Ben Haywood: Kind Farewells and New Beginnings

Professor Haywood’s tough decision to transfer to Furman University is something that many of us in the ESS Department are aware of, and we were saddened by the departure of a great professor and mentor. However, he assures us that his time at Allegheny has brought him some of the most meaningful moments in his career, and that he will bring these memories and lessons to the students that he will continue to inspire at Furman.

Ben relayed that the aspects of Allegheny he will miss the most are the bonds he formed while he was here. These include but are not limited to: talking with his students, sharing the magic of birds with them, working with them in the classroom, and watching them overcome challenges and grow as people. He said he will also miss taking walks on campus with his dog Harmony, laughing with his colleagues, as well as Eric’s freshly baked bread and Rich’s hugs (you need 12 a day).

His time at Allegheny was productive, to say the least. He was most proud of his recent projects working with students “to reduce lead poisoning from lead ammunition among raptors in Pennsylvania.” He would often say that “you don’t have to save the world in one day” and, even though this was not a project on the same scale as the climate crisis, it was an important one for the people in PA. Seeing progress being made on this issue at the state level was encouraging for him as well as his students and colleagues. Ben stated that “although the nature of the ESS major and the scary and unsettling issues that envelop the curriculum and experience in the program are intense and paralyzing at times, I actually have come to have even greater hope that a new day and an alternative future is bubbling up as we speak. My ESS colleagues and students get the credit for that.” Anyone who has been in the department for long can attest to this. The issues seem all encompassing, but working with other people on missions you believe in is nothing less than inspiring.

Ben also communicated how hard his decision to leave was. It ultimately came down to the position at Furman itself, and how he would be able to grow and develop his career in different ways than at Allegheny. He said that he will be able to “expand beyond the classroom to focus also on larger institutional efforts that cultivate learning and growth in many different environments, and among faculty and staff as well.” It is no doubt to any of us at Allegheny that he will succeed in this new field of learning and we wish him all the best in this new chapter in his life. Another reason for his decision was to be closer to his family and be present in their
lives, as well as getting out of the Meadville weather (which we can all relate to). Even though we will miss him, these are opportunities that Ben could not pass up, and he wanted to leave us with some pieces of knowledge he gained at Allegheny. “The planet is in trouble and sustainability isn’t easy. It takes a lot of courage to invest in a more sustainable world, but I do believe the steady, intentional tortoise moving one step at a time will outlast the hare eventually. 99% of the time, the only person that expects you to be perfect is you. Give yourself a break...If you can’t find a rose to stop and smell, find a bird to watch instead. Just five minutes - It will bring you joy. No matter where you are, or what challenge you are facing, there are beautiful people around you that care - you just have to let them in.” He hopes these words stick with us as we continue to grow in our careers as well.

**New Carrden Coop**

While there had been chickens at the Green Living special interest house in the past, there had not yet been college sponsored chickens on campus. When Lynnsey Winchell, class of 2022, matriculated at Allegheny College, it became her mission to have chickens at her home away from home. After getting in touch with Carr Hall Garden Manager Kerstin Ams, Winchell learned that the department had been working on getting chickens on campus but needed a passionate student to push the idea into motion. This was just the project Winchell was looking for.

“I am the crazy chicken lady,” Winchell proudly proclaims. “I’m really passionate about agriculture and feel there’s not enough advocacy for it on campus or globally, primarily from lack of experience. It’s hard to understand things you don’t see.”

Inspired by Eric Pallant’s Soil to Plate class, Winchell embraced the idea of building awareness of where food comes from, and the operations and processes behind food production. The chickens build on the idea of soil to plate, in conjunction with the Carr Hall Garden.

In the Fall 2019 semester, the chicken project was approved. A semi-mobile coop was constructed that could be moved through the Carrden to address different areas for weed management. In turn, the chicken manure provides nutrients to the soil. “Through trial and error we realized this coop wasn’t adequate for the size and number of chickens we wanted,” reported Winchell. Currently, the chickens are at the Green Living house while a new coop is being arranged. They plan to either construct a new coop themselves or find one in the local community.

In the future, Winchell hopes to see more students involved with the project. She’s received overwhelming support from the community and help from close friends. Once a more suitable coop has been established, Winchell hopes to see the chickens flourish with increased student involvement. The small-scale agriculture class and work-study students are likely to handle the routine care of the
chickens. As students interact and engage with the idea of agriculture, they care more about sustainability, awareness, and support for farmers. The project should be completely set up by the end of the spring 2020 semester.

Marijke Hecht, Prospective Professor

A mark of a talented teacher is their ability to both convey their own interest and explain their passion in a way that draws others in. These are genuinely rare qualities, but Marijke Hecht fulfills them both; and soon, she may be doing this at Allegheny. Ms. Hecht is currently a prospective professor for our own Department of Environmental Science and Sustainability. She has a long list of environmental work, and her track record is impressive: in New York, she worked as a public school teacher and a field supervisor with The Nature Conservancy of New York. Ms. Hecht continued her career in Pittsburgh, where she served as the project manager for the Frick Environmental Center and the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy’s Director of Education. Along the way, she’s gathered multiple awards including two 40 under 40 awards. Her experience is certainly impressive, but it is her research that truly speaks for itself.

Ms. Hecht’s research concerns the ways out-of-school learning and mentors can influence development of interests, usually in students. She authored one study where a group of those working within the field of environmental science or with significant interest described their memory of how they came to have that passion. This study, “Becoming a naturalist: interest development across the learning ecology,” is rich with qualitative anecdotal evidence that experience outside of the classroom drove people’s interest.

This concept is then placed within the idea of a learning ecosystem, where our education system is modelled after a web of connections in a natural environment. One of Marijke Hecht’s key conclusions is that students are not the lynchpin of this educational ecosystem. While students may provide insight as to whether the system is working, she believes teachers are the most important node. To this point, out-of-school learning in partnership with specialized parties needs to be one of the tools teachers are given access to. Personally, I find this line of research very engaging. One of the reasons I feel Ms. Hecht’s research is so interesting is because of its accessibility. Most everyone can relate to the first time you engaged with the subject of your major, or of a significant hobby or passion. Even more can remember the time you took a field trip from school to a museum, park or zoo, and how much more exciting that was than a classroom lecture.

Outside of her research, Marijke Hecht was a pleasure to talk to, and a very worldly person. We spoke about her travels to Bolivia (and my expressed jealousy of that fact), and her casual enjoyment of the outdoors. We also connected over a shared liking of board games. I had a great time speaking with Ms. Hecht, and sincerely hope that she comes to teach at Allegheny.
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