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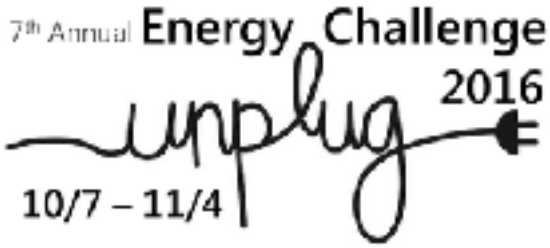
Environmental Science Newsletter

Allegheny College

7th Annual Energy Challenge



From October 7th to November 4th, Allegheny dormitories participated in the 7th Annual Energy Challenge. Across campus, students attempted to reduce their energy use by turning off lights, unplugging devices, and shutting down all electronics over breaks. Pi Kappa Phi had the largest energy reduction at 17.7%, followed by Caflisch and Crawford. A total reduction of 13.2% was achieved across campus, saving 128,000 kilowatt hours and $11,000. This money will go toward sustainable features on campus, like solar panels and reusable water bottle fill up stations.

ES 110 "Shark Tank" Project

This semester, students in ES 110 were tasked with devising a unique project that would help Allegheny reach its goal of climate neutrality by 2020. Broken into small teams, students worked to identify spots on campus that were unsustainable and developed plans to improve these areas. At the end of the semester, students presented their ideas in front of panel, similar to the judges on the TV show "Shark Tank." Ideas ranged from composting paper towels to installing outdoor recycling bins. The best idea will be given a budget of $100 and be implemented on campus.

Lake Malawi

Dr. Jay Stauffer, a professor at Penn State main campus, gave a talk about the research he conducts in Lake Malawi on November 15th. He shared many videos that he recorded in the lake of the incredible biodiversity and behavior that the fish exhibited. The lake is home to over 1,000 species of fish, and some of the differences can only be seen under UV light. He also shared stories of his interactions with the villagers while he was there. One of which was a story about how the locals stole his safety pins and beads that were used to tag fish and made them into earrings for the ladies.

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(Melissa Burnett, Bethany Chez, Grace Rohaley, Rene Benoit, Chloe Finger, Masha Serguievski, Annie Socci PhD, Cayla Brandon, Rebecca Montgomery, Karly Studley, Mitchell Carrigan, Alaina Duessel, Andrew Kirn, Dawei Zong, Jordan Durci)

On November 17, 2016, the Natural Resource Conservation FS met up with Conservation & Outreach Manager for The Foundation for Sustainable Forests, Annie Socci, PhD and Land Manager, Allegheny alumnus, Guy Dunkle '05 to discuss **sustainable forestry**. Dunkle explained to students that selectively cutting down trees can be beneficial to landowners and forests. When invasive species, such as the Emerald Ash Borer, pose a threat to forests, sustainable foresters will mark trees, such as ash, to be cut. Trees that are at risk to invasive species are removed in hopes to reduce the damaging impact of invasive species in the forest. Trees are also selectively cut based on their neighboring species, shade tolerance, health, and their economic potential. The Foundation for Sustainable Forests wisely chooses which trees to harvest, then they hire workers to cut and haul the trees out of the forest by horse. Using horses on trails through the forest to transport lumber certainly forms a muddy trail, however, it is much better for the well-being of the forest in comparison to heavy logger machines in conventional logging. After walking through the woods and absorbing knowledge on sustainable forestry, students were granted Amish cookie keepsakes.

Stories from the Alum

Sandra Wayman, an Allegheny class of 2010 alum, is currently working at Cornell at the Rodale Institute as a sustainable agriculture research assistant. I had the opportunity to talk to Sandra about how her time at Allegheny prepared her for her current, and former, careers. She majored in ES with a minor in the pipe organ; talk about those 'unusual combinations'. I asked her what advice she would give to current students to help them prepare for their future careers, and she said, "Looking back on my own path, I'd say: getting involved with volunteer projects like the Vines Organic Farm really helped me think outside the college bubble. Saying yes to extra work and involvement that my professors offered me: being a TA, going to office hours and building relationships with my professors. Attending conferences and presenting posters or talks, even giving presentations on campus for various events when possible. Talking to alums who had jobs in areas where I had interest. Getting to know as many professors and deans and college support people as I could (and the president!)." I also asked what she loved most about her Allegheny experience, "The environmental science professors! Being on a first name basis, discussing the problems of our world in class, and doing practical group class projects in Meadville. I also enjoyed being a "big fish in a small pond" as it were, I gained a sort of reputation for being "that short haired biking girl" because I was usually riding my bicycle, often carrying a bucket of compost or plate of rescued-from-a-catering-event cookies." Sandra credits Rich Bowden for encouraging her to follow the path of soil science and getting hands on experience. She said that, "I am so happy doing what I do now."

Sandra at the Cornell Musgrave research farm, ready to soil sample in an experiment testing perennial and annual forage cover crop mixtures.