstrated commitment to address climate change. We support your re-entry of the United States into the Paris Agreement, and for making climate action a central pillar of our federal government's activity.

As institutions that are educating the next generation of our country's leadership, we care deeply about the future of the United States and the health of its people and economy. Many of our colleges and universities are the largest employers in our cities and towns, and play a key role in the long-term viability of our communities.

Given the central role higher education plays in society, we affirm that solving global challenges, like the challenges posed by global climate change, is a key part of our educational missions. Through our curriculum, research, and operations, we will continue to be engines of innovation driving climate solutions in this country, and around the world, in the years ahead.

We know that we need to address the climate crisis at the pace and scale it demands. Climate science, much of which is generated at our institutions, tells us that the United States must adopt an emissions reduction target that will place the country on a credible pathway to reach net-zero emissions by 2050.

We, therefore, call on the administration to adopt the ambitious and attainable target of cutting our nation's greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% below 2005 levels by 2030.

Many of us have set our own institutional emissions reduction goals in line with the Paris Agreement. In some cases, we have been even more ambitious and have already achieved carbon neutrality. As you raise the bar for our national target, we will continue to ratchet up our activities to move the United States forward on this journey. While implementing an effective national climate strategy will require everyone's effort, your leadership will provide us a north star with a bold 2030 target.

As both sector actors, and enablers of action across other sectors in the economy, our higher education institutions are well-positioned to continue accelerating the nation's climate progress with your strong national leadership.

Faculty Accomplishments



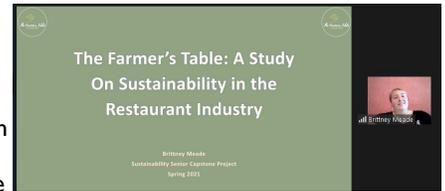
Kent Klitgaard, professor of Economics and Sustainability since 1981, retired at the end of this

academic year. Over his thirty year career, he taught a wide array of courses ranging from ecological economics, political economy, globalization, and energy and the economy. Kent co-authored *Energy and the Wealth of Nations*, which has become a preferred text in the field of ecological economics. Intriguing titles of some of Kent's published works include: "The Struggle for Meaningful Work"; "Hydrocarbons and the Illusion of Sustainability"; and "What every conservation biologist should know about economic theory." This quote, prominently displayed on Kent's faculty page, sums up his teaching and professional philosophy: "Anyone who believes that an economy can grow exponentially inside a finite planet is either a madman or an economist." Kent has been a stalwart component of the sustainability academic team and he will be sorely missed. Best wishes on your next adventures, Kent!

Marian Brown, director of the Center for Sustainability and the Environment, was invited to join a new Sustainability working group within the Upstate NY College Consortium (UNYCC) to share best practices and ideas among member institutions. Brown was also invited to participate on the Climate Change subcommittee of the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network, with the goal to help that organization educate the public about impacts of climate change on land within this Finger Lakes region and to identify tools and efforts to mitigate negative impacts to the dozens of communities and municipalities within the watershed.

Student Sustainability Presentations

The end of each semester is always a busy time for presentations of student work, and this Spring was no exception. Senior Sustainability major **Brittney Meade** presented her capstone project titled "The Farmers Table—A Study on Sustainability in the Restaurant Industry." In her semester-long in-depth research project, Brittney explored what "green" practices are employed by successful restaurants, what connections those practices have with the so-called three pillars of sustainability (social, environmental, economic), and she identified successful examples of green restaurants, including more local enterprises. She did all this with an eye toward developing her own "farm-to-table" restaurant here in the area in the future.



Student teams in the cross-listed SUS 335/PSY 335 *Psychology of Sustainability* class presented the final results of their projects to try to foster more sustainable behaviors among targeted members of the campus community. The *Campus Compost Collection* team of **Nicole D'Aurizio '22**, **Becky Husner '23**, and **Nash '23** piloted compost collection in several residence hall areas, including providing individual compost bins to several student rooms, and placing a large compost collection bin in the Weld Hall kitchen. Students responded very positively to having this opportunity to responsibly divert compostable food waste from landfill trash in their living spaces. The team will share the results of this study with Residential Life leaders to see if we might move from pilot phase to permanent operational integration. The *Psychology of Menstrual Cup Use* team of **Abby Frey '22**, **Feleesha Jones '23**, and **Dayhana Jerez '22** worked to overcome the many psychological barriers to converting from disposable menstrual products like tampons and sanitary napkins to reusable menstrual cups. The team distributed menstrual cups to more than a dozen amenable study participants and provided education on the proper use of and the many benefits offered by these safe, reusable products, especially in saving money and reducing waste. The team surveyed participants after using the menstrual cups



for at least one cycle and found that most study participants were sold on the idea and would continue to use them. The *Water Conservation* team of **Trevor Stein '21**, **Alisa Hines '21**, and **Liliana Talbot-Gould '23**, had a markedly less successful project experience. They learned the hard way that getting people to do something as seemingly simple as to record their shower duration, using their cell phone timer app, with the goal to successively reduce the amount of water consumed, is quite difficult. The reasons why humans behave as they do is complex and often hard to understand, and even more complicated to try to modify. But we learn valuable lessons even from failing to meet our intended goals. The class learned behavior change strategies based upon psychological theories that may work on other populations in other settings in the future.



Sustain-a-Cell Project

Students in *Biology of Organisms* again took part in this assignment in which students are instructed to use "found materials" (recycled or landfill trash items) or natural materials to create a cell model. We incent the best efforts in several categories with Dining Dollars prizes, including for the *Most Effective Use of Found Materials*, *Most Effective Use of Natural Materials*, and the *Most Amusing Use of Found and/or Natural Materials*. We also award a Grand Prize, which was won by **Samuel DalCais '21**. Their entry was cited for its elegant simplicity and creative integration of both found and natural materials, including some intricate construction of



items representing cell organelles. These *Sustain-a-Cell* results were covered in the Spring newsletter of the New York State Association for Reduction, Reuse & Recycling (NYSAR3).

BYOB Sustainability Prize

Business major **James DeLuna '22** was awarded the Sustainability Prize during this year's *Be Your Own Boss* business idea competition. James' idea to repurpose defunct shopping malls as affordable housing for young professionals was well thought-out and certainly timely, as so many malls, warehouses and school buildings are standing vacant due to COVID-related economic downturns coupled with the exponential rise of internet commerce. Other business ideas considered for this Sustainability prize category included senior Leah Jezer-Nelson's concept for an organic farm at Wells College, and the rooftop gardens idea for NYC skyscrapers proposed by the three-person team led by senior Brittney Meade.



Wells College Seed Exchange 2021 Done

The Wells College Seed Exchange was bigger and better than ever with over 6,000 packets of seed donated by 14 seed companies. We supported over 150 patrons by the time the seed exchange was liquidated in May. This year's all-virtual seed exchange meant that we were able to meet the seed needs of gardeners from farther-flung communities (including some folks out of state!). This raised our postage costs substantially, but also raised the profile and positive perception of Wells College among a much wider area than our prior on-site exchange could do. We did ask that those requestors who lived within a reasonable distance come to campus to pick up their orders - and most did. Because of the online order process, we also received more information on who and where our seed exchange patrons were located which helped in collecting testimonials from those seeking free seeds for area food pantries, community gardens, beautification projects, and youth projects. This is invaluable information to present as we approach seed companies for future donations of seed for our program.



PrintReleaf Joins Trillion Trees campaign

PrintReleaf has joined the Trillion Trees program with the goal to restore one trillion trees. The Trillion Trees campaign (1t.org) is part of the World Economic Forum's work to accelerate nature-based solutions in support of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. 1t.org aims to conserve, restore and grow one trillion trees by 2030. Scientists estimate that nature-based solutions, such as reforestation, can provide up to 1/3 of the emissions reductions required by 2030 to meet Paris Agreement targets. What does this mean for Wells? Our print management contract partnership with Toshiba, which in turn partners with PrintReleaf to plant trees based upon the number of pages we print each year, means that our Wells community will now have this larger, global emissions reduction benefit.



Wells Scores Well in National Recycling Competition



The 2021 *Campus Race to Zero Waste (CRZW)* competition results are in and Wells did quite well again this year in several categories. Formerly called *RecycleMania*, our participation in this friendly competition for college and university recycling programs provides a platform to promote our waste reduction activities and helps us track our performance improvement. Over an 8-week period each spring, colleges across the U.S. measure and report the amount of recyclable materials and landfill trash collected each week. This year's CRZW competition period began January 31st and ended on March 27th. We know the COVID-19 pandemic forced many campuses into remote teaching situations which reduced the number of participants. Below is how Wells stacked up in individual CRZW categories this year.

The **Diversions** category combines trash and each of the core recyclable materials (paper, bottles and cans, cardboard), plus food organics to determine a school's recycling rate as a percentage of its overall waste generation. Posting a 51.31% recycling rate, **Wells ranked #8 nationally out of 102 participating schools, and came in at #1 among 13 New York State schools** in this category. This rate represented a 22% increase over our 2020 recycling rate of 46.96%, although is less than our all-time high 2017 rate of 54.05%. We are a little surprised to see this increase in our recycling rate, given the substantial changes in global recycling markets that have been occurring over the past two years, coupled with the reduction in our resident campus population due to COVID.

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 #9 out of 125 participating schools, and ranked #1 out of 17 New York State schools.** At 36.425 pounds of recyclables per person, our per capita rate was significantly up (61%!) from 2020's 22.678 pounds per person, and is close to our 2019 record high of 39.548 pounds of recyclables per person. We attribute this increase in part to our ongoing re-educational efforts to "recycle the right things right".

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. Where other categories recognize schools' efforts to divert the most recyclables, this competition focuses on efforts to reduce the amount of waste generated overall, including recyclables. In this category, more is decidedly not better. Wells ranked #130 out of 153 participating schools, posting a whopping total of 102.44 pounds of waste per person. This sounds bad, but we are also down 24% from last year's high of nearly 135 pounds per person. We ranked #16 among 18 New York State schools reporting in this category. 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. COVID has really magnified this problem with much higher generation of single-use waste items.

In the **Total Recycling** category, schools collecting the most total pounds of recyclables score the best, so tiny Wells can never expect to be in the top tier. For reference: Top 10-ranked Cornell University collected over 700,000 pounds of recyclables in this 8-week period. In sharp contrast, Wells came in at #109 out of 156 participating schools, collecting 36,163 pounds of recyclables. We placed #14 among 18 NY schools, holding our own considering we are by far the smallest NY school to compete each year.

We competed in the Targeted Materials category of **Food Service Organics** again this year. Results are calculated based upon points allotted for quantities of organic material donated to people, fed to animals, used as biofuels, or composted. This year, the CRZW competition awarded additional points for our implementation of food waste minimization strategies like trayless dining, using smaller serving plates and compostable tableware in catering, offering reusable take-out boxes, and making some meals to order. Out of 102 schools reporting in this category, **Wells scored #12 nationally and #1 among the 12 New York State schools** who reported this material. We earned 70.93 points from our efforts to divert food waste to compost collection and to recycle used fryer oil for biofuel.

This year, we did not compete in either the *E-waste* recycling effort (we didn't have enough accumulated during the competition period to call our e-waste recycler), and no schools participated in the *Game Day Challenge*, due to COVID. While we welcome public recognition of our recycling efforts, the *Campus Race to Zero Waste* competition is more useful to us in that it brings added focus internally to the importance and value of recycling and waste reduction efforts. CRZW provides a useful snapshot of our progress year over year and points out areas needing attention, like minimizing our waste generation and addressing sources of unnecessary food waste. Wells' successful showing this year is a tribute to Facilities and Wells Dining who have established and maintained great recycling infrastructure systems which our campus community has rallied to support. We expect our Wells community to *keep pitchin' in* - into the right bins,



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

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The Center for Sustainability donated a "Green Goodie Basket", filled with more sustainable cleaning and personal care products, for the gift basket raffle offered during the annual Sap Run/Walk fundraiser for Healing H'Arts Equestrian Center on May 1st. Healing H'Arts promotes physical and emotional wellness using horses as a therapeutic tool. Owner Kirsta Malone, a certified Level II Therapist in Hippotherapy, also hosts and teaches Horseback Riding classes for Wells College Physical Education credit.



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

Sustainability Scholars, continued from page 1



Cheyenne Nowalk, who double majored in Environmental Science and Sustainability, did her Sustainability internship with her high school in Cincinnatus NY. She worked with school administrators to assess their overall waste management issues with special focus on disposable service ware in their cafeteria program. Cheyenne seized the opportunity to return to Cincinnatus to do her Sustainability capstone project research, this time looking at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the school's waste management practices, and offering recommendations to school leaders on how to reduce their waste production post-pandemic, especially with new state mandates eliminating the use of Styrofoam food service products. Cheyenne was also awarded the **Wells Woman in Science Prize** and inducted into **Phi Beta Kappa**.

Sustainability major **Kaya Perry** has been actively engaged with sustainability both in academic settings but also through her work as the Sustainability Programs assistant for the Center for Sustainability for the past two years. Kaya has done research and data collection to support the college's sustainability re-assessments, and she has been invaluable as our "boots on the ground" to promote sustainability events and activities. Hers have been the "wings" enabling Orson to "fly into" bathroom stalls atop each month's Installment. Kaya's sustainability internship involved coordinating the **Wells College Seed Exchange** this year. Under Kaya's leadership, this season's seed inventory was larger than ever, with over 6,000 packets of seed donated to us, and Kaya widened our distribution of seeds to gardeners and growers throughout the region. Kaya's Sustainability capstone was an interesting synthesis of her sustainability and Psychology studies in which she analyzed whether respondents' support for and commitment to more sustainable practices was influenced by their sense of economic privation in childhood.



Computer Science major and Sustainability minor **Brenon Weed** (left) was awarded the **John Perry Prize in Math or Computer Science**. Brenon did his sustainability internship with the **La Paz Group** in Costa Rica, working to integrate sustainability practices into tourism destinations and hospitality operations.

An Environmental Science major and Sustainable Food Systems minor, international student **Patience Koenig** was awarded the **Cayuga Watershed Prize in Environmental Science** and she was also inducted into this year's class of **Phi Beta Kappa**. Patience was also a past manager of the **Aurora Farmers Market** and she won top honors in the United Nations Youth Assembly's **Global Impact Challenge** competition for her enterprise concept, **PK EcoStorage**, to repurpose shipping containers into solar-powered refrigerated storage systems to provide food preservation support for farmers bringing their produce to market in her home country of Liberia.



Sustainability Outreach Activities

In mid-April, Center for Sustainability director Marian Brown participated as a panelist in a Facebook Live Admissions event about our Sustainability and Environmental Science academic programs. Joining Brown and Environmental Science faculty Niamh O'Leary and Jackie Schnurr was alumna **Katie Sweeney '15**, Environmental Studies major and Sustainability minor, who is currently completing an Environmental Science master's program at the University of Washington. Katie was joined by current Wells students: **Feleesha Jones '23**, sustainability major, and **Derek Shea '21**, environmental science major. The group talked about the benefits of and differences between each academic program, including the internship experience and capstone project components. Katie spoke especially eloquently about how well her Wells liberal arts education and her studies in both environmental science and sustainability prepared her very well for the series of interesting environmentally-related jobs she had before starting grad school.



Thanks to our two intrepid Wells student volunteers for our first **Adopt-a-Highway** cleanup of nearby section of Route 90: **Feleesha Jones '23** and **Patience Koenig '21**. The turnout may have been small but their results were mighty! We notified all the homeowners along our "adopted" section of Route 90 (from Sunset Beach Road to the south end of Lake Road) about this **Earth Week** cleanup event. Three households accepted our invitation to clean up their own section of frontage and leave their "findings" for us to bag up with the rest of our collected material for NYS Department of Transportation highway crews to pick up.