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What are some of the topics that you cover in your courses?

We do a survey of the main foods that ancient Mesoamericans ate and domesticated, such as maize, beans, squashes, tomatoes, chili, cacao, maguey, prickly pears, zapotes, amaranth and others. We learn about these plants, their origins, evidence of their use and domestication throughout the centuries. These plants were grown and farmed, rather sustainably through indigenous agricultural practices and technologies, like slash and burn, milpa agriculture, chinampas, terrace agriculture and raised beds. We talk about the difference between a diet, a cuisine and a food tradition and how all acts of growing, preparing, and consuming food are imbued with cultural significance and meaning. We also do a survey of the main foods and crops that various world regions ate and domesticated. Through this, we learn about the archaeological evidence behind their domestication, use, consumption, and farming. We cover wheat and barley in what is now Iraq, olives and grapes along the Mediterranean, millet and rice in China, potatoes, quinoa, and peanuts from the Andes, and again, the foods we know and love from Mesoamerica. Sometimes we talk about African domesticates, such as rice (they independently domesticated rice, another variety) and fruits such as watermelon, and tubers that are a strong part of African, Caribbean, and some South American cuisines). We go around the world learning about the archaeological evidence of food domestication, production, preparation, consumption, and discard. We discuss why some foods are edible or not, why certain foods are taboo, or why some foods are breakfast foods or dinner foods. It is a fun course where we focus on the rich material culture around food from around the world.

What interested you about teaching a course about food in Meso America?

My heritage is Mesoamerican and as a Mexican person living in the US, food is a way to connect me and my children to my culture and heritage. There is no better way to do this than through food. I am also an archaeologist who focuses on ancient Mesoamerican cities, which are renowned places of food production. Modern-day western societies do not think of cities as sites of food production, but this is a mistake. In antiquity food had to be grown near where people lived, especially in ancient Mesoamerica where there were no beasts of burden or large domesticated animals (nothing larger than a dog), so it made sense to have agricultural cities. In my class we work to unpack the modern Western cultural belief that cities are not places of food production. In fact, to help the world achieve some level of sustainability, we all need to start growing food near population centers and reduce the carbon footprint of what we eat.
I love food and probably most people love and are passionate about food, so this course is a great way to teach about archaeology through a topic that is important and central to all of our lives and identities. I also love learning about the food cultures and traditions of my students, this way I keep growing as a teacher and as a citizen of the world.

**Do you have any specific sustainability learning objectives for this course?**

Learning objectives are to foster an awareness about the importance of growing food sustainably in ways that have been proven to be effective for centuries in other societies.

**How do you measure if students have increased their knowledge with regards to sustainability literacy?**

In the course we explicitly discuss how sustainability is defined and according to whose world standards. We critically discuss how this term “sustainability” has been co-opted to further a capitalist “sustainable development” agenda. We also try to define what is livability and how this is a variable and culturally constructed benchmark that is often involved in the definition of what is sustainable. Students get to discuss and write about this topic at different points of the semester.

**Which of the UN Sustainable Development Goals do you feel are addressed most in your course?**

In my class we strive to unpack top-down approaches and definitions of what is sustainable or even the fact that development should be viewed as an indisputable concept or as something that societies should strive for. We work to become conscious of the fact that these institutions, and their inception was brought forth by the interests and policies of those in power in the global north and that these institutions routinely try, perhaps with good intentions at times, to lead and dictate standards for other world regions. The goals put forth in the goals outlined by the UN seem positive and desirable, but the programs and organizations that have been set in place to bring these goals forth still adopt rather colonialist and top-down policies that have yet to reach good results.

In my class we instead turn to humanity’s thousands of years of history and experience with living in cities and in large, complex communities to take a critical look and see what worked and what did not. What proved to be sustainable? By looking at humanity’s vast archaeological record, we are much better poised to make an informed assessment of what is sustainable living and what are acceptable living standards for all.

**Is there anything else you want students to know about your courses?**

I want students to know that these courses only require you to be interested in learning, interested in humanity and interested, of course, in food. Archaeology can and should be approachable to all. A lot of people throughout my career come up to me and say they would have loved to study archaeology and although we cannot all be archaeologists; my courses are a chance to get close to archaeology and learn what it is really all about and why we archaeologists are so passionate about our discipline.
Did you know that the Office of Sustainability has been managing a campus composting program since 2014? A pilot was funded through a grant from the New York State Association for Reduction, Reuse and Recycling (NYSAR3), allowing faculty and staff to voluntarily take part in composting food waste at work. The program has grown to 20 participating offices, reducing waste and mitigating emissions. Organic waste in landfills generates methane, a potent greenhouse gas that affects air quality.

Steps to join the program:
1. Discuss with your co-workers the possibility of having a bin.
2. Request a small kitchen composting bin by emailing gogreen@albany.edu.
3. Insert the provided compostable bag and add appropriate food scraps.
4. Prepare the bin to be picked up every Friday afternoon when classes are in session by the composting interns from the Office of Sustainability.
5. The food waste is then brought to the dining hall and gets picked up by our organics hauler.

Composting provides numerous environmental benefits:
- Soil enrichment
- Contained soil remediation
- Pollution prevention
- Water conservation
- Reducing waste in landfills
- Reduces the need for fertilizers and pesticides

If you are interested in being an Office Composting Ambassador, contact us at gogreen@albany.edu. For more information check out our composting page.
The Monitoring and Evaluation of Climate Communication and Education (MECCE) Project is an international research partnership of leading scholars and agencies. The group’s goal is to advance global climate literacy and action through improving the quality and quantity of climate change education, training, and public awareness. Dr. Aaron Benavot, a Professor in the Department of Educational Policy and Leadership, is serving as a Project Lead for this ambitious endeavor.

The group recently completed a call for innovative case studies to inform policy or practice and is currently reviewing these to determine which projects will be funded. International collaborators include the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and Environment and Climate Change Canada.

In addition to the case studies, the group manages a data platform designed to be an accessible place for data and indicators. Learn more about the project here.
The UAlbany Green Scene consists of a variety of offices, individuals and student organizations. In this edition, we are featuring the student group: UAlbany Students for Sustainability (U.S.S.) which was formed in 2008. Its purpose is to serve the campus and community by initiating, coordinating, and maintaining student-driven sustainability projects on campus and in the local community. We had the pleasure of interviewing Mya Darsan, the president of the group.

For those new to UAlbany, what does your group focus on?
We are a student organization that advocates for sustainability on campus and throughout the Capital Region. We have biweekly meetings that could be educational or social. Some past events include: documentary night, planting events, clean-ups, and guest speakers.

How do you interact with the other environmental groups and the UAlbany community?
We often have collaborations with other student organizations (many of them are also a part of the Green Scene) and with local groups. We’ve gone on tours of the Radix Ecological Center in Albany and Dr. Gary Kleppel’s (former Biology professor) farm in Knox.

What are the central values and goals of your group?
To promote sustainable choices, educate the public, and bring people who care about our planet together!

What’s the most important message you would give to the general public regarding climate change and a sustainable future?
One message that we really try and get across to members (especially new ones), is that everybody starts somewhere. Start small (ex. using a reusable water bottle) and work your way up from there. It can be intimidating but even taking small steps can make a difference!

What are the best ways to promote your group and spread your information?
The best way is to share our flyers and reshare our posts on Instagram.

If you are interested in joining the group, check out their page on my involvement.
**The Sweet Side Of Five Rivers**

*Saturday, March 25, 1:30—3:30 PM, Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, 56 Game Farm Road, Delmar*

Drop in for an introduction to maple sugaring, from tap and sap to syrup. You’ll get to twirl a brace and bit, pound a spile, inspect the sap flow, and enjoy the aroma of sap boiling in our evaporator. A local maple producer will be on site to answer questions and offer a variety of maple products for sale. Click [here](#) for more details and info on other Five Rivers programs.

**Backyard Chickens in Albany**

*Friday, March 31, 5:30 to 7:30 PM, Honest Weight Food Co-op 100 Watervliet Avenue, Albany*

Come and learn about the ins and outs of having backyard chickens in the city of Albany: the permitting process, the associated expenses, and all about coop orientation and design, feeding your chickens, seasonal care, and more!

**Zero Waste Lifestyle: Food and Clothing**

*Monday, April 3, 6 PM—7:30PM, UAlbany Uptown Campus Massry Building Room B14*

Join Zero Waste Capital District and UAlbany Eco-Reps for a discussion on how to reduce waste related to food and clothing. Refreshments served and sustainable product samples will be available. Learn more about Zero Waste Capital District [here](#).

**Beginning Bird Walk**

*Monday, April 10, 7:30 –9:30 AM, Albany Pine Bush Discovery Center, 195 New Karner Road, Albany*

Come explore the Yellow Trail at Karner Barrens. Walk through the preserve and learn how to use binoculars and identify birds by sight and sound. The program will include hiking 2.6 miles through various habitats to search for birds of all shapes and sizes, and practice listening for and recognizing bird calls; pausing frequently to listen and look for birds and observe their activities! Binoculars and field guides provided. See more and learn about other programs at the Discovery Center’s [events website](#).
Alumni Spotlight

Zoe Mies

What year did you graduate? What was your major?
May 2022, Public Policy and Management with a concentration in Environmental Policy and minors in Communications and Emergency Preparedness.

What was your co-curricular and student organization involvement on campus?
Involvement early on in ABLE freshman year, then moved into involvement in the Sustainability club and interning with the Office of Sustainability, working as a Zero Waste Educator.

What are you doing now? Where do you live?
I am working at Energy Solutions as an Associate on the Business Strategies Team. I’m from the Capital Region but have relocated to Boston.

How have you applied your experience with the sustainability movement on campus and involvement with the Office of Sustainability into your post-college life and career?
My Office of Sustainability experience and my passion for sustainability movements have transferred into my job where I am now able to work in areas that are creating positive impact in the energy sector. The office pushed me to advance my knowledge and increase my passions in creating real change for the environment and sustainability, and was a gateway in introducing me into the career I now am a part of and love! In addition, I work to be my most sustainable self in everything I do in my personal life, small changes can create big impacts!

The Office of Sustainability is proud of the successes of our alumni! They were essential in the early stages of the sustainability movement at UAlbany and have shaped where it is now.