



Environmental Science and Sustainability Department Newsletter

*End of Semester Issue
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Professor Wissinger; in memoriam

Scott Wissinger had an undeniable impact on Allegheny College, visible through his interactions with multiple departments, staff and countless students. He was one of the flagship professors for the Environmental Science Department, and a mainstay of Biology in Steffee, where he spent time as the Department Chair. It was largely through his presence in those two departments that he mentored students and performed research. His research centered around aquatic ecosystems, where he would study amphibians and caddisflies. His research of the latter took him to Colorado, where Professor Wissinger spent summers researching alpine ponds. His research in that area took place over such a long time-frame that he was able to notice long term trends in organism populations, which provided the catalyst for more research.

I had the opportunity to speak with Scott himself about his research, actually for this Newsletter at the time of his retirement; his love for this research stood out clearly. He spoke with such interest that it was obvious to see he truly cared about not only what he studied, but also what he taught. That passion in the classroom extended from the textbook to his students. Even after his retirement, he still led Senior comp. groups, which is only one way out of all the ways he influenced his

students' careers not only at Allegheny but also post-graduation. Scott regularly recognized student interest in the topic of his research, and worked to put those interested on the fast track to learn more.



The Rocky Mountain Biological Lab, where he performed summer research, provided another opportunity to introduce students to real-life practical methods. He often invited students to go to Colorado and experience research firsthand, both in assistant and comp-related roles. This opportunity helped many students realize their passion for aquatic ecology, or in related fields, and I spoke to some who said that without his influence they would not have had the same career path.



It was in this continual process of connecting with students that Professor Wissinger created a network of post-Allegheny professionals, both from former students, peers and friends. Multiple alumni that I spoke to have met others as doctoral advisors or peers who also knew Scott and met him through his research. This network allows those who have moved on from Allegheny to continually discover ways he has affected the field of aquatic ecology, and enriches all those who knew Scott.

Along with his passion for research and his students, he was a dedicated staff member and a friend to all. Through interviews with some of the faculty that knew him, it was clear that he was young at heart and had a good sense of humor. Every year on Professor Shaffer's birthday, Scott filled Carr Hall with photos of Professor Shaffer and Punxsutawney Phil. Nobody knew how he got into the building or into Professor Shaffer's office, but it was a delightful sight to see each year. He was the type of person who could fool around with faculty and students without ever being mean. In class, he was not the professor that needed to be animated or incredibly bubbly, because his unique sense of humor, storytelling and unparalleled jokes would put any student in a good mood.

After speaking to many who knew Scott Wissinger, the only thing I can write is that he really was the professor who did it all. He was the professor who was active in research, in his department, went away for summers to break new ground, and still managed to engage so deeply with students that he changed whole careers for the better. Professor Scott Wissinger was a teacher of the highest quality and will be sorely missed.

Junior Seminar Takes on Energy Burden

The Junior Seminar taught by Ian Carbone this semester has been focusing on the energy burden in the South Main neighborhood. They have been learning about energy assistance programs that the community can enroll in such as the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), the Low Income Usage Reduction Program (LIURP), Local Income Residential Assistance (LIRA), WARM- a weatherization program, and the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP).

Through working with Common Roots, the Housing Coalition, CHAPS, Autumn Vogel, and Guy McUmbert, and with some of the assistance program heads, they have been able to reach out to the community, assist with applications, understand why the community is hesitant to apply for energy assistance programs, and explore the feasibility of a common application that can be used for multiple energy assistance applications.

Due to the location of their partners who were working to improve the low-income housing options in Meadville, the Junior Seminar chose the South Main neighborhood. Most of the houses in the neighborhood are old and do not have efficient heating or cooling systems. This causes the

homeowner to need increasing amounts of energy to keep the house warm. However, when they cannot pay their energy bills, they will often go into debt, and may have to take out loans in their childrens' names to keep the heat on, or the energy companies will cut them off. If the energy companies cut them off, that person will have to resort to dangerous ways of heating the house that also lead to health issues and possible fires. Because many of the residents of South Main rent and do not own their homes, there is little incentive for them to invest in fixing these issues when they can barely pay the bills in the first place.

Ian's Junior Seminar has also deemed this an environmental issue because it addresses all three pillars of sustainability. The environmental aspect which is being efficient in energy usage and using the cleanest energy available. The social aspect incorporated the socioeconomic aspect of the neighborhood, as almost all of the residents fall under the poverty line. The economic side was to decrease the energy burden in that neighborhood and making the payments easier for the homeowner/renter through the energy assistance programs.

The class has split into three different sections. One section, The Outreach Group, held a table at the Fall Pumpkin Block Party and went door to door to administer a survey about energy assistance, how many people were enrolled (currently and previously), what programs they were or were not familiar with, if they were below the poverty line, and what their boundaries were to apply for these programs. Another section set up a site at the public library where citizens could come and the students would assist them with applying for the programs and would tell them which ones they were eligible for. The third group worked with different programs to explore the possibility of a

common application so that the process would be less confusing for those trying to use it.

New Cornhole Boards Provide Opportunity for Art

All of us in the physical sciences know the pain of a three-hour lab, and anyone who has taken one with Professor Rich Bowden knows the easy cure: a break for ultimate frisbee. You've probably seen this happening, whether on a warm fall day or in the spring semester snow. But from this semester on, we now have alternative for lab breaks in the form of new cornhole boards. Built earlier in the semester, and painted by Senior Rene Benoit, they are a new way for students to engage in a much-needed break from a long lab. These boards also provide an opportunity for the intersection of form and function.

I had the chance to communicate with Rene about this opportunity, and her inspiration for the designs. Each cornhole board was chosen to have a theme relating to the ESS Department: The wind turbine was chosen to represent sustainable energy and Professor Ian Carbone, the bees and garden represent Professor Beth Choate, Kerstin Ams and the Carrden, respectively. Others include Professors Rich Bowden and Ben Haywood on a forest and wildlife design, and Professor Casey Bradshaw-Wilson on the aquatic-themed one. This artwork related to the department connects the game to the subject matter being taught around it. Science and Art often seem to be disparate and unconnected, but within history this is untrue. In the past, scientists often recorded their findings in drawing or illustrations, instead of data tables. This allows potentially different conclusions to be found and improves the research as well as the ability of the findings to be digested by others, not mention

bringing those who may otherwise not interact with science into the discussion. It's a situation where everyone wins and both science and art get the attention they deserve, and now we get to experience this at Allegheny.

The new cornhole boards are already present in Carr, and anyone taking a lab in the Spring semester should look forward to being able to use them!



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