

Environmental Studies

SPRING 2020

The Corona Chronicles

by Karl Offen, Professor and Director of Environmental Studies

I wonder if there has ever been a more challenging time at Oberlin College. The academic year 2019-20 has been marred and scared by COVID-19. A week before spring break the campus closed, and it is not hyperbole to say that life has not been the same since. We now interact with our students and each other online. Daily use of the noun and verb “Zoom” must surely place it in contention for word of the year. For those of us who remain in town, including the students I see from time to time, we are reduced to elaborate gesticulations from across the street, smiling invisibly through our masks or waving in silence as we pass one another on bicycles.

Among the saddest things is that our outstanding Environmental Studies Class of 2020 will not have their commencement day. These wonderful folks who’ve worked so hard over the last four years won’t get to dress up or down or sideways or wear funny hats and shoes, pass through the faculty gauntlet, and then get to saunter around Tappan Square as graduates. They will not get to spend a beautiful May day in northeast Ohio hugging and reminiscing with family and friends. The new reality is hard on us all but especially our seniors and their families. As the father of a 2020 Oberlin graduate, it is heart-wrenching to see my daughter disappointed, sad, and leaving town in a fog of uncertainty about her future. I know other students, parents, and families feel as bad or worse. For all of us who supported our seniors for the last 20-plus years, I hope that the milestone can be commemorated wherever we may be on May 25 and then again, if fortune permits, in Oberlin in May of 2021!

And, still, the school year goes on. As I write on a snowy day in late April, our student- and community-organized Earth Day 50 events unfold online. Climate justice essayist and scholar Mary Annaïse Heglar has been interviewing four of her colleagues via invigorating webinars covering different dimensions of what climate justice might look like



Obies patiently awaiting their Thai dinners while at a conference in Lexington, Kentucky, in February. Photo by Karl Offen

and how we should be better communicating the vision. Carolyn Finney gave the virtual keynote talk on Race and the Outdoors. Dr. Finney gave a passionate talk that drew on her own family’s experiences and her recent book *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*. Student organizers Ora Hammel, Madeleine Gefke, Olivia Vasquez, Wenling Li, Phoebe von Conta, and the numerous students who moderated all the Earth Day 50 events deserve our appreciation for their work and for pulling this off under adverse circumstances.

I have to say that there was definitely something eerie about celebrating Earth Day under lockdown while a global pandemic burns through vulnerable and poor populations. The specter of people across the globe dying from hunger as food supplies are disrupted is very real and frightening. I try to conjure more pleasant thoughts. In Oberlin, the

The Corona Chronicles, *cont.*

idea of a silent spring takes on new meaning as birds chirp contentedly while humanity is muted, periodic tweeting tirades the unwelcome exception. Let's hope the virtues of clean air are visible to all and demonstrate the health and climate benefits of a post-carbon economy.

This spring semester also coincided with our third annual Careers Day, the last college event on campus to be officially canceled on March 14. As this newsletter goes to press, the event is slated to take place online in early May. The event features several members of EnviroAlums—an active, generous, and financially supportive OC alumni group—that we have paired in Zoom sessions to offer their wisdom to weary graduates about potential careers in sustainability, urban planning, environmental justice, science, and the fine art of navigating post-college life, including graduate school. Student organizers Lauren Holmes, Madeleine Gefke, Olivia Vasquez, and Rebecca Kukushkin deserve our thanks for the initial planning and Lauren deserves special kudos for making the transition to online possible.

The transformative tragedy of COVID-19 has obscured but not eliminated the many accomplishments and events that preceded our new reality. In this newsletter, we hope to shed light upon some of the activities we in Environmental Studies have been up to during this past academic year. One highpoint of my year was taking 12 students to Lexington,

Kentucky, in late February for the tenth annual Dimensions of Political Ecology (DOPE) conference (see photo on previous page). Five Oberlin students presented excellent papers, four of which had originally been conceived as term papers in my Political Ecology class. I'm hoping this trip can be an annual event.

This past year has been personally satisfying in other ways as well. With the help and patience of my colleagues, I managed to complete my first year as the director of the Environmental Studies Program. It is a challenging job, and COVID-19 didn't make things any easier. Still, I was lucky. In the fall, we managed to hire Janet Cali as our administrative assistant. She replaced Rosalind Soltow, who took a new job in the Cleveland area last April. Janet had worked at the college before but never in an academic unit. Her learning curve was steep. Thankfully she navigated things quickly and has remained in good spirits even while transitioning to work from home on a small laptop. At times, she and I were like the blind leading the blind through the minutiae of college bureaucracy, databases, and innumerable forms. Still, I am proud to report that we managed to help 40 terrific Obies graduate with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Environmental Studies, and nine others complete a minor. To the Class of 2020, I offer my heartfelt congratulations and best of luck in the years ahead!

Senior Reflections Joyce Gorn Memorial Prize 2020 recipients



AMY NAMEI WANG

In writing this reflection, I am in the middle of self-quarantine due to COVID-19 outbreak. With plenty of time to reflect, I started to think about how my four years of college shaped my aspiration to work with local communities. As a teaching assistant for ENVS 101, I developed and organized

community-based projects, seeking to connect students with community members. I helped students with more than 30 projects working with local members of the city of Oberlin, such as designing a green roof for the local police department building. Working with the Environmental Dashboard, I designed and led campaigns at local stores in Oberlin to celebrate supporting local businesses. Through leading two teams of students, interviewing local residents, and public presentations, I acquired the knowledge and

experience of community organizing. Later, with \$10,000 from the Green Edge fund, I applied these skills to tackle water waste problems and reduce unequal water distribution on the college campus. Outside of the U.S., I have been working on a book project focusing on climate adaptation for local communities in developing countries as a research assistant for Professor Md Rumi Shammin. All of these experiences would not have happened without support from the Environmental Studies Program and its tight connection with the Oberlin community. Thank you to all my professors and peers who have made my four years at Oberlin incredibly meaningful.

ANNA DEGOLIER

When I came to Oberlin, I was excited about environmentalism and strengthening my Spanish, so when I found the ExCo class taught by the founders of OSSGUA (Oberlin Students in Solidarity with Guatemala), I was excited about the ways it could merge these two interests



with its focus on environmental activism in Latin America. In this class I learned about how environmental crises are connected to larger histories of racism, colonialism, and capitalism and how indigenous land defense is a crucial guide for environmental action. I went on my first student-lead delegation to Guatemala the

following winter term and learned about the harsh history of the Civil Armed Conflict and genocide of indigenous peoples in Guatemala from 1960 to 1996 and how colonial legacies continue to subvert the rights of communities defending their land. While there, I was moved by the friends I met in Copal AA La Esperanza, a community of indigenous Maya people that was founded on their return from refuge in Mexico, who have successfully halted the construction of the Xalala hydroelectric dam on the river adjacent to their land.

I returned to Guatemala as a delegation leader both my second and fourth years at Oberlin to continue to learn from this resistance and to build community and solidarity. In the meantime, I helped teach the ExCo, served as organization treasurer and SEPA board member, and worked with my peers to bring speakers from Guatemala and solidarity organizations, organize workshops, and create outreach materials. My involvement in OSSGUA has influenced my college experience in every way, profoundly shaping my understanding of climate change, justice, and human rights and will continue to inform my actions for the rest of my life.

CHARLOTTE PRICE

During my freshman year at Oberlin, I went on a student-led and student-organized delegation to Guatemala. My worldview shifted drastically on this trip as I learned about U.S. involvement in a coup, succession of military dictatorships, and genocide of Indigenous Maya groups during a 30-year internal armed conflict. During winter term my second and fourth year, I helped organize and plan the delegation. This experience, which involved facilitating an experimental college class, allowed me to solidify my knowledge through passing it on to others. Through these experiences, I began to understand how environmental



injustices were rooted in the internal armed conflict, and dispossession of land from indigenous groups dating back centuries to the arrival of the Spanish. Knowledge of environmental issues rooted in Guatemala has helped me better understand environmental injustices in the U.S and how to formulate resistance.

LILLY JONES

I decided on my environmental studies major my junior year. It was my first semester on campus after doing the 2018 Oberlin-in-London Program, which was run by professors from ES and the English department. I already knew I was interested in both disciplines, but didn't realize how much they could enrich each other (thanks, T.S. and Janet!). That semester introduced me to the idea of using writing and



other creative methods to explore environments past and present, urban and rural. This has been one of my main academic focuses ever since. The flexible structure of the ES program is what makes it so special. I appreciate that my ES major was always in conversation with my work in the English department, and that Oberlin embraces an approach to studying the environment that

allows for interdisciplinary experiences such as mine.

Looking back at the past four years, my favorite memories involved collaborating with peers, professors, and community members. This is true for my extracurricular work and internships as well. Whether those experiences were here in Oberlin envisioning new designs for South Main Street with my Sustainable Cities team, in Toledo helping teach a workshop for the Environmental Dashboard, or walking the streets of London in search of hidden rivers with a class, my learning in this program was in many ways shaped by the people I met. I am excited to bring this knowledge with me into the world and look forward to visiting Oberlin as a graduate.

MADELEINE GEFKE

The most rewarding part of my Oberlin experience is the community of people I feel fortunate to learn from, work with, and find friendship in as I try to figure out who I want to be and what I want to do. I have certainly found these friends and mentors in the Environmental Studies Program and am so thankful for the interesting conversations, the words of encouragement, the inspiration, and so much more. During my time at Oberlin, I have focused on both science and communication through my work in the Garvin disease ecology lab, the field work and community-based projects in John Petersen's classes, and the survey work with Environmental Dashboard. These experiences culminated in very rewarding projects during my final year. I thoroughly enjoyed talking with students in the local public schools about the Vermilion River Watershed as my ENVS capstone project. The 8th graders' skepticism of macroinvertebrates and the 4th grade enthusiasm around breaking shale rocks into smaller and smaller layers was so fun to experience. And then there was Earth Day 50! Starting with the initial excited conversations around a crazy idea, this turned

Senior Reflections, *cont.*



into innumerable meetings with our small but powerful student committee and the community green groups over lovely potlucks. Even the conversion to online resulted in an overwhelming and exhilarating blur of Earth week itself. Through this entire process, I learned so much about the blessing of a supportive, loving, inspiring,

passionate, and powerful community that believes in my abilities, my goals, and the change I want to bring to this world. Even with the uncertainty and the challenges of what comes next, I find so much comfort in knowing this and will hold these experiences close to my heart.

MICHAEL (SANTI) ROMAN

For the past three years, I have been working within a community-led collaboration in Africatown, Alabama. Africatown, located in a historical district of Mobile, Alabama, has existed and thrived as a community for people of African descent since its founding in the 1860s by survivors of the *Clotilda*, the last recorded ship carrying enslaved Africans to the U.S. In the last few decades, the community, which still includes people with a direct lineage to the enslaved people on the *Clotilda*, has faced serious threats to public health, education systems, and land ownership. Since the 1960s the population has dropped by 83 percent, from 12,000 to 2,000, and reports high rates of respiratory issues and cancer. Today, in addition to being encroached upon by heavy industry, community members must travel longer distances to acquire basic necessities due to the disappearance of once-prevalent community-owned businesses. They are also fighting for their rightful place in American history, working to ensure that Africatown's international significance is recognized and that the community maintains control over how its story is told.

My colleagues and I have been a part of a community-collaboration between Africatown and Oberlin that has included student research projects, academic classes, community immersion, and an NSF funded workshop on community history. Since 2017, we have worked to record and digitally archive oral history interviews with members of the community. We have also researched the industries expanding into the historical district and their potential human health and environmental impacts. In

our work, we seek to preserve the stories and history of the community, examine the local knowledge about the community and the natural environment surrounding it, and, most importantly, act as collaborators and members of a large, multifaceted community-led project. This work has by far been the most definitive aspect of my college experience and has forever changed the way I think about the world. I am most grateful to my advisor Jay Fiskio, for introducing me to it and mentoring me to become the person I am today.

NATHAN CARPENTER



At the beginning of my sophomore year, I started working on the oral history research partnership with the community of Africatown, Alabama, led on Oberlin's end by Professor Jay Fiskio. My friend and mentor Ify Ezimora '19 had invited me to join the project, which I knew barely anything about. Nearly three years later, I write this message

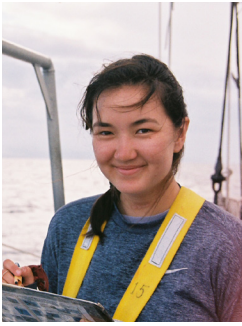
having just defended my Honors thesis entitled "'The Story Goes On': Environment, Community, and Epistemic Justice in Africatown, Alabama." My time spent working on the community partnership with Africatown—recording oral history interviews, conducting community health surveys, attending church services, sharing meals, presenting at the local school about our work, attending meetings about how best to celebrate the community's rich and unique history, and so much more—has been the most meaningful of my undergraduate career.

With all of that in view, it's tempting—and largely true—to say that my most enriching experiences as an environmental studies student at Oberlin took place outside the classroom. But that statement must be somewhat modified, for it was Oberlin, and Professor Fiskio in particular, who was willing to provide me with the tools to step into that work and the resources to keep going back, year after year. My journey to becoming an environmental studies major is entirely due to the incredible friends, colleagues, and mentors I found here, who have encouraged me to explore and grow in ways I could never have anticipated. I am so grateful for my time in the ENVS program and will miss it dearly.

OLIVIA VASQUEZ

I came into college with the desire to fully delve into the environmental scene. With the plethora of sustainability initiatives on campus and in the town, this was not

Senior Reflections, *cont.*



difficult to come by. I started out as a STRONG Scholar, developing video content for Environmental Dashboard to visually connect viewers to Oberlin's landscape and resource-use. Later, I met community members and assessed grant applications through Green EDGE Fund, and then had the opportunity to conduct oral

history interviews through the Africatown Community Collaboration project. These experiences reframed and redefined my understanding of community sustainability and resilience. It also sparked a genuine interest to connect these spheres of work, where I hoped to foster communication, support, and collaboration between Oberlin environmental groups.

And what better way to do this than with a celebration! For the past school year, I served on the student board working to plan and facilitate Earth Day 50, a two-week symposium of events to contribute to Oberlin's legacy of environmental action. We had relevant and grounding conversations with Mary Annaïse Heglar '06, listened to presentations and discussions from 18 different green groups through the Oberlin Virtual Sustainability Fair, and were moved to tears and laughter through Carolyn Finney's personal story about race and the outdoors. Although this was not able to occur in-person as originally planned, we shared profoundly meaningful moments with friends, faculty, and strangers across the world. While Earth Day 50 was the culmination of our hard work, it was the preceding months of relationship-building and collaboration that was the most rewarding, and ultimately, stands as a testament to an Oberlin education.

ORA HAMMEL

Curious about our school's food system, I intentionally worked in Oberlin's CDS for my work-study job. This continued curiosity led me to embark on a project to connect with local farms sourcing to Oberlin's CDS and, consequentially, to OSCA. I spent hours this year building rapport with a couple of local farms, offering up free labor in exchange for interview content. The work taught me so much about Northeast Ohio farming, and I hope that my time with them, despite our differences, developed in them a new appreciation for Oberlin College and



its students. I also worked with the Oberlin College Outings Club. In my sophomore year, I led a canoeing trip down the Manistee River in Michigan and later became the club's Workshop Wallaby. I spent the past three summers leading youth on trips into the Boundary Waters and Quetico. This past summer, I read the book *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* by Carolyn Finney and thought, "She needs to speak at Oberlin." So last fall, I contacted Carolyn and began raising money. Early in this process, other students reached out to me and shared their plans for an Earth Day 50 symposium. I had the incredible opportunity to work with Madeleine Gefke, Olivia Vasquez, Phoebe von Conta, and Wenling Li. In doing this work, we also got to engage with the Oberlin community in a very special way. One of the best committee moments was our first meeting after the campus shutdown, where we all began to brainstorm how to move Earth Day 50 online; we were all committed to making it happen for Oberlin College, and it did.

RACHAEL HOOD



During my second year at Oberlin, I joined Students for Energy Justice, a student group dedicated to resisting fossil fuel extraction and settler colonial domination. In my three years with the group, our focus has been on resisting fracking in Northeast Ohio and the Appalachian Storage Hub in the Ohio River Valley. I joined SEJ after

interning in Wild Virginia, which works to protect and preserve Virginia's wild spaces and was heavily engaged in anti-pipeline work. Through SEJ, I have met incredible students who have inspired me to no end and completely transformed my understanding of environmental justice and meaningful organizing. My work in the group inspired me to pursue an Honors thesis investigating how grassroots groups have resisted pipelines and how to engineer success in those fights. I am so grateful and lucky to be surrounded by the students in SEJ and ENVs, including the other recipients of this prize, who are dedicated to meaningful exploration of just alternatives and transformations.

Next year, I will be pursuing a master's degree in geography at West Virginia University while also working as a graduate research assistant to investigate the impacts of the Appalachian Storage Hub in the Ohio River Valley. SEJ has immensely shaped how I see myself, my purpose, and my goals.

Senior Reflections, *cont.*



WREN FIOCCO

My first semester at Oberlin, I took an ExCo class about Guatemalan indigenous resistance that would prepare us for a winter term trip to Guatemala. This class was the first time I learned about the appalling ways that the U.S. and the CIA have shaped the political and economic realities of many

countries in Latin America, including Guatemala. The trip opened my eyes to the ways that the same power structures set up by colonization are maintained and exacerbated by neoliberalism. I was particularly moved by the activism of the indigenous, returned refugee community of Copal

Aa La Esperanza in protecting their river and primary source of water from destruction by a hydroelectric megaproject owned by a multinational corporation that would have exported the electricity for consumption in the U.S. Returning to Oberlin, I knew I had to work to fight multinational corporations and colonialist extraction at their roots, which I began doing with the organization Oberlin Students in Solidarity with Guatemala, engaging in various projects and co-leading the winter term trip for my remaining winter terms. Later, I joined Students for Energy Justice and No Nexus Oberlin in the fight against the Nexus Pipeline, which began carrying fracked gas for export to Canada through Oberlin during my junior year. Post-graduating last December, I am now fighting against extractive industry full-time in Appalachia.

Senior Reflections, Doris Baron Scholarship Recipients



ANTONIA OFFEN

In summer 2019, I was the (unpaid) intern at an environmental peacebuilding organization called Amman Center for Peace and Development (ACPD) in Jordan. This organization works with Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian citizens to try and build cooperative

peace among them. They had many projects occurring at once, one of which was the Migrating Birds Know No Boundaries Initiative, which protects the rest stops of migrating birds in all three nations.

Over the course of the summer, I had two main projects. One was creating an archiving system for ACPD, in which I went through all of their documents and organized them by project. This required much Arabic reading, as I had to dive into emails, information packets, and receipts. I was also able to read into much of the history of the organization and learn about many of the challenges which it faced in its 20-year history. This information is crucial for my senior honors research, which is about environmental peacebuilding between Jordan, Palestine, and Israel. Through this organization, I was also able to make connections with similar institutes and their employees. I took advantage of being in Jordan to begin these interviews.

The second main project I completed was creating a research foundation for a new program they were considering. This program was focused on creating a textile cooperative with 10 women in the Jordan Valley. My job

was to discover what other cooperatives in the area were doing. I also looked into the history of textile cooperatives in the region, and if perhaps it would be possible to create a cooperation between Jordanian and Israeli seamstresses. Overall, my work differed from what I proposed to do but I was able to achieve many of the goals which brought me to this job in the first place.

CHARLOTTE PRICE



I traveled to Oaxaca, Mexico, and worked with SURCO (Servicios Universitarios y Redes de Conocimiento en Oaxaca) as part of the process of my Honors thesis. At SURCO, I did small tasks such as translating parts of the website, identifying grants, and editing audio files for the radio program that the organization produces. I also

had the chance to work with the person who had made the maps of mining concessions in the Oaxaca area. I attended various workshops that it hosted, including one about community map making. I attended the weekly seminar on indigenous geopolitics.

Beyond working at SURCO, I was also able to have a rich experience in Oaxaca during my time there. I met different scholars and activists both affiliated and unaffiliated with SURCO. There is a super vibrant culture of activism and resistance in Oaxaca that encompasses many areas of the public sphere. I also did a lot of independent learning about

Senior Reflections, *cont.*

the history of Oaxaca and contemporary social movements such as the 2006 Teachers Strike. My time at SURCO, and the work that I participated in was heavily influential in my honors ENV5 thesis, *Counter Mapping Beyond Extraction: Digital Commons in Defense of Common Land in Mexico*, that I presented on May 5.

LEAH FINEGOLD

Project title: Community Resilience in the Borderlands: Rural Organizing around Deaths and Disappearances in the Desert in the Border Zone (PHP)

I held a summer 2019 internship with People Helping People in the Border Zone, working in Arivaca, Arizona, a small, remote town of about 700 people located just 10 miles north of the Mexican border. Arivaca is a place like no other. Its residents are a characteristic mix of ranchers and back-to-the-landers who love the town for its socially and geographically distanced culture. In recent years, Arivaca has been thrown into the untold story of migration from central America to the United States.

Prevention through Deterrence (PTD), a border policy that militarizes urban points of entry, has pushed migrants into the remote parts of the desert in often desperate attempts to enter the U.S. The number of deaths and



disappearances in the desert have skyrocketed due to the nature of the harsh landscape as well as cruel Border Patrol tactics. As migrants in distress began stumbling into Arivaca, residents stepped up to provide relief. This is where People Helping People in the Border Zone (PHP) comes in.

PHP is a community organization in Arivaca that provides support to residents giving humanitarian aid, as well as direct relief and harm reduction for migrants. I worked with PHP for the summer, staffing their office located in the center of Arivaca's small downtown, where we often had visitors seeking information about humanitarian aid. I also was a part of a weekly humanitarian delegation to Sasabe, the town on the direct opposite side of the border from Arivaca, where displaced peoples gather to prepare for their journey across the desert. In Sasabe, we distributed harm reduction kits that provided travelers with life-saving supplies in case they fell into distress during their journey. My summer in Arivaca was an incredible experience that showed me the resilience and power of community organizing in the rural borderlands.

CONGRATULATIONS, ES GRADS!

ES MAJORS

Anderson, Pearse
Bettencourt, Jordan
Breslin, Alex
Carpenter, Nathan
Cato, James
Coe, Henry (Buster)
Crook, Marija
DeGolier, Anna
Edminster, Alexandria
Escalera, Fatima
Finegold, Leah
Fiocco, Claire (Wren)
(Dec)
Ford, Olivia

Gefke, Madeleine
Gerrits, Julie
Gifford, Reuben (Dec)
Gupta, Ananya
Hammel, Ora
Hood, Rachael
Jones, Lillian
Matiwane, Musawenkosi
(Musa) (Dec)
Offen, Antonia
Page, Madeleine
Peel, Rowyn
Price, Charlotte
Ramirez, Marissa
Reddy, Sarah

Roman, Santiago
(Michael)
Rosenboom, Johanna
Rosenstein, Isabel (Izzy)
Royer, Elizabeth (Libby)
Ruppenthal, Ian
Sayles, Molly
Scola, Francesca
Seiler, Scott (Dec)
Stoner, Juliana
Sung, Jun
Vasquez, Olivia
Wang, Amy

ES MINORS

Chiappetta, Giulia
Dix, Monica
Maffie, Sophia
Ortega, Ehryn
Shostak, David
Szende, Rian
Vaughan, Nora
Lockard, Kendra (Dec)
Zucker, Lauren (Dec)

Faculty and Staff Bios

BEN HOBBS

Over the past year I have had the opportunity to continue working to make the AJLC a shining example of ecological design, as well as pursue many personal and professional opportunities to improve myself, my community, and my family.

This past May I had the unique chance to provide a tour for my daughter's fourth and fifth grade class from Ruffing Montessori School. I was able to share with them the work that our students do as Living Machine Operators as well as all of the unique and interesting elements that make the AJLC special.

I've assumed the role of primary advisor to the Green Edge Fund, a role I have thoroughly enjoyed given the commitment and thoughtfulness of the students elected to serve on its board. In June, our two summer Living Machine Fellows joined me in attending the State of the Great Lakes forum, at which our own David Orr was a panelist. Personally, I was able to attend both the Sustainable Cleveland Summit in October and the Resilient Buildings Conference in November. Both provided an enormous amount of inspiration for how we as a community and as a building could be doing more to ensure a better future.

Locally, I've continued to volunteer on the board of Providing Oberlinians With Efficiency Responsibly (POWER), recently being appointed vice-chair. I also recently joined the board of the Avon Lake Soccer Organization as their Assistant Girls Travel Director, and I continue to coach my daughter's travel soccer team. Lastly, beginning this June I will assume a coaching role with Force Lacrosse Academy, where I will coach elite-level high school lacrosse players during their off season. It has certainly been a busy year and the next one doesn't appear to be any lighter.



CHIE SAKAKIBARA

In the current global crisis, I often reflect upon the meaning of the Anthropocene: the age in which humans' influence on the earth have become a significant



geological force affecting ourselves and other beings. At this speed of devastation, all life is fragile, especially when one has to stand in isolation. But now, to our greatest sadness, social distancing has become the new norm. We live in the age of solitude; the separation between the human and non-human others is magnified more than

ever. But I also believe, as Donna Haraway says, in a time of crisis like ours, we must make kin; humans are not the only important actors on this planet, and kin-making must be a multispecies affair to cultivate resilience and mitigate vulnerability.

My forthcoming book *Whale Snow: Inupiat, Climate Change, and Multispecies Resilience in Arctic Alaska* (University of Arizona Press, 2020) sheds light on how togetherness fosters resilience in a time of global climate change. Indigenous resilience is often embedded in families, families are in turn embedded in communities, and communities are embedded in the environment. My community-partnered work illustrates this embeddedness through an exploration of human-whale relations in Arctic Alaska. In this time of ecological transition, exploring multispecies relatedness is crucial as it keeps social capacity relational, elastic, and resilient. The goal of this book, therefore, is to seek out the stories of multispecies resilience that humans constitute with nonhuman counterparts. Resilience is a deeply multispecies affair, and COVID-19 tells us this.

My exploration of resilience informs my new course Global Indigenous Health, to be first offered in Spring 2021. In a time of deep distress, anxiety, and uncertainty, a reconsideration of our relationship with the environment is essential. With my students, I look forward to pursuing indigenous concepts of health, well-being, healing, and ways of moving forward to promote multispecies health and environmental equity.

Faculty and Staff Bios, *cont.*

JANET CALI

My employment with Oberlin College began in June 2011. My first administrative assistant assignment was in the Office of the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. In that role, I served as the receptionist and support person for the deans and the office. In 2016, I joined the Arts & Sciences Admissions Office. While there, I provided support from the processes of recruitment to admittance. Upon culmination of the process, I had the pleasure of producing all of the admit letters, scholarship letters, admit packets, and post-admit letters. It was rewarding to notify our prospective students, great meeting them at All Roads, and exciting to welcome them as new Obies when they arrived on campus.

Changes in the admissions office propelled me into my current administrative support role in the Environmental Studies Program office. It is a great office to work for and a lovely building to be in. Although it has been a challenging year assimilating into the position and dealing with all of the changes due to COVID-19, it has also been rewarding getting to know and work with all of the students and faculty. I am looking forward to the year ahead. Although I am saddened by changes which caused the cancellation of so many events and our ability to finish the year out with our seniors on campus, I am optimistic about their future and all of the great things they will accomplish. I congratulate each and every one of our amazing graduates and wish them a wonderful and rewarding future!



JANET FISKIO

I'm glad to have the chance to say hello at this strange and terrible moment in our lives together. Hearing from current and former students has been especially precious in the past weeks.

This year has been busy and joyful. In November, I attended the HBCU Climate Conference in New Orleans with four students who presented our research collaboration with the community of Africatown, Alabama. In January, I travelled to Africatown with students to continue our work on the Africatown Digital Archive. Our collaborators were enthusiastic about the results, and we look forward to making a series of presentations to the community to take the Archive public when we are able to return. Two of my honors students are also writing excellent theses about their three years of community-directed learning in Africatown, and we'll return to present their research as well.

I'm pleased to report that my book, *Climate Change, Literature, and Environmental Justice: Poetics of Dissent and Repair* is under contract with Cambridge University Press. Cambridge has also invited me to author another volume, *Introduction to Environmental Humanities*. I'm continuing to work with colleagues from other universities on grants that will support Oberlin's continuing collaboration with Africatown.

In spring 2020, I was teaching a course at the Grafton Correctional Facility until the pandemic forced us to postpone. The class included seven Grafton students and seven Oberlin students, and two writing associates. It has been one of the most profound classroom experiences I have been a part of. I hope to make these kinds of combined classrooms a regular part of my teaching.

In spring 2020 I was also teaching my class on climate change. This means I was already teaching the ends of the world when we had to leave campus. I miss that daily joy of the classroom, and it reminds me of how lucky I am to be at Oberlin. I also hold on to the hope that I take from Rebecca Solnit's luminous history of disaster utopias, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, that it is possible to build better worlds out of moments like this one in history. My students are the people I want to build this world with.

JOHN PETERSEN

"Resilience" can be defined as the capacity of an individual or system to maintain and exhibit its essential character (and ideally to exemplify the best of what is possible) in the face of external stresses. My academic interest in this area merged with a variety of real-world tests of resilience in this most unusual year!

On the academic front, Cindy Frantz and I proposed and recruited an exceptional group of students to participate in a fall '21 "Oberlin in London" Program that we have organized around the theme of social and environmental dimensions of Climate Resilience. On an institutional front, Oberlin College's budget challenges are testing the resilience of a student organization that I care deeply about—the Oberlin Student Cooperative Association. Although the context is challenging, I have



greatly enjoyed a heightened level of engagement with the amazing student leaders of OSCA, and have likewise enjoyed connecting with kindred alums as we initiated

Faculty and Staff Bios, *cont.*

“OSCAIums” as an affiliate group that can support and enhance the educational value and sustainability of OSCA into the future.

I have likewise been enriched this last year working with EnviroAlums to reinvigorate this important affiliate group in their efforts to support environmental initiatives and education at Oberlin. Kudos to EnviroAlums for fully funding four summer fellowships for current Oberlin students during a time when many fellowships have been cancelled! Teaching (and being a student) in the time of COVID-19 has most definitely demanded a special kind of resilience. But I nevertheless found at least some of the challenges interesting, such as giving tours of both the Environmental Studies Center and our Living Machine with my phone on a selfie stick. And instead of a big yellow school bus, I took a class of 60 students on a tour of Oberlin’s local energy, food, and water resources using Google Earth.

“*What makes this community resilient*” became the revised theme for community-based projects in my section of Environment and Society, in which students interviewed each other and Oberlin community members to develop inspiring new content for the “Community Voices” component of Environmental Dashboard.

As always, students in my upper-level courses impressed me with their creativity and initiative. Students in the Ecosystems Ecology class pursued research projects that continued to expand our knowledge of the Oberlin experimental hazelnut orchard’s capacity to sequester carbon (above and belowground). We also learned that Oberlin’s turf-to-meadow conversions do not (at least yet) appear to be storing more soil carbon than the college’s turf grass landscapes. Students in my Environmental Communications class helped to significantly enhance the Cleveland Environmental Dashboard exhibit at the Great Lakes Science Center, and helped to promote climate action planning in the City of Oberlin (see Dashboard update article for details).

In spring 2020, students in Systems Modeling developed fascinating simulation models of virus transmission, climate change impacts on pollinator-tree interactions, effects of agricultural regulation on nutrient runoff, and the psychology of pro-environmental behaviors. Despite all else, it has been a good year for me with grant funding (see Dashboard update). Finally, I have fond memories of a fun camping trip in the fall 2019 with some of my earliest Oberlin students (see photos).

KARL OFFEN

A highlight of my year was two trips to Latin America. Last July I traveled to Brazil, where I visited Salvador, Bahia, on my way to present a paper in Florianópolis at the World Congress of Environmental History. And then, in January, I traveled to Antigua, Guatemala, to present at the Conference of Latin American Geographers. A climax of each conference was an associated field trip. In Brazil we visited the remnant Araucaria forests in the southern state of Santa Catarina. Each world region where this ancient evergreen survives has a unique species that holds special significance for the people who live there—in Brazil it is illegal to cut them down, and on our trip it was not unusual to see a lone Araucaria towering above vineyards in Brazil’s largest wine producing region.

In Guatemala, I traveled with a small group that included my eldest daughter, Antonia Offen ’20 (with me in the picture along with my youngest daughter, Kaya), on an



environmental and human rights excursion to the middle of the country where we met with Mayan Achi activists and survivors of the genocidal attacks of the 1980s. At both conferences I presented a version of a 2020-published paper titled “Subsidy from Nature: The Green Sea Turtle in the Colonial Caribbean.” Therein I argued that the easily caught, gregarious in size, highly nutritious, and widely abundant marine reptile provided the natural capital for colonizing Europeans and, thus, inadvertently facilitated the rise of plantation agriculture, slavery, piracy, and more throughout the Caribbean basin.

My major intellectual accomplishment, however, was the revision and acceptance of the long-format article, “English Designs on Central America: Geographic Knowledge and Imaginative Geographies in the Seventeenth Century,” for the history journal *Early American Studies*. All of this already seems a lifetime ago.

Faculty and Staff Bios, *cont.*



PAUL BREHM

The most important development this year was the arrival of Alexander Oskar Brehm (pictured. He's so good at smiling for the camera!). Alex is generally quite happy and definitely assertive. When he wants something, he lets us know! While he can't crawl yet, he loves the control over his movement that his jumper/bouncy chair provides. Our

plan for a zoo membership has been delayed, but we can already tell from his interactions with local cats that he's passionate about (wild)life!

I am pleased to report that I recently published "Natural gas prices, electric generation investment, and greenhouse gas emissions" in *Resource and Energy Economics*. This work explores the effect of recent declines in natural gas prices on carbon emissions and investment in natural gas fired power plants. I have also been advancing other projects in my portfolio and had the privilege of presenting one last fall at Kent State University.

Spring 2020 has brought my first opportunity to teach a seminar in energy and environmental economics. Students are writing original research papers that seek to establish causal relationships in one of these fields. The course has been rewarding—it's wonderful to be able to work closely with so many students. My hope is that they are proud of their excellent work. Many of these projects serve as capstones in either economics or environmental studies or both. I look forward to returning to the course in the near future.



ROWAN HANNAN

My past year as a staff member with Oberlin College has offered a plethora of new opportunities including conferences, teaching, and grant proposals. I also became a parent to a second poodle, who can often be seen trotting

around the AJLC and giving kisses to stressed students.

In October 2019 I got to speak at Be.Hive's Behavioural Science conference at Dickinson College. I was a main

stage lightning speaker and presented on how Oberlin's Environmental Dashboard has affected resource conservation behavior in our community. Impossible Food's CEO Patrick Brown also presented at the conference and sponsored an Impossible Food's buffet. They really nailed vegan stuffed peppers.

In fall 2019 I was also able to co-pilot Professor John Petersen's Ecological Communications class. I assisted students on a variety of Dashboard-related projects in Cleveland and Oberlin. We presented for Good Morning Oberlin as well as for a community audience at Kendal.

As we look toward the coming year with new funding from the City of Oberlin and Green Edge Fund, I am looking forward to making upgrades to digital signage around the city, sharpening my programming skills, and strengthening bonds with community members.

MD RUMI SHAMMIN

"A happy life must be to a great extent a quiet life, for it is only in an atmosphere of quiet that true joy dares live."

—Bertrand Russell

As I write while trying to Zoom to the finish line of the spring 2020 semester in the quiet quarantine of my basement study area, I find myself contradicting Bertrand Russell and longing for happiness in the chaos of the final weeks of classes on campus. I miss my students, colleagues and friends. Never did I think that the little digital icons of the real people in my life would ever bring me so much joy!

A reality of lockdown is that you do not get to travel much or go to very many places. This comes on the heel of an eight-month period when I traveled to more places than ever—mostly related to my research projects on environmental issues associated with refugee camps and community-based climate change adaption in developing countries. In the end of May 2019, I traveled to the Rohingya Refugee Camps in Bangladesh and led a brainstorming workshop organized by the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

In late June, I had the opportunity to present on the complex interplay between refugees and local resilience at a workshop on *Borders and Borderlands at the Global Crossroads* organized by the American College of Greece in Athens. This was a great opportunity to interact with international scholars working on various aspects of the refugee crisis, visit a couple of European refugee camps, and traverse the points of crossing of Syrian refugees from Turkey into the EU. In August, I returned to Bangladesh to launch a project on developing refugee camp environmental management protocol in

Faculty and Staff Bios, *cont.*

collaboration with IUCN.

In December 2019, shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic started to spread in East Asia, I gave a plenary talk at the GLAA *Conference for Humanitarian Innovation & Entrepreneurship (CHIE): SDG Impact through Service-Learning* hosted by Lingnan University in Hong Kong on incorporation of UN SDGs and Resilience Framework in the Management of Refugee Camps. In January, I went back to the Rohingya Refugee Camps in Bangladesh to work with UNHCR and other partners on the draft camp management protocol that we have been developing. During this trip, I also conducted a pilot project on using oral history methods to document refugee environmental history.

As we navigate through the COVID-19 crisis, I have been working with collaborators in South Asia on a book project on community-based approaches to climate change adaptation as a way of delivering more just and resilient solutions. This is the culmination of a decade of field work in Bangladesh where I have been documenting stories and studying community-based climate change initiatives. In a post-COVID-19 world, we see these approaches to continue to advance climate adaptation work in developing countries despite potential interruptions in global financing under the Paris Agreement. The new reality of the disconnected existence of humanity in an interconnected world is revealing the deep lack of sustainability that exists in modern industrial societies and reminding humanity of the importance of building resilience through grassroots solutions. These research projects will be central to my work during my sabbatical leave in 2020-21.



SWAPNA PATHAK

The past academic year was quite productive for me in terms of research. One of my papers titled “Building Global Institutional Synergies to Accelerate the Ambition Mechanism of the Paris Agreement” was published in the *Solutions* journal. Additionally, a couple of my other projects

focusing on different aspects of the negotiations for the Paris Agreement are close to the publication stage. Beside research, I have been thinking a lot about the pedagogy of environmental policy reversals. This is because one of the core classes I teach focuses on the U.S. environmental policy, which has been unraveling over the past few years. These circumstances pose a challenge for educators in the field to not talk about environmental policies as the relics of the past and generate hope in our students. In order to share some of my thoughts with the academic community I wrote an article on the issue, which is close to publication at one of THE journals focused on political science education.

Another highlight of this year for me was to serve as the primary honors thesis advisor to three brilliant students—Ananya Gupta, Rachael Hood, and Antonia Offen. Their research ranged from analyzing natural gas pipeline protests to environmental conflict and peacebuilding in the Middle-East and South Asia. They all worked extremely hard all year to gather primary data through interviews, situated fieldwork, and newspaper articles for their research, and have produced incredible work (despite challenging circumstances). I feel great pride and joy in working with my honors students where in addition to guiding their research, I get the opportunity to learn so much from their work.

Beyond Oberlin, I traveled to Krakow, Poland, last summer to present my research on international diplomacy. During that period I also got the opportunity to visit Scotland, where I was able to hike the beautiful coastline and educate myself on scotch.



2020 ES Student Awards

DORIS BARON FUND

The Doris Baron Environmental Studies Student Research Fund supports independent research projects proposed by students and designed to increase knowledge of and appreciation for environmental studies. This year the fund supported four research projects and eight students.

Imani Badillo '22
Nathan Carpenter '20
Havi Carrillo-Klein '22
Leah Finegold '20
Antonia Offen '20
Charlotte Price '20
Michael Roman '20
Isabel Tadmiri '21

JOYCE GORN MEMORIAL PRIZE

Joyce A. Gorn Memorial Prize is awarded to one or more students for outstanding work on an extracurricular or off-campus environmental project.

Nathan Carpenter '20
Anna DeGolier '20
Wren Fiocco '21
Madeleine Gefke '20
Ora Hammel '20
Rachael Hood '20
Lillian Jones '20
Charlotte Price '20
Michael Roman '20
Olivia Vasquez '20
Amy Wang '20

ARTHUR BLANK FELLOWSHIPS

Established by the Arthur M. Blank Foundation, this grant enables Oberlin students to undertake research and educational opportunities in collaboration with Environmental Studies Program faculty.

Marika Anderson
Liam Hefta
Leo Lansdun
Iliana Lukasik
Harriet McSurdy

Charlotte Price
Michael Roman
Amy Wang

ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES HONORS

Nathan Carpenter

The Story Goes On: Environment, Community, and Epistemic Justice in Africatown, Alabama

Ananya Gupta

The Rhetoric of Transboundary Water-Conflict in the Indian Subcontinent

Rachael Hood

Don't Frack With Us! An Analysis of Two Anti-Pipeline Movements

Antonia Offen

Swimming Across the Divide: Environmental Peacebuilding in the Jordan River Valley

Charlotte Price

Counter Mapping Beyond Extraction: Digital Commons in Defence of Common Land in Mexico

Michael Roman

Perpetual Apocalypses: An Afticana Response to (Un) Natural Disasters and Environmental (In)Justice

SIGMA XI, THE SCIENTIFIC HONOR SOCIETY 2020 INDUCTEES

Sigma Xi is an international science research society with over 60,000 members worldwide.

Alexandria Edminster '20
Molly Sayles '20

Africatown Collaboration Update

by Isabel Tadmiri '21

Just north of downtown Mobile, Alabama, in the greater Mobile-Tensaw River Delta, the town of Africatown was founded by survivors of the *Clotilda*—the last ship on which enslaved Africans were forcibly brought to the United States. Since its founding in the early 1860s, Africatown has flourished as a tight-knit Black community, while also organizing against the impingement of polluting industries on their community. The traditions of oral history in Africatown date back to its founding,

too, and document the generations of continued community resistance and strength despite environmental racism and threats to education, health, land, and sovereignty.

Since 2017, Africatown and Oberlin have worked to create the Africatown Oral History Digital Archive—an effort to record and digitally archive these oral histories, in efforts to facilitate a public means by which Africatown community members can continue to retain sovereignty over their histories, and create space for fu-

ture story-sharing, collaboration, and repair. Since this past Fall, I've had the privilege to take part in this collaboration, but the relationships that have blossomed between Professor Janet Fiskio, her students, and Africatown collaborators date all the way back to 2014, even before the current digital archive project and my time at Oberlin. To date, over 30 oral history interviews have been recorded and developed by community historians in partnership with Oberlin students under the mentorship of Professor Fiskio. As the Africatown-Oberlin collaboration reaches its sixth year and we are readying the oral history digital archive for public launch, this year has been filled with exciting trips, and there is a lot to report back on!

With the support of the Doris Baron ENVIS Student Research fund, in October 2019 I was able to travel with four other students to Africatown to spend a week meeting with community partners, conducting oral history interviews, and assisting with local housing revitalization and tourism projects. This trip proved essential to the ongoing sustainability of our collaboration, in that it acquainted newer project members—Imani Badillo '22, Havi Carillo-Klein '22, and me—with knowledge and relationships necessary to carry on after spring 2020, when several of the project's students—including Nathan Carpenter '20 and Santiago Roman '20, who led this Fall Break trip—will graduate. In October, we were able to catch up with many long-time collaborators and develop newer relationships with partners such as the *Clotilda* Descendants Association. On this trip, we also spent critical time thinking about relationship-building within onboarding in community-based research, focusing on how to



share intergenerational knowledge in order to facilitate political education. Santiago wrote of the opportunity, “it was a bittersweet and powerful experience to, in a sense, hand off the baton to younger students who will be taking on the important work with Africatown after we graduate.”

After our Fall Break trip to Africatown filled with oral history interviews and archive development, in November, in part thanks to ENVIS departmental support, a group of Oberlin students had the privilege to attend and present in New Orleans at the HBCU Climate Change Consortium, alongside other communities and students doing essential climate justice work. The Oberlin group had the privilege to learn directly from pioneers of the environmental justice field such as Robert Bullard, Beverly Wright, and Dorceta Taylor. Students presented research we’ve done with our Africatown collaborators to showcase their community history and organizing efforts. Santiago Roman gave a 15-minute presentation describing the history of Africatown and the development of the digital archive. Eli Presburg ’20, Imani Badillo, and Jimmy Chu ’21 presented at the conference poster session and received third place out of dozens in the undergraduate poster competition.

During Winter Term, thanks to continued departmental support, I was able to return to Africatown with Nathan Carpenter, Eli Presburg, and Kobi Gomes ’23 alongside Professor Fiskio. Our group had the chance to participate in the inspiring daylong “Africatown Collaboration Workshop” led by the Africatown National Parks Service Blueway project. Importantly, on this trip, we were able to present the Digital Archive to our community partners to gain their critical feedback

in preparation for what was going to have been its public release in May.

Over this past year and in this interesting time as the end of the (virtual) semester nears, many of us—and especially seniors—have taken time to reflect. In a newsletter for the Mobile County Training School Alumni Association, Nathan Carpenter, Santiago Roman, and Eli Presburg wrote on their experiences: “In Africatown, we have found friends and mentors who have profoundly shaped our academic journeys, and more broadly, our lives. Our experiences there have meant more to us than we are able to fully express. In this uncertain time, we are spending extra time reflecting on them. More than maybe anything else, we’ve learned in Africatown how to be better keepers of one another. As we prepare to depart college and launch into an uncertain

world, our sense of what is possible is larger than it’s ever been before—due in large part to the kindness, compassion, and wisdom we have been humbled to receive in Africatown.”

These times feel ever uncertain, and with the move to online learning and limited events due to COVID-19, our public launch in Africatown is now indefinitely postponed. However, while we continue to remotely ready the archive for public launch, in these often scary and confusing times we are focusing not only on the immense gratitude for all of the hospitality, stories, and learning that our community partners in Africatown have constantly imparted on us, but are also all looking forward eagerly until the next time we can all catch up, and meet together again in Africatown to celebrate the Africatown Oral History Digital Archive’s public launch.

VIRTUAL CAREER DAY

The Environmental Studies Program holds an annual career day for majors, allowing alumni in environmental careers and local government and nonprofit leaders to talk with students about their career paths and ways of getting started in their fields. This year, the event was scheduled for March 13-14, the day Oberlin decided to stop in-person classes and initiate the vacating of campus in favor of safer, virtual classes. The Environmental Studies Career Day swiftly shifted to a virtual platform and spread across multiple days.

Virtual sessions were grouped around career fields, including Conservation & Sustainability, Renewable Energy & Food Systems, Transportation Planning & Technology Research, Environmental Science & Engineering, and a Recent Alums Panel. Panelists included Dana Goldstein ’18, Yael Reichler ’19, Chris Holbein ’03, Michael Mullaley ’09, Tom Simchak ’03, Sandi Kronick ’01, Allegra Fonda-Bonardi ’11, Naomi Fireman ’19, Annika Sullivan ’12, Dr. Doria Gordon ’81, and Ankur Desai ’97. Sessions were moderated by Rebecca Kukushkin ’22, Lauren Holmes ’21, Olivia Vasquez ’20, and Madeleine Gefke ’20.

A Year in Review



A. Green EDGE Fund Board Members during the Sustainability Celebration Banquet (from left): Wenling Li '21, Olivia Vasquez '20, Hannah Scholl '21, Audrey Kamal '22, Stephan Ciulla '21, Phoebe von Conta '22, Johan Cavert '20, and Emily Rosenberg '22. **B.** The Green Edge Fund Sustainability Celebration Banquet. **C.** Kaytlen Cruz '22 presents on Environmental Dashboard at Kendal at Oberlin. **D.** Vladi Shunturov '05 hosted a Pescara camping trip in his new Airstream with fellow OC grads Gavin Platt '06, Andrew deCoriolis '07, and Chris Fry '06, with John Petersen '88 taking the picture. **E.** Madeleine Gefke '20 and Hanae Garrison '21 measure carbon accumulation in above-ground biomass



in the experimental hazelnut orchard using allometric equations. **F.** Oberlin climate strike. **G.** Ecosystems Ecology field trip to Old Woman Creek research reserve. **H.** Kaitlyn Rivers '20 analyzes in the Ecosystem Ecology lab. **I.** Iñupiaq environmentalist Dr. Rosemary Ahtuanguaruk visits Professor Sakakibara's Indigenous Peoples and Environment course in fall 2019. **J.** Fall picnic at John's Pond. **K.** Obies and other presenters at the DOPE Conference at the University of Kentucky in February (from left): Zoe Kaplan, Gus Jaynes, Nichole Vargas (WKU), Charlotte Price, Theo Claire (Mount Holyoke), Santiago Roman, and Leah Finegold (*photo by Karen Kinslow*).

HBCU Climate Change Conference

by Eli Presberg, Jimmy Chu, Santiago Roman, Imani Badillo

By attending and presenting at the HBCU Climate Conference in New Orleans, we were able to learn from and connect with other undergraduate and graduate environmental justice researchers, as well as strengthen our relationships with our community partners from Africatown. Through listening to several presentations and panels by fellow environmental justice students from other HBCUs and PWIs, we gained further gain insight into even more projects and communities that remain essential to this field. We were fortunate to engage with giants in the environmental justice field such as Robert Bullard, Beverly Wright, and Dorceta Taylor. Learning directly from these incredible pioneers of environmental justice was a singular and deeply valuable experience for us.

In addition to attending the conference, held November 13-16, 2019, we had the privilege of presenting the research we had done in Africatown, Alabama, and supporting our Africatown community partners in presenting their community history and organizing efforts. Santiago gave a 15-minute presentation on Thursday describing the history of Africatown and our research there. On Saturday, Eli, Imani, and Jimmy presented at the conference poster session. This presentation received third place out of

dozens in the undergraduate poster competition.

Africatown is an invaluable historical and environmental justice site. Now officially a collection of Mobile neighborhoods, Africatown was once a self-sufficient, thriving community. Through our community-led oral history project, we continue to conduct interviews with residents of Africatown to build a digital archive of important stories and memories that highlight the unique and vibrant history of the place. The town was founded by the last documented group of enslaved Africans taken to the United States. The ship, the *Clotilda*, was sunk and burned after landing in Alabama in 1860, and the remains were discovered just last May. This added urgency and relevancy to the work we presented at the conference. Our work is done through requests by community members; we use the resources that we can to give to the community through assistance with finding and writing grants, checking in with the residents of Africatown through trips to Mobile during breaks in the school year, and using as much funding as we can to give back to the community. Connecting the work we do in partnership with the Africatown community with other scholarship and activism in the field through the conference was an incredible and deeply enriching experience. We thank the dean's office for supporting us in attending.



From left: Robert Bullard, distinguished professor of urban planning and environmental policy at Texas Southern University; Santiago Roman; Eli Presberg; Beverly Wright, founder and executive director of the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice; Imani Badillo; and Jimmy Chu. *Photo courtesy of Jay Fiskio*

Adam Joseph Lewis Center: Building Update

by Ben Hobbs



To say this year has been unique would be a massive understatement. A highly productive first half of the year gave way to a shocking end to residential life at Oberlin this March as the Covid-19 pandemic swept its way across the country. Virtually all student workers had to leave their dorm rooms and campus jobs to head home for an unprecedented spring semester of distance learning and quarantine.

This loss of student staff has created a lot of challenges for our building and the Living Machine. On average these LM operators, as we call them, work about 40 hours a week. Among other duties, they principally conduct four major lab procedures: Biological Oxygen Demand, Anion Analysis using Ion Chromatography, ISE Ammonium Analysis, and Fecal Coliform Bacteria Culturing, often

more than once a week to ensure the overall health of the system, as well as the care and maintenance of the garden and orchard that provide food to Oberlin Community Services (OCS). Their absence leaves a huge hole in the process of maintaining the Living Machine and the AJLC in general. To say these LM operators are missed is to grossly understate the obvious. As many staff on Oberlin's campus are working from home, the Living Machine is an active wastewater treatment facility, and its continual upkeep is essential during the pandemic. Therefore I have been present at the AJLC most days, ensuring the lab work remains as continuous as possible and that the garden and orchard are prepared for the summer and fall bounty that OCS depends on, especially this year. Adjustments have been required in the absence of suf-

ficient staff. We will not be growing our garden from seed this year, instead depending on seedlings from a local nursery. Thankfully, last summer, many perennial varieties, asparagus and rhubarb notably, were planted and will be harvestable this spring, displacing some of the need for preparations to plant annuals. Additionally, parts of the garden may need to be rested this year for want of the labor to prepare them adequately. On the plus side, we are supplementing the annual outdoor garden with a newly installed tower garden—an aeroponic setup that allows for year-round growth—that now lives in the atrium. The AJLC, and indeed the entire Oberlin campus, feels unnaturally quiet in the absence of students. Trust that we are doing the best we can to make sure it is ready for the return of students as soon as it is deemed safe.

2019-20 ES PROGRAM SPEAKERS & EVENTS

September 10, 2019: Iñupiaq educator and environmental activist Dr. Rosemary Ahtuanguaruk gave a special presentation on **Arctic climate change and health**. Rosemary received an honorary degree from Oberlin in 2017, catalyzing collaboration with Oberlin faculty, staff, and students.

September 15, 2019: The Annual **ENVS Fall Picnic** took place at the pond at Professor Petersen's house. ES faculty and students enjoyed an assortment of vegetarian food, played yard games, canoed, and mingled at the pond.

September 13, 2019: **Harvest Hazelnuts**. The Environmental Studies Program maintains an experimental hazelnut orchard on the grounds of the Lewis Center. Research is being conducted to assess the viability of hazelnuts as a woody-agricultural crop that might substitute for conventional agricultural crops such as corn or soybeans.

September 20, 2019: **ENVS Design Contest**. Environmental Studies students submitted artistic ideas for patches and stickers to display on backpacks, laptops, water bottles, etc. Oliver Vickers Batzforf '21 won the patch design and Hanae Garrison '21 won the sticker design.

September 24, 2019: **Climate Justice Strike** was held on Tappan Square. The event created a space for several student groups to brainstorm, share dialogue about climate action, reflect on the climate strike and think critically about how they could meaningfully engage with climate justice.

October 8, 2019: Screening of **Decade of Fire** in Professor Shammin's Sustainable Cities

course. Directors Vivian Vazquez and Gretchen Hildebran explore the aftermath of a rash of fires during the 1970s that consumed New York's South Bronx. The movie reveals the borough's history, racial politics, and government neglect while showing how multiethnic residents banded together to rebuild their community.

October 31, 2019: **Panel on Decolonization**. Professor Chie Sakakibara was a panelist for the Comparative American Studies Keywords Panel addressing ways that decolonization impacts faculty research and teaching.

November 4, 2019: Kristin Braziunas '08 from the Department of Integrative Biology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison presented **Western Forests in an Uncertain Future**. How will changing climate and increasing fire activity affect forested and human landscapes in the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem? Kristin discussed post-fire regeneration and the role of emerging technologies in measuring and anticipating future forest landscapes.

November 5, 2019: Jen Deerinwater presented the talk **Resource Extraction, Environmental Racism and Native Communities**.

December 12, 2019: Professor Chie Sakakibara presented her research **Ainu Renaissance: Reclaiming History, Heritage and Environment in Indigenous Japan**. The ongoing project compares the colonial past and contemporary renaissance of the Ainu expressive culture as a foundation of emerging Indigenous environmentalism steeped in cultural identity.

February 11, 2020: A group of environmental studies students

presented **Environmental Justice and Community Knowledge in Africatown**, Alabama, about their fall break research. They discussed Africatown's current environmental justice threats and the preservation and advocacy work that Oberlin has collaborated on since 2014.

February 26, 2020: **Careers Day 2020**. In lead up to the canceled event, acclaimed journalist and author Sonia Shah '90 spoke about her post-Oberlin path and theirs. Sonia has written extensively about the environment, climate displacement, and public health.

February 19, 2020: **Harnessing Collective Intelligence for Environmental Decision-Making**. Steven Gray, Associate Professor at Michigan State University, addressed the challenges of climate change, fisheries management, equitable access to clean water, and problem-solving in these complex systems. In a hands-on workshop, Gray created models, ran scenarios, discussed applications within communities, and explored the additional functionality of Fuzzy Cognitive Mapping software (www.mentalmodeler.com).

February 20, 2020: A film screening of **Anote's Ark** and discussion with Mike Roman, University of Cincinnati. The film is set against the backdrop of International climate and human rights negotiations.

March 6, 2020: An **ES pathway proposal workshop** was held for first- and second-year students to learn about the different pathways they can choose from and how to navigate this aspect of the ENVS major. Third- and fourth-year students led the discussion and offered advice to new majors.

A Life Changing Discovery at Oberlin

by Mike Roman

A February 2020 visit to Oberlin College led to a surprising and bittersweet discovery by Kiribati native Michael Roman of the University of Cincinnati. Environmental studies students Jess Wilber and Madeleine Gefke, along with the support of the ES Program, brought Michael to campus to screen the climate justice film Anote's Ark. This was Michael's first visit to Oberlin, and he arrived early to have a look around. After enjoying his first ever Paczki, or Polish donut, he made a remarkable set of discoveries at the Oberlin College Ethnographic Collection in the Mary Church Terrell Library, something best described in his own words.

Dear Obies!

I wanted to send a huge thank you for hosting me, Kiribati, and our movie at the college this past week! The Oberlin experience was surprisingly life-changing! As a result of this week at Oberlin, I am working with the UN Embassy in New York City; Te Papa in Wellington New Zealand; and the Kiribati Government for possible repatriation routes of materials at Oberlin. I wrote this little note to myself after viewing the artifacts.

I cried when they opened the cabinet [at the library]. The shark tooth sword from 1800-something—bare, naked, on a metal shelf locked away for no one to find. Where did you come from, I whispered. I was illogically hoping that it would tell me something. Abaiang, Tamana, Maiana my adopted roots. Nothing. Surrounded by students and their teacher, I wept. One of the students handed me a handful of tissues. Here, she said, I always keep tissues in my pocket. Thank you, I smiled. I don't know why I'm crying; I said as I wiped away my tears. It's just overwhelming seeing this in storage so far from home—Kiribati. The next item pulled out...a bag of skirts. Small, rolled, hard to decipher who they belonged to until exposed. They were indeed skirts of young girls, maybe 6 or 7. Exactly like the ones woven today with old VHS cassette tapes here in the states.

"You're tall enough," I asked. "Do you want to get that box down from on top of that shelf?" The sticker on the box said Kiribati armor. Like a child's coffin, walking the box to the examination table felt almost morbid. 1897 Kiribati warrior—I was carrying my adopted great great-grandfather's armor, I thought. We cut the seals

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EnviroAlumns Update

EnviroAlums continues its three-fold mission of supporting the ENVIS program, aiding current students and recent graduates with funding of internships, and advocating for best practices in environmental sustainability within Oberlin College and the community.

This past year we pledged funding for Career Day and for the 50th anniversary of Earth Day on campus. We funded Bhairavi Mehta '21 in her 2019 summer project: an alumni survey to compare perspectives of alumni who worked in OSCA with those who worked in standard college dining services. We also provided partial funding for a feasibility study of heating Oberlin's campus with waste heat from a landfill on the outskirts of the city of Oberlin.

Lauren Holmes '21 was hired as an intern liaison with the Environmental Studies Program, working an average of 5 hours per week under Professor John Petersen's supervision. Paul Safyan '68 was elected to a one-year term as chairperson of the EnviroAlums Steering Committee—the governing board of EnviroAlums—succeeding Andrew deCoriolis '07.

New steering committee members elected in January for three-year terms were Molly Samuel '04, Claire BW Miller '07, Aviva Glaser '04, and Krista Egger '04. We are seeking a few more interested alumni or faculty for steering committee membership.

We would also like to invite new members—especially recent graduates—to our group to assist in planning and executing new initiatives. Membership is free to anyone with an interest in environmental issues. Please join at: <https://oberlin.wufoo.com/forms/suieq0l7db0l/>. However, we encourage members to donate to our endowment fund, which is used each year to fund fellowships, internships and other programs. You can do this at <https://advance.oberlin.edu/donate> and write in Enviro Alums under the Other category.

We have the good fortune to have an annual budget that we can direct to promote sustainability in the college and the Oberlin community. We are always looking for new and innovative ways to achieve this part of our mission. Please get in touch to let us know how you think we can maximize

Environmental Dashboard 2020



Dashboard team members in fall 2019, including CS group, content managers, and project groups from the Practicum in Environmental Communication, show off their work on the Cleveland Environmental Dashboard exhibit at the Great Lakes Science Center in Cleveland.

Environmental Dashboard (ED) is a community-focused data acquisition, management, and communication platform developed by Oberlin faculty, staff, and students. ED aims to foster engagement in environmental development and community resilience. The development of ED technology has been supported by grants from the EPA, Great Lakes Protection Fund, and many other agencies. Last year, the project was fortunate to receive funding from the Cleveland Foundation, the city of Oberlin, and the Green Edge Fund to support major new initiatives in Cleveland and Oberlin.

Over the last two years, faculty and student teams from Oberlin have worked closely with Cleveland organizations such as the mayor's office and the Metroparks to develop a Cleveland Dashboard based on our Oberlin Pilot. In 2018, Oberlin's ED team created a novel exhibit at the Great Lakes Science Center (GLSC). The exhibit incorporates real-time

data on resource use in the facility, air quality in Cleveland, and water quality in Lake Erie. Interactive components of ED's exhibit also went live in the lobby of the Great Lakes Science Center. This spring, the ED team developed a new exhibit for the Cleveland Metroparks Watershed Stewardship Center—the first in a series of ED expansions into the Cleveland metro region.

The interactive exhibit in GLSC consists of a large mural and two display screens. One screen uses the "Community Voices" component of ED to feature environmental and community actions of partner organizations. The other display allows visitors to navigate through a series of stories narrated by "Flash" the energy squirrel and Wally the fish. These stories are animated with real-time data and teach guests about Lake Erie, water and energy use, greenhouse gas emissions, and local air quality. ED aims to empower Cleveland residents to improve the regional and global environment.

In spring 2020, Oberlin's Green Edge Fund (a student-run funding entity) awarded a grant to Oberlin Public Schools and ED to develop a data monitoring and display system and educational materials for a new K-5 school that is now under construction. While ED technology is already used to display resource use in each of Oberlin's public schools, the new building could separately monitor and display resource use in different grade levels, different end-uses, total greenhouse gas emissions, and solar energy produced in a planned on-site solar array.

Most recently, Oberlin City Council voted to support ED as a central mechanism for communicating the city's newly revised Climate Action Plan. A communications feature will support this initiative through a phone app for residents that will significantly enhance accessibility and interactivity. The ED project continues to provide Oberlin students with significant career development and community engagement opportunities.

Professor John Petersen and ED Project Manager Rowan Hannan coordinated student project teams in Petersen's Practicum in Environmental Communication course to participate in a range of projects that enhance ED initiatives. Cleveland-focused teams used video to assess user engagement at GLSC; developed an educational guide for museum docents; created messaging and narratives for Flash and Wally. Oberlin teams developed a presentation for the 21 screens in town, focused on the City's newly revised Climate Action Plan. This summer, a group of five summer fellows will develop new graphics and text content, extend software capabilities, and coordinate research. The long-term goal of ED is to create a model that can be replicated in communities across the country.

A NOTE FROM OUR STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

Thank you so much for having us as your ENVS student representatives this year! We are very appreciative of this opportunity to serve the ENVS community, which has meant so much to us as a learning environment, a space for change, and a family to be a part of. We have really enjoyed delving into the program more by connecting with our fellow students as well as the incredible faculty, all of whom have made our time as representatives feel so special. Our favorite part of the job? The wild, wackadoodle emails we love sending to everyone about our new program patches and stickers, Professor Beers, Earth Day 50, and more!

We started off this year with the annual picnic party at John Petersen's house, a beautiful summer evening with canoes on the pond, volleyball on the lawn, and conversations aplenty. But that was only the beginning! We flew headfirst into a whirlwind of rethinking the ESIC layout and art in the AJLC, improving pathway documents, contributing to Environmental Careers Day, and organizing Oberlin City & College's Earth Day 50 Celebration through the student planning committee.

Yet all of our worlds were turned upside down when COVID-19 hit our reality. We are at a loss, with not much more to say other than that we deeply miss our ENVS community. We miss the class discussions, the iconic ESIC couch, the hazelnut trees in the snow, the hellos to friends in the AJLC, the office hours with professors—the list goes on. However, even through separation, we have felt warmth in our hearts seeing Oberlin's environmental community come together in celebration of Earth Day 50. Although the events were different from our planning group's original vision, we are so grateful for the collaborations with our fellow organizers, community members, faculty, and guest speakers.

Most importantly, we thank you for participating and giving us a reason to smile and connect as we see each other pop up on Zoom from across the country and around the world. The biggest lesson we have learned on the job is that we cannot do it alone, whether it be planning events, pushing for an inclusive and empathetic environmental movement, or taking action against climate change. But we know we are not alone, and we cannot wait to continue working with you all together, as colleagues and friends, to strive for a better world. So, with all the hugs from our arms and all the love in our hearts, we thank you for everything.

Madeleine Gefke and Olivia Vasquez

Discovery, *cont.*

and opened the box. Another shark tooth sword and buried beneath the styrofoam and popcorn, a headrest... breastplates made from hardened, almost petrified, coconut fibers hundreds of years old. I needed more tissues. Elena had secretly refilled her supply. Like an archaeological dig, we uncovered him. Stood him up and placed him front and center throughout my talk. I had my adopted ancestor behind me...and it was the smoothest talk I ever did on Kiribati. No nerves...No mess-ups...No nothing. I believe he was there. Thank you for bringing me here, whoever you are! There are no words to explain the gratitude I have for this once in a lifetime experience.

The intimate setting for the student lunch let me delve deep into my life's mission of telling the world about vanishing nations and climatically endangered human populations. Humanizing climate change from my family's perspective, my Kiribati father's sunken village, my niece's life cut short too early, our fear of loss and the stories behind the science that never got unearthed were unearthed at Oberlin!

The movie night was great! The audience filled with students, staff, faculty, community members and an RPCV [Returned Peace Corps Volunteer] from Kiribati was amazing! [Professor Sakakibara's] class talk as well was truly touching! I loved that students stayed after to talk and thank me for coming to their class. I love Oberlin!!!

Thank you Jess! Thank you Madeleine! Thank you John! Thank you, Chie! Thank you Amy! And, of course, thank you, Ben, for my new Paczki obsession!!!

Mike

OBERLIN COLLEGE ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES PROGRAM

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