

VASUDHA

This fall semester marked a new director for the Vasudha Living and Learning Community. Dr. Michael Mascarenhas was fortunate to step into this leadership role and build on the extraordinary programming efforts of the



previous Director, Dr Atsushi Akera. Joined by Dr. Brandon Costelloe-Kuehn, the instructor for Nature/Society, the course at the center of the first year Vasudha experience, and Science and Technology Studies' graduate student David A. Banks, the Program Coordinator, the new Vasudha team were keen to build on previous traditions as well as embark on new living and learning initiatives.

The Fall Picnic

The first event to mark the fall calendar was the Vasudha Picnic in August. Located outside Nason Hall, this well attended event

provided incoming students with the opportunity to socialize with Vasudha graduates and faculty about living and learning at RPI.

Saratoga Apple Field Trip

Vasudha students kicked off the beginning of the semester with a trip to Saratoga Apple in Schuylerville. Students toured the orchard, cold storage and processing facilities, and even picked a few apples! Owner Nathan Darrow led the tour and discussed growing food for the local economy. Darrow touched

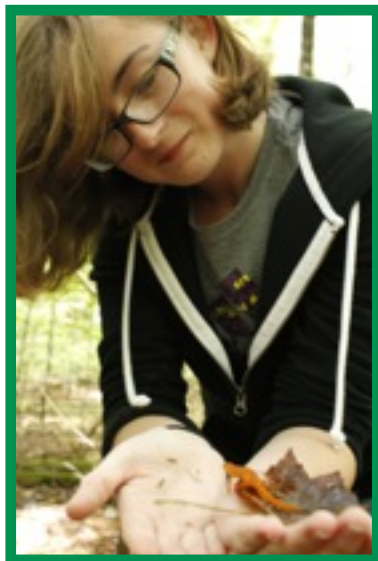


on a wide range of topics including: access to low interest credit, crop insurance, workers' rights and health insurance, and the challenges of scaling up organic farming. The Saratoga Apple field trip was an excellent complement to the early semester readings and class discussions in Nature/Society about the deep

intersections between society, economies, and natural systems.

Darrin Freshwater Institute

The following weekend nine students were given the opportunity to take an over-night trip to Rensselaer's Darrin Freshwater Institute (DFWI) in Bolton Landing on Lake George. On the way up students were treated to a



dinner of locally and organically sourced ingredients at Harvest & Hearth, owned by Saratoga restaurateurs Peter and Gina Michelin.

Peter was also able to stop by the table and talk to the students about

why they source organically, and the importance of organic farming to local business. The trip to DFWI was both educational and recreational. Students took canoes out on the lake, met successful Rensselaer alumni who were also staying at the facility, and enjoyed local nature trails and museums.

The Radix Center Field Trip

In October, the Nature/Society class explored topics in urban sustainability and visited the Radix Ecological Sustainability Center in downtown Albany. Students saw a closed loop hydroponic system used to grow watercress and a variety of fish species; duck, rabbit, and chicken coops; and an open-air garden adjacent to thriving bee hives. The founder of

the Radix center, Scott Kellogg, underscored his vision for urban food production, waste streams management, and alternative energy production and use. The Radix Center field



trip demonstrated to students the immense untapped potential for urban food production, waste streams management and alternative energy production and use.

The Omega Institute

After their trip to Radix four students went to the Omega Institute in Rhinebeck with Dr. Costelloe-Kuehn for a two-day conference on living sustainably. Vasudha provided scholarships for the students to attend the conference, which featured a keynote address by former U.S. President Bill Clinton. The conference centered on the question "where do we go from here?" and suggested that a powerful strategy for building sustainable futures is creating alternative models for technological innovation and human development. The students attending the trip were inspired to practice what many speakers at the conference called "regenerative science and design," a model to minimize society's ecological footprint. Vasudha student Sherese Morgan wrote about the lasting impression the Omega Conference had on her future college and career plans: "Before attending the conference I considered applying my environmental engineering background to

secure a government job, and test water samples in glass test tubes for the rest of my life. After attending the Omega Conference I have explored science and technology studies as a possible dual major, and I am exploring the various ways in which I can utilize my environmental engineering degree to greatly change the world."

Frear Park

In November students accompanied Rensselaer professor Bram Van Heuvein to Frear Park to tour a native plant garden that he and his partner, Rhonda Van Heuvein, have maintained on behalf of the Frear Park Conservancy. As the group walked around the lakefront trail built by RPI students, the Van Heuveins discussed the difficulties of repopulating built environments with native plants. Students picked apples in the park, which they then pressed into cider back on campus.

Sustainability Film Series

Vasudha co-sponsored the Fall Sustainability Film Series. Now entering its third year, this interdisciplinary forum brings students together from across campus to watch documentary films about pressing sustainability issues, and to discuss their relevance with faculty, guest speakers, and in some cases filmmakers. This semester's films focused on the controversial practice of hydraulic fracturing, the promise of nuclear energy as a clean fuel source, and the complex social and environmental controversies surrounding the Hanford nuclear site in the Columbia River Basin.

Nason Community

Just outside of the Nason Hall lounge the students have cultivated a community garden.

Fall crops included garlic, shallots, and turnips alongside mums and perennial flowers. A standing working group will coordinate the



responsibility of watering the garden until the winter sets in.

Vasudha has a brand new consolidated web presence at Vasudha.rpi.edu. The site provides a centralized calendar, a list of on-campus resources for students, information about the program itself, and a space for students to blog about their Vasudha experiences.

The Spring promises to be another busy semester for Vasudha: Well-regarded speakers in sustainability and energy are being invited to speak on campus, and Earth Week promises to be a large presence on campus once again. The Spring Film Series will offer more interdisciplinary learning opportunities and faculty continue to offer a wide range of sustainability-related courses for students at every level.

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