

Environmental Studies Program

Academic Year 2021-2022



Meet the Staff



Dr. Suzanne Crawford O'Brien
Interim Dean of Interdisciplinary Studies



Dr. Adela Ramos
Chair




Christine Nicolai
Administrative & Communications Director, Division of Natural Sciences



Teri Potts
Administrative Assistant, Interdisciplinary Programs

The pages of this newsletter highlight the reasons why we conclude this year on a hopeful note. Returning to campus, as senior Sophia McDonald states in her reflection [13], gave us an opportunity to “reaffirm [our] love of learning.” It was affirmed in our Environmental Methods course through the work of our faculty and students on the Clover Creek Watershed, in our disciplinary breadth courses [3-8], and in the ambitious and thoughtful projects that our seniors developed in their Capstones [12]. It comes across in the Earth and Diversity week events and activities which addressed urgent questions: How do we walk the line between environmental loss and what is still preventable with hope and without denial? How do we mobilize for environmental justice in a political system that privileges corporate interests? How do we move from recognizing we are on Tribal land to learning land management with and from its original caretakers? [9]. Love of learning also comes across in what our alumni are doing now [14], in the research and work our students will develop over the summer [15], and how our students and faculty are poised to continue learning about our local watershed and the environmental health of Parkland in the coming academic year [16-18].




The energy and commitments recorded on these pages are a great example of what Earth Day speaker, Dr. Jennifer Atkinson (UW/Bothell), might refer to as “climate hope”: a kind of hope that coexists with the acknowledgment of grief and loss--of species, landscapes, livelihoods, and knowledge--brought on by climate change. This ability to hope without denying grief or the complexity of the present resonates with our experience throughout another challenging year when we had to re-learn how to learn, how to teach, how to be in community, and to do so, in some instances, without dear colleagues who we relied on for expertise and their commitment to our shared educational project. The loss of this expertise and changes across the university required that we revise our curriculum. As a result, we have removed one of our core courses, ENVT 498: Interdisciplinary Inquiry and Analysis. Its loss has not gone unnoticed by our students. Yet, thanks to the Executive Committee’s vision and creativity, we have integrated an Environmental Justice requirement for both majors and minors. While this does not substitute ENVT 498, it does move us forward in affirming our commitment to environmental justice by making it an integral part of our curriculum.

As of next year, the Environmental Studies Program will cohabit with our esteemed colleagues in Geosciences--Alex Lechler, Rose McKenney (obviously!), and Peter Davis--under a new merged unit: Earth Sciences and Environmental Studies. We are excited for this new configuration under the College of Natural Sciences, which will highlight the geoscientific foundations of care for the Earth and bring new opportunities for interdisciplinary conversation with colleagues from the humanities, social sciences, and other interdisciplinary programs.

The work and accomplishments of this year would not be possible without the Environmental Studies Committee. I want to thank Romey Haberle (Biology), Sergia Hay (Philosophy), Brian Naasz (Chemistry), Rose McKenney (Geosciences), Priscilla St. Clair (Economics), and Michael Turzweski (Geosciences) for their unflagging support of the Program and commitment to our students, for their vitality, good humor (even in difficult times!), companionship, and creative contributions to our curriculum. Thanks to all of our affiliate faculty and to the mentors who guided our Capstone students through their projects. And many, many thanks to Christine Nicolai and Teri Potts for their endless generosity and support in all the things we do from fall through summer. You are all vital to our Program!

The following pages attest to why, despite our complex academic and social realities, we conclude this year with a spirit of what might be called down-to-earth hope.



About This year's Design



Alex Reed
Design

For this year's newsletter, I was inspired by the flowers on campus. Since a lot of environmental media focuses on the color green, I wanted to branch out from this by adding pops of color. After taking pictures on my phone of a few different flowers, I used those pictures to create the color pallet for the newsletter: Tulips for the red, lunaria for the purple, and daffodils for the yellow background. To incorporate the PLU gold, I created a gold border to represent the darker inside of a daffodil.



Notes From The Watershed

Environmental Methods of Investigation

is the heart of our major and minor. In this interdisciplinary course, students learn diverse disciplinary methods of data and evidence collection, analysis, application and integration Environmental Studies. This spring students learned and applied chemistry, English studies, environmental biology, surface geology, and Southern Coastal Salish religion to assess the health of the watershed. We are able to sustain this exciting interdisciplinary curriculum thanks to Dr. Rose McKenney's interdisciplinary expertise and pedagogical vision, and to the enthusiasm and commitment of our affiliated faculty.

Dr. Rose McKenney works relentlessly every year to provide students with a robust and exciting experience of the watershed. She brings colleagues from across campus into conversation through their guest teaching for the course, and provides students with opportunities to reflect on the complexities and values of each discipline.



Students analyzing the health of the water through an environmental biology lens thanks to Dr. Jacob Egge. Pictured here from left to right: Makaela Whalen, Belen Zuñiga, Greta Schwartz, and Ally Lessard in Dr. Egge's biology lab for ENVT 350.



Coast Salish Sea Religion

Thanks to Dr. Suzanne Crawford O'Brien, students joined members of the Puyallup Tribe on the campus prairie to learn about the meanings, value, cultivation, and harvesting of camas lily for the Puyallup Tribe in preparation for this year's first salmon ceremony.



Dr. Brian Naasz (right) teaching environmental chemistry. Pictured here with (left to right): Kord Tuttle, Great Schwartz, and Charlie Cutter in Spanaway.



Angeline Totus teaching students about the camas lily and its role in traditional diets and the first salmon ceremony.



Totus harvesting Camas.



Nick Ezzell and Blake Clapp holding Camas.



Literature in the Environmental Studies Classroom



Letters from the Watershed

Adela Ramos

For the past two years, I've had the pleasure of representing literature as a discipline in ENVT 350. After teaching remotely last year, it was exciting to walk down to Rieke 108 from my office in upper campus to read and discuss Mary Shelley's famous novel, *Frankenstein* (1818), with an incredibly engaged group of students. Shelley's famous novel might not be the first literary work that comes to mind when thinking about watersheds or water. But Robert Walton, the character who shares Victor Frankenstein's and the Creature's story with his sister and, through her, with us, is writing from a ship stranded in the icy waters of the North Pole. When Victor Frankenstein seeks comfort from debilitating guilt and the consequences of his actions, he often turns to a beloved lake where he sees "fish play in the waters" as tears stream from his eyes. The Creature first refers to himself as a "monster" after seeing his reflection "in a transparent pool." As students realized even before I made the point, water is everywhere in this novel, which has so much to teach us about how our everyday choices ripple through our environment and the lives of those near and far.

We spent a week thinking about how language shapes our relationship to the environment, and how this language oftentimes determines which lands and landscapes are protected and which are deemed unhealthy or monstrous. At the end of the week, during our Lab, students were tasked with drawing an area of the watershed that holds particular meaning for them. Then, they took pen to paper to write about this area of the watershed from the perspective of one of the characters in the novel. Their letters had the goal of addressing a complex environmental problem they have studied throughout the semester, one which resonated with the novel. We did this as Robert Walton would have done--by candlelight, using laid paper, ink, and wax seals.

The excerpts below demonstrate how nimbly this year's class of ENVT 350 students moves between geological or chemical and imaginative frameworks, as well as attesting to their deep commitment to thoughtful inquiry and to the environment.

"The place I fled from left me beaten and bruised, leaving my own health in question. Now, here in this controlled but beautiful place, the question of my own health extends to the overall health of this manufactured oasis. What are the consequences of manufacturing beauty? I lay with this question for weeks, as I watch local countrymen enjoy the gifts the park has to offer. Children playing in the stream, groups who gather to eat lunch, youth who come to this space to partake in actions that would not be allowed at home, all share the joy in this space. This, in turn, fills me with happiness. Surely, a place that provides so much joy, must be a place rich with health!"

-Blake Clapp ('23), writing as "Broken Man"



You've got mail. Wax sealed letters.

"I believe they call this Spanaway Lake, a flourishing haven of calm and tranquility. The trees are flowering, encapsulating the area with life. The lake is swaying in the contentment of the music of birds, and the stream sings in a song of power and dominance. I found myself hiding within the dense tree line that allowed me to view this haven without the judgment of man. But as night blankets my ugliness from the likes of you, I was able to explore this false garden and discover how man has created this land in the likeness of me."

-Rebecca Smith ('23), writing as The Creature



Rebecca Smith and Fiona Ashton-Knochel draw the Clover Creek Watershed from their perspective.

"I have been taking the children to Clover Creek, what a dear little name, don't you think so, Robert? Still lately we have been noticing the loss of ducks that frequent his spot. The deer, too, seem to be disappearing as certainly as this Creature you speak of. Mary in particular is very upset that she is no longer able to feed the little birds. Now where do you suppose they could have gone?"

-Makaela Whalen ('23), writing as Margaret Saville.



Gunnar Legler and Greta Schwartz write nineteenth-century style epistles.

ENGL 234: "Whose Nature? Diverse Perspectives on the Outdoors"

Dr. Nathalie op de Beeck

Students in my environmental literature course "Whose Nature? Diverse Perspectives on the Outdoors" (ENGL 234) took a field trip to Communities for a Healthy Bay in March. We met with Marquis Mason, a climate justice community organizer, and Khadijah Tividad, a PLU alum and a clean water educator for CHB. Mason and Tividad taught us about how CHB monitors safe industrial practices in Commencement Bay and educates diverse communities about environmental justice in the Pacific Northwest. Our class continued to Tacoma's Chinese Reconciliation Park, where we explored the interactive space and learned about Tacoma's history of Chinese American exclusion and unequal access to the outdoors.

To celebrate Earth and Diversity Week, we traveled to the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge. As barn swallows and violet-green swallows swirled around us, we talked about activist Billy Frank Jr.—the namesake of this restored estuary—and his defense of tribal sovereignty and fishing rights in the nearby Nisqually River. We walked the forested boardwalk and observed black-tailed deer, great blue herons, and a pair of eagles carrying prey to their massive nest. For fun, we went on a nature scavenger hunt, with a promised bonus point for finding a frog; a student from Prof. Jacob Egge's "Natural History of Vertebrates" course (BIOL 354) located a Pacific tree frog, and the paparazzi descended to snap photos of the green celebrity.



ENGL 234 students visit the Chinese Reconciliation Park in Tacoma.



Winner of the scavenger hunt exhibits the Pacific Tree Frog.

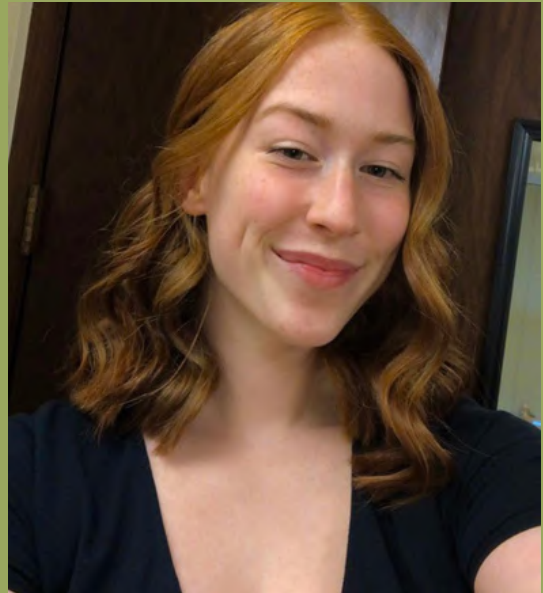
To conclude our Spring 2022 course, environmental literature students composed creative nonfiction essays and crafted video presentations. They modeled their talks on the research-informed essays in Aimee Nezhukumatathil's book *World of Wonders*.

Each student chose an animal or plant, researched its unique qualities, and put the species in context with their own identity and life history.

To see these three examples from our course, go to the Newsletter webpage (url link below).



Business major/Dance minor Kei-Lynn Ono tells us about O'ahu's invasive Coqui frog,



Kinesiology major/Psychology minor Breeze Bartle introduces the hardy succulent *Echeveria elegans*,



and Biology major/Environmental Studies minor Blake Clapp reflects on the resilience of the PNW's Coho salmon.

Newsletter website:
<https://www.plu.edu/environmental-studies/newsletter-3/>



Earth and Diversity Week 2022

PLU's celebration of Earth Day began twenty years ago thanks to the advocacy of colleagues like Chuck Bergman (English), Bill Teska (Biology), Sheri Tonn (Chemistry), and Jill Whitman (Geosciences). We began this year's Earth and Diversity week by acknowledging their important legacy as we continue this important tradition, which has now extended to an entire week that includes a host of campus partners.

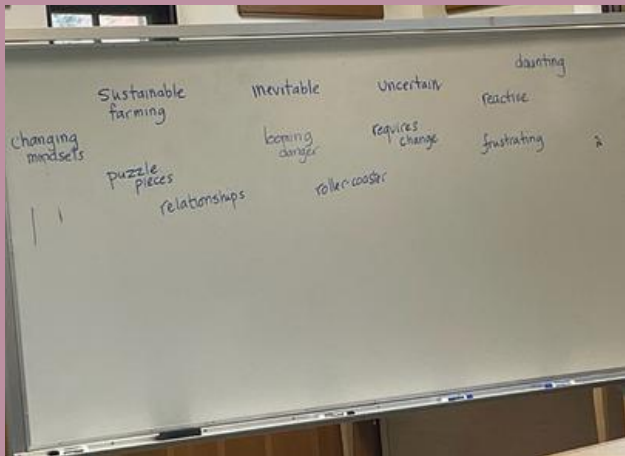
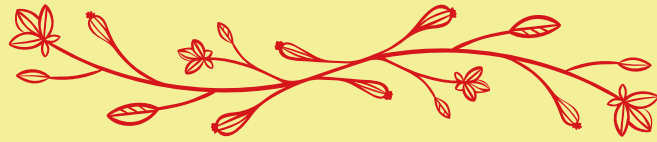
Co-led by the dCenter, the Environmental Studies Program, ASPLU, GREAN, and contributions from the Interim Dean of Interdisciplinary Studies Dr. Suzanne Crawford O'Brien and Dr. Romey Haberle (Biology), this year's events included the Earth Day lecture with Dr. Jennifer Atkinson, a conversation on mobilizing for environmental justice with Sen. Mona Das (Seattle, 47th District), screenings of the documentary *Inhabitants: Indigenous Perspectives on Restoring our World*, Sounds of Solidarity, Invasive Species Removal on campus, and ENVT 350 students joining the Puyallup Tribe in a beach clean-up. We are grateful for Nicole Juliano's leadership in sustaining a campus-wide week where we honor the Earth and affirm our commitment to social justice.



Mooring Mast article 2003



Earth Day Speaker: Dr. Jennifer Atkinson provided faculty and students with practices and actions we can take to navigate climate grief and move toward what she and other experts term, "climate hope."



Dr. Atkinson visited ENVT 350 and asked students to identify the keyword that best defines how they feel about the future



Sen. Mona Das in conversation with students



ENVT 350 Students volunteered in this year's beach cleanup organized by the Puyallup Tribe.

Notes From The Summit



It is always exciting to see a class of thoughtful, hard working students reach the Capstone stage and complete it. Witnessing this year's seniors achieve this final milestone is particularly moving given the unprecedented challenges that staff, faculty, and students have weathered over the past two years, nevertheless remaining thoughtful and determined in the midst of it all.

The graduating cohort welcomes back in-person teaching alongside affiliate faculty members Troy Storfjell, Sergia Hay, course instructor, Rose McKenney, and Romey Haberle.

2022 Graduates in one word

We asked a group of our graduating seniors to describe their college experience in one word:

Abrupt

Humbling

Unpredictable

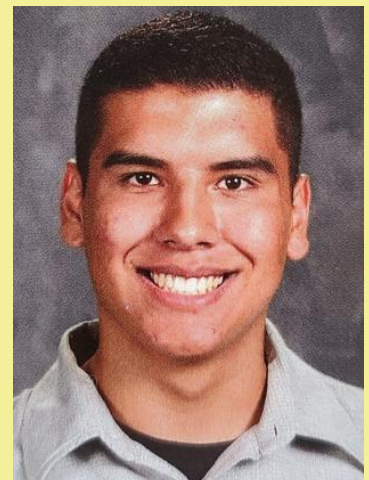
Unconventional

Hopeful

Aaron Pantoja chose the word "unconventional" and explained his choice as follows:

"The reason lies solely in the strange and macabre experience of living with COVID-19 for the past few years. My entire Junior year was online, and while it wasn't the most difficult thing to adjust to in terms of scheduling, since I am pretty disciplined when it comes to managing my time, it is certainly fascinating to look back. I managed to overcome such a tremendous obstacle that had the potential to derail my college career, but I persevered. It was certainly something no one in my family had experienced, and it was certainly not the norm for a college student and the expectations I had when I first began in the fall of 2018. Therefore I want to use the word "unconventional" to highlight the unique twist on the college experience."

-Aaron Pantoja ('22)



Despite all of the challenges they have faced, Environmental Studies graduating majors presented their Senior Capstone Projects on Tuesday, May 24th in Morken 138. Their presentation topics represent their thoughtful inquiry about our time's pressing issues. Their topics ranged from exploring how policies prevent communities of color from access to clean water and air, how climate change is impacting the lives of Indigenous tribes in Tacoma and in Alaska, how film allegories can reach climate skeptics, how shifting our definitions of wilderness and cultural frameworks can bridge the divide between humans and nature, and the importance of integrating ethical frameworks to our treatment of amphibians and cattle. Their concerns and commitments point us in a hopeful direction.



ENVT Class of 2022 (left to right): Caitlin Ferguson, Aaron Pantoja, Grace Godwin, Cooper Claxton, Juli Rendler, Mary Lynn McLeod, Sophia McDonald, Jayna Ott, Luis Ryes, Helena Waterton, Shalom Wundimu, Ryan Shane, Emily Toycen. (Not pictured: Allison Sheflo who was at rowing competition).

You can read about this year's capstone projects on our website.
<https://www.plu.edu/environmental-studies/capstones/>

The Path Ahead

Some of our graduates are off to old or new jobs, summer research adventures, graduate school. But, as in the case of ENVT and Global Studies major, Sophia McDonald, some are heading back to campus! Like many students who missed out a whole year of in-person college, Sophia has decided to take advantage of the PLUS Year, and will be returning to campus next year to take courses she didn't have room for during her four-year college track to graduate with two majors. Below, she reflects on her decision to take the PLUS year.

"I decided to do the PLUS year to have the opportunity to explore new avenues and to space out my classes. Over the course of my four years at PLU, I meticulously planned out my classes to ensure that I met all the major requirements for Global Studies and Environmental Studies. However, with the PLUS year being offered,

I finally felt that I was able to take a breath and appreciate more of what PLU has to offer.



Not only do I have the opportunity to space out the remainder of my classes but I am also able to take classes outside of my majors that I am interested in. The PLUS year is allowing me to dedicate more focus to each of my capstones and explore other areas, like art and music, which I would not have had the opportunity to do otherwise. In addition, I have been afforded the opportunity to participate in

a J-Term study-away program. I think it is a valuable opportunity for students **to explore different paths and reaffirm their love of learning.**

The PLUS year is a great opportunity to explore different job careers, add on another minor, conduct research with a faculty member, do independent study, or explore new interests."

Congratulations Class of 2022!



Where Are They Now?

Each year we celebrate our graduating seniors and each year we receive exciting updates about their adventures after graduation. This year, we're happy to share that our alumni are successfully finding jobs, despite the challenges of our current economic context, and beginning studies in graduate school.

"I have been admitted to the Educational Psychology Department at the University of Minnesota, and I will be completing their Masters in Counselor Education. The program prepares graduates to counsel individuals in either a school setting or as licensed mental health professionals. I think I will be seeking a degree with an emphasis on the latter. My goal is to become a therapist and work with adolescents."

-Siri Fretheim



"For this position, I have really taken the skills associated with converting one discipline's language into a more relatable and understandable version for another discipline to use. In my position I have to communicate with our lead operations manager, transportation heads, volunteers, and Mavericks to ensure the proper trails are being cleared and maintained in a safe and organized fashion."

-Kenzie Davidson: Trails Coordinator for Holden Village in Chelan, WA.



"Working as an environmental educator for the Nisqually River Foundation has taught me a lot, but the biggest takeaway from this position has been to trust in my capabilities. My confidence in this field has grown exponentially and a lot of that has to do with the path I took at PLU. Because environmental studies is an interdisciplinary major, I developed a lot of skills and interests in subjects that make learning about the environment much more interesting and relatable for kids. Throughout my time with the River Foundation, I've learned to rely on these skills and be confident in my role as an educator."

-Layne Perkins: Environmental Educator for the Nisqually River Foundation.



"I will be teaching students how to rock climb outdoors as an Assistant Guide for Summer Camp at Edgeworks Climbing Tacoma."

-Emily Toycen ('22)



Further Adventures

Environmental Studies majors see in summer an opportunity to continue pursuing their passions. Here's what two of our returning students will be doing while school is out:

"I will be traveling to Oxford, UK to research sense of meaning and well-being with IHON-Oxford Program students. My goal is to assess how the program impacts the students beyond the academic setting. I'll be sharing my research with the IHON-Oxford Program and PLU's Wild Hope Center for Vocation in order to provide a more robust understanding of how PLU is assisting students in their vocational journeys through study-away programs."

-Nick Etzell ('23)

Nick was recently featured in Resolute discussing his work as Vocation Program Intern.
<https://www.plu.edu/news/archive/2022/04/13/nick-etzell/>



"I will be working as a Habitat Conservation Support Member for the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge in UTAH under the US Fish and Wildlife service with the American Conservation Experience. My work will include hydrologic restoration for migratory bird habitats, establishing baseline vegetation data points, and networking with land agency professionals."

-Fiona Ashton-Knochel ('24)



Confluence

As this newsletter attests, for Environmental Studies students and faculty, the return to in-person classes has been a celebration of hands-on collaborative learning. In addition, it has allowed us to revitalize important partnerships that were dormant during the social distancing phase of the pandemic and to cultivate new relationships. This has resulted in two new exciting opportunities for PLU and our Program.

Chambers-Clover Creek Watershed Archive and Digital Exhibit @ PLU

This year allowed us to reconnect with our long term watershed partners, the Chambers-Clover Creek Watershed Council. Throughout the past year, we have been meeting regularly to revisit a project started by Dr. Claire Todd, a great partner of the Council throughout her time at PLU. We're happy to report that through these conversations and our successful application to two different grants--a PLU Kelmer-Roe grant and a Chambers-Clover Creek Watershed Council grant--we will develop the Chambers-Clover Creek Archive and Digital Exhibit at PLU throughout the next academic year. The project will collect, digitize, and organize the Council's materials and decades worth of scientific research collected by Environmental Studies students and faculty. In addition, we will record and edit oral histories, create educational articles about the watershed, and make all of these materials accessible to the community at large.

The project highlights the richness of our interdisciplinary community as it will bring together Dr. Seth Dowland (Interdisciplinary Studies/Religious Studies and History), Dr. Rose McKenney (Geosciences/Environmental Studies), Dr. Adela Ramos (English/Digital Humanities), and students from a rich array of majors: Vilde Aker (Communication/Environmental Studies), Ally Lessard (English/Environmental Studies), Makaela Whalen (Environmental Studies/Political Science), Belen Zuñiga (Environmental Studies/Religion). Josh Smith, the Library's digital preservationist, will assist the team in both the digitization of materials and creation of digital platforms for the exhibit. In addition, we will develop this project in collaboration with Dr. Anna Trammel (Tacoma Public Library Northwest Room Historian), who will integrate the Council's digital holdings to the exciting new project she is leading, [Tacoma Community Archives](#), which is devoted to making visible missing, marginalized, or underrepresented histories of the Tacoma area. We are incredibly excited to begin this truly interdisciplinary and community-centered project.



Barbara Ann Smolko (CCWC) on the watershed with the spring 2020 ENVT 350 class.



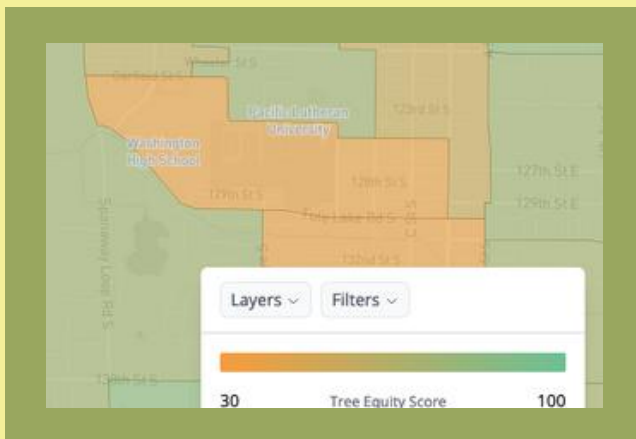
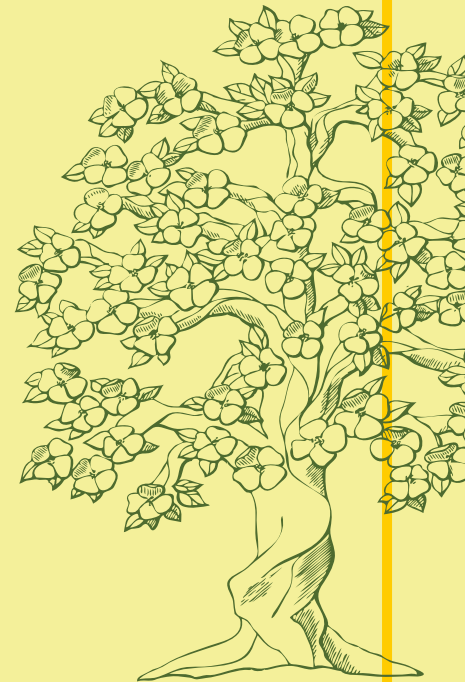
Ally Lessard (English/Environmental Studies), recipient of the Kelmer-Roe Fellowship for the archive and exhibit, shares her reasons for wanting to participate in the faculty-student team that will develop the project:

"I am excited to collaborate with my professors and the CCWC to create a public archive of the history of the watershed. Through this project, I hope to promote the importance of the Clover Creek watershed for PLU and our neighboring community. It will be an amazing opportunity to extend my studies of the watershed outside of the classroom, and create an accessible narrative of its history."



Tacoma Tree Foundation

This year also brought the opportunity to create a new partnership with the local Tacoma Tree Foundation (TTF). Under the leadership of Dr. Lowell Wyse, this organization serves the Greater Tacoma Area through educational and civic engagement projects that have the goal of cultivating a greener and healthier Tacoma. TTF was just awarded a grant by the Washington State Department of National Resources to develop a project in partnership with Pierce County that will allow them to provide at least 200 free trees for residents who agree to plant and maintain them in the right-of-way (next to the street). The Foundation has invited PLU to support this project in the Parkland neighborhood. Compared to other areas of Pierce County, Parkland has greater ethnic diversity, lower average household incomes, less tree coverage, higher summer temperatures, and lower public health outcomes. The Parkland street tree program is being funded in part because of its anticipated environmental justice impacts. PLU students will support this project from July - September working as interns. We are very excited to support the Parkland street program which overlaps with our commitment to our neighboring community, environmental justice, and to education.



A map of the Parkland neighborhood showing disparities in access to greenery and canopy. You can get more information on greenery and canopy in your neighborhood at www.treeequityscore.org.



TTF Founder Sarah Low discussing a street tree with some Tacoma residents.

Our collaboration in these two projects will bridge the summer and fall, leading us into an academic year for which the Environmental Studies Executive Committee has the goal of reaffirming its long standing commitment to sustainability. Water and trees sustain the ecosystems that nurture us, our neighbors, and our neighborhood. They are crucial witnesses to Parkland's long and complex history, and invite us to imagine new ways of honoring the lands of the Puyallup, Nisqually, Steilacoom, and Squaxin Island people. We are excited to engage, reflect on, and reaffirm the importance of sustainability for environmental and social justice.



Clover Creek Watershed running through lower campus on a sunny day.

We wish you all a restorative and healthy summer!

