This semester, Allegheny College has welcomed two new professors into the Environmental Science and Sustainability department, Professors Delia Byrnes and Jesse Swann-Quinn. These two professors have been recently tasked with sharing an ES 210 class, Environmental Research Methods, and have combined their shared expertise of social science and the humanities to create a 210 class like nothing our department has seen before.

Being new to the college, both Byrnes and Swann-Quinn have had teaching experience in larger universities throughout the country; with Byrnes teaching at the University of Texas and Swann-Quinn at Syracuse University. The professors noted an important major difference between these schools and our small liberal arts college- the enthusiasm of the students to an interdisciplinary approach in the classroom. Professor Byrnes quotes “We need to become undisciplined as scholars and students and actually think beyond the academy and beyond what traditionally counts as academic work.”

Here at Allegheny, they found that there was a possibility to dive deeper into problems that might not have been addressed at a larger, more anonymous university. Thus, taking into consideration their student’s passion for thinking broadly, the two professors decided to investigate the history of the land in the Crawford County area. This investigation includes a primary focus on the acknowledgement and traditions of the Indigenous land, the recognition of the cultural genoice of the native practices, and furthermore the actual genoice that occurred in order for the settlers to take over the lands we live on today. Jesse Swann-Quinn insists the importance of this study, saying “The only reason we are able to be here together is because there was a dispossession of land from people originally.”

The class is a student led approach, veering away from the traditional method of the rigid frame of introduction, methods, results, discussion. In fact, Professors Byrnes and Swann-Quinn encouraged their students to span different directions in their research, discovering aspects of this topic which interest them the most. Some of their students are researching the history of the land, the geographical borders which have been mixed and entangled between perspectives, and the shifting between Indigenous peoples and colonial settlers. Their scope of interest is the Allegheny River Watershed, from the early 1600’s to the Revolutionary War. Others are looking into the agricultural practices which have been utilized on this land by Indigenous peoples such as tilling and harvesting historically grown crops. Lastly, the students have been reading
primary sources including letters and field notes from historical figures such as George Washington and William Penn. These letters display firsthand how the native people were treated and described during that time period. Both of these historical figures had spent time within the Allegheny River Watershed, with George Washington having surveyed French Creek during his beginning days in the military.

The findings of this study, being so varied and individually focused, are going to be difficult to display in a standard academic presentation. Unlike other environmental research methods classes, the professors have been considering a digital form of presentation, such as putting together a website or creating a podcast to display their findings. The main goal of this class isn’t just to present information, the class also wants to see results. One of the class goals is to implement a Land Acknowledgement Statement, an official declaration by the college that acknowledges the historical use of the land the school sits on, a short statement that is said before gatherings such as board meetings and conference events. These goals are just the beginning of the work that is to be done, and the Professors both acknowledge that the progress will have to span longer than a semester’s class. They hope that their findings will encourage more enthusiasm from the student body and from the college administrators, prompting more research projects and more acknowledgements focused on the Indigenous people that lived on this land long before our college was founded.

A Resource to Look Into: LandBack

The Four Landback Campaign Demands —
“1. Dismantle — white supremacy structures that forcefully removed us from our Lands and continue to keep our Peoples in oppression.”
“2. Defund — white supremacy and the mechanisms and systems that enforce it and disconnect us from stewardship of the Land.
(Police, military industrial complex, Border Patrol, ICE)”
“3. Return — All public lands back into Indigenous hands.”
“4. Consent — Moving us out of an era of consultation and into a new era of policy around Free and Prior Informed Consent.”

For more information, visit: https://landback.org/

Writer: Molly Tarvin
Eric Pallant’s Junior Seminar: How can Allegheny Become an Anchor for Students and the Community?

When most Allegheny students graduate, they do not stay in the community and continue to work with the city they have been a part of for the last four years. This, along with a multitude of other reasons, has created a disconnect between the Allegheny College community and the Meadville community. Eric’s Junior Seminar is focusing on this issue as well as steps to achieving a more unified and sustainable city. The steps they came up with include: encouraging the city of Meadville to pursue carbon neutrality; promoting diversity, inclusion, and equity; using Allegheny’s resources to educate the community; and to develop a business incubator in the city. These were synthesized using the My Meadville webpage, created years ago through surveying the people of Meadville asking where they wanted to see change. However, these changes are easier said than done.

The first aspect the Junior Seminar wanted to include was moving Meadville towards carbon neutrality. This was emphasized in their methods because of the importance of sustainability on Allegheny’s campus. Allegheny was able to reach carbon neutrality earlier this year which is a major feat, but those of us living on campus are only going to live in this carbon-neutral-bubble for a short period of time. There are only a few cities around the world who are reaching towards the same goal. These cities tend to be larger, more diverse, and have the facilities to pursue this goal. However, if Meadville became carbon neutral in a few decades, this could be a defining factor that attracts students as well as other people to the community.

This brought the class to their second point: promoting diversity, inclusion, and equity. Promoting these aspects as well as making Meadville a safer environment for minority groups is crucial in creating an anchor in the community. The “easiest” way to do this is to increase immigration to this area. Again, this is easier said than done. Without having a safe and accepting community already, it is hard for minority groups to want to move to Meadville. Therefore, instead of putting the pressure of creating this safe environment on groups that would already be marginalized, the class thought about using Allegheny to help educate the community. This is the class’s third step in connecting Allegheny College and the city of Meadville. The thought was to open Allegheny’s campus to the community to continue their education at a discounted rate in the hopes this would also expose them to different people and perspectives.

The last step the class came up with was building a business incubator. This would involve sponsoring a new or already established business to build itself in Meadville while creating jobs and wealth in the area. To facilitate this, the business would have to align with the values of Allegheny College and would help build the relationship between the community and the college.

This process has been an ongoing one and will not be fixed with just one junior seminar class or with a dozen of them. This is a long, arduous process that will take effort and compromise on both sides. However, through hard work, communication, and commitment, Meadville will see the changes that it wants and we will create a community that people want to stay a part of and actively participate in.
ESS Alumna Kristen Locy: Dedicated to Helping Communities Thrive

Kristen Locy is a student of sustainability, inside and out. A 2018 graduate of Allegheny’s ES program, Kristen demonstrates what is possible when you approach life with curiosity and a desire to make the world a better place. She plays a meaningful role as Communications Manager for the Center for Coalfield Justice, empowering rural communities in Appalachia to address key sustainability issues—but it’s no accident she was given that opportunity.

Kristen brings an engaging personality and a clear passion for learning and exploration to everything she does. Naturally, she is drawn to the outdoors. When asked in an interview how she would spend a free weekend, Kristen replied enthusiastically, “definitely an overnight canoe trip!” She was an outing club leader at Allegheny, and has fond memories of floating down French Creek with her friends. And now, she is the proud owner of her very own blue fiberglass canoe! I got the impression that Kristen is not afraid to jump right in and seize opportunities; within two months of arriving as a freshman, she convinced Kerstin Ams to let her work in the Carrden—a job which became integral to her college experience.

I asked Kristen about her time at Allegheny. She responded, “I know it’s kind of cheesy, but…the best part was the people, and the connections I made. It just means so much to me to have connected with so many amazing, inspiring people—and my professors too! I still keep in touch with a lot of them, and that’s just so unique… I’m really grateful for that.” Kristen emphasized how much she learned both inside and outside of the classroom. If anything, she said, “my classes taught me how complicated the world is… We are facing climate change, and there is no answer—but I also love that, because it’s so many puzzle pieces and so much to think about. It’s endlessly fascinating.”

Kristen put her thoughtful approach to complex problems to good use at Allegheny. Her comp researched socially-beneficial carbon offsets for Allegheny to invest in, using the UN SDG’s as a framework. She wanted to research not just their effectiveness in offsetting carbon emissions, but also their measurable benefit for the communities in which they are implemented. It wasn’t easy, but Kristen was creative; she leveraged carbon neutrality’s appeal to prospective students to help encourage Allegheny to invest in the offsets. Her comp came not a moment too soon; being completed in 2018, Kristen’s work made a substantial contribution to the college’s carbon neutrality achievement in 2020.

She has proven to be a very thoughtful, caring member of her community as well. After graduating, Kristen traveled across Europe for a while, including some time working on a farm in Scotland, which she describes as a highlight of her life. Upon returning to the states in 2019, she moved back to near Washington, PA, where now employs her people-organizing skills at the Center for Coalfield Justice. “Even though I didn’t plan on it, necessarily,” Kristen said, “it’s really worked out for me to give back to my community.” She humbly added, “I was privileged enough to go get an education…but I do still live here, so I can come back and help people out.”

Southwest PA has been heavily impacted by fossil fuel extraction, both from fracking and coal mining—one mine in particular is larger than Manhattan! The Center serves as a progressive base, helping people fight the fossil fuel companies that seek to, literally and
figuratively, undermine their communities in western Appalachia. Here, again, Kristen has found her niche in a complex environmental problem, which entangles traditional livelihoods with a growing awareness that they will not be sustained indefinitely. Kristen applied for a Fulbright scholarship to study in England, with the goal of building a master’s degree around sustainability, geography and behavior change. Her degree might place emphasis on comparing rural communities in Appalachia and Scotland, which face similar sustainability issues. And her ultimate, long-term vision is to “hopefully someday buy a farm, and do permaculture,” which would blend her interests in community organizing and sustainable agriculture. Her advice to students is, “it’s okay to take your time... I worked as a bartender and then traveled, and I still got a job. Also, non-profit jobs can be really nice!” I’m sure the future holds good things for Kristen, as long as she continues to approach life with curiosity and a desire to empower others to do the same.

ESS Alumna Maegan Stump

While at Allegheny Maegan Stump was a Davies Community Service Leader for three years, working mostly with Kathy Uglow at the Crawford County Conservation District doing environmental education and helping to create a recycled bike share program. Her senior comprehensive project focused on creating a comprehensive list of the trail systems in Northwestern PA (trailsofnwpa.com). She also did an internship with the Student Conservation Association and National Park Service in Yellowstone National Park and was the President of the Ski and Snowboard Club her Senior year. Maegan is currently a student at Vermont Law School pursuing a degree in Environmental Law, but had quite an interesting journey before ultimately deciding to enter graduate school.

Right after college, Maegan decided to immediately start working because she “wanted the real-life experience and all of the struggles that go along with it.” First, Maegan moved to Montana right after graduation to work for the National Park Service in Glacier National Park as a seasonal park ranger. Eventually she moved back to PA to serve as an Office of Surface Mining, Reclamation, and Enforcement AmeriCorps VISTA working with a local land trust, a conservation district, and a watershed organization in Indiana. Maegan comments on her work in Indiana, saying “My work in Indiana focused on environmental education, ecotourism, and watershed conservation. Indiana, PA, as well as a large portion of Pennsylvania’s
waterways, have been impacted by abandoned mine drainage (AMD) leftover from the coal industry. The projects I worked on in Indiana were largely focused on education and remediation efforts within the surrounding watershed.”

After completing her work in Pennsylvania, Maegan moved to Jackson Wyoming where she took her first full time job at the Teton Science Schools. Her main job here was to support the Wildlife Expeditions team in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Afterwards she moved to the eastern side of Pennsylvania to take a managerial job with Wildlands Conservancy, an environmental nonprofit focused on outdoor recreation. There, Maegan spent most of her time running outdoor programs in the Lehigh and Delaware River watersheds.

In Fall 2020, Maegan finally began studying at the Vermont Law School. She says “the brief yet adventurous career I had the few years after college both reinforced the decision and gave me the time and experience to observe why environmental law is so important to the environmental and conservation community.”

She offers some powerful advice to current students and the Allegheny community as a whole. First, “my advice is to listen to your professors, advocate for yourself, and do not be afraid to fail.” Secondly is some guidance evolving from the first that certainly reflects some self dependence ideals Maegan learned throughout her journey working across the country: “sometimes someone, a professor or otherwise, might give you advice in regard to your education or career path that you don’t like or tell you that you aren’t playing to your strengths...you don’t have to listen to them. Advocate for yourself and put the time and work in. Every person you look up to has failed at some point...That’s the easy part, the hard part is continuing to put in the patience and effort to go after another opportunity that better fits you.”

We are so happy to see Maegan succeed and wish her the best of luck in her studies! Feel free to reach out to her by email at: maegan.stump@gmail.com.