

UVA ECONETWORK



Student Highlights

The sustainability community at UVA is made up of some of the most incredible, devoted people you could meet. Here are highlights of just a few on Grounds. This page can also be used to find people who have worked on projects you are also interested in! If you have any questions, feel free to contact them at the email provided.

If you know of anyone else deserving of some recognition, please send us a note via the form on the main page of the EcoNetwork!

Clara Falls, Class of 2021



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“With great privilege comes great responsibility” - Clara’s Grandma

What got her into sustainability in the first place:

- Clara was always interested in climate and environmental science
- In middle school she was interested in learning about and volunteering with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation
- Her high school lacked recycling infrastructure so she helped to organize a group of volunteers to pick up recycling on Fridays

How she got involved with sustainability at UVA:

- Knew she wanted to be involved from the get-go. Saw chalking for Sustainability Advocates and started there
- Main project was with waste reduction in Clarke, but she wanted a more direct connection with sustainability
- Started working for the Department of Recycling (DoR) in her second year

Main Projects with the DoR:

- Green Games (helping to lower waste at sports events)
- Volunteer initiatives/relations
- Working with StudCo Sustainability Committee on a plastic bag takeback and other behavior change campaigns

Food Systems Summer Internship

- Worked with City Schoolyard Garden the summer before her third year
- Worked on the Charlottesville Food Justice Network
- Provided administrative/writing support to different initiatives including the EPA's [local foods, local places initiative](#).

Other Projects

- Composting: has worked with Materials Working Group to do popup composting events around Grounds. Worked on efforts to increase bathroom paper towel composting

Virginia Harris, Class of 2020



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How she got involved with sustainability at UVA:

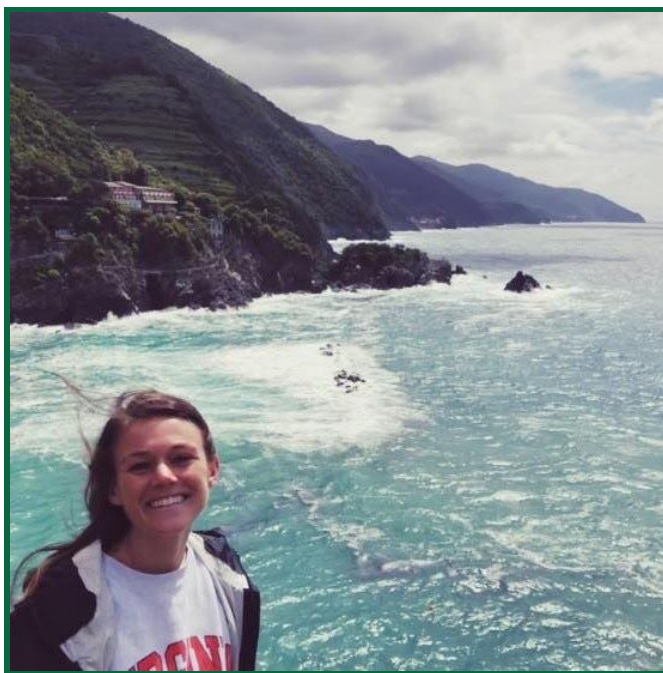
- Virginia grew up in a relatively sustainable household, and was surprised by the amount of waste when she came to UVA. She took a Global Sustainability class in the fall of her first year, and has been more interested in sustainability as a discipline ever since.

Activities while on Grounds:

- Joined Green to Grounds marketing team Spring of her first year:
 - One of her greatest successes in her involvement with this club was giving Access UVA students free boxes of food every week assisted by the Parents Fund
- Independent Study third year with Paul Freedman:
 - Studied the Charlottesville City Farmer's Market
 - Found that for many families prices were high at the farmers market and that it was too far away to access
 - Ran a composting pilot
 - Found it very difficult
 - Worked with the signage, talking to vendors to get them to use more compostable materials

- **Challenge:** Because margins for farmers and food vendors are small, convincing them to buy more expensive and compostable wares is really hard. Language and tradition barriers also posed issues
- Virginia has the contact information for the market manager as well as the other students with whom she worked on this project if anyone would like to contact them
- **Net Impact:**
 - VP of sustainability for 2018-2019 year
 - President for 2019-2020 year
 - Enjoys the wide range of projects and ability to connect to community members
 - Looking forward, might start a food solutions nationwide challenge

Mckenna Savoca, Class of 2020



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Green Greeks:

- Mckenna noticed that greek life at UVA needed help with sustainability before she was even part of it, and brought it to the Dean of Greek Life. Once in a sorority, she organized the formation of Green Greeks
- **Challenge:** how to motivate those in greek life towards sustainable initiatives when there are so many people
- The first year of Green Greeks, many committees were formed
- **Challenge:** retaining involvement for committees amidst busy college schedules and the persistence it can take to make sustainable change
- Developed guidelines, mission, goals, and structure for Green Greeks over the summer of her first year
- Branched out from Green Grounds and made Green Greeks its own CIO through Fraternity and Sorority Life (FSL)
- Spoke a lot with greek life, OFS, and Spencer Megan from FSL (she stills works there as of April 2020)
- **Challenge:** doing too much at once and spanning too broad

- Had representatives from a lot of the houses, some more involved than others. Most were pretty disengaged
- **Challenge:** delegation and knowing how much work to take on so that the legitimacy of the club does not take a hit if it attempts to accomplish too much.
- Focused on Cans to Cans competition (competition between groups with houses to see who can produce the most recyclables by weight)
- Had some composting initiatives, but this kind of fell apart after a year and a half
- **Challenge:** some of the most passionate people got burnt out
- Mckenna had to shoulder a lot individually, and this was difficult to achieve
 - Got better with time as she narrowed it down
- **Challenge:** passing the club on to different leadership
 - Washington University has an internship program where someone gets paid to run something like Green Greeks. Mckenna thinks this sort of operation would be much more successful. They also have a related course that people can take. Reach out to her if you're interested
- Believes the change must come from the top down. FSL needs to penalize people to get the greek life system to change/become more sustainable. Must be FSL and ISC
- **Future objective for Green Greeks:** lobby to make bylaws in FSL that apply to the IFC and ISC to make them be more sustainable

Sam Mogen, Class of 2020



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What got him into sustainability in the first place:

- Sam had an outdoorsy family growing up, but really only connected with sustainability once he got interested in climate change for its public health implications
- Knew he wanted to focus on climate change going into college

How he got involved in sustainability at UVA:

- Guided his studies around climate change, and was interested in going into chemistry and public health. Realized he wanted to do more applied work, and found environmental science and the global sustainability program (in which he is now double majoring)
- Thinks that the Global Sustainability program is really useful and offers many different classes for one to take
- Sam has been overall really impressed with UVA's sustainability efforts, especially by all of the people at the Office for Sustainability. Specifically, he admires how they navigate dealing with an

administration that may have ties with fossil fuel companies and still succeed in accomplishing some pretty incredible goals

Main Projects and Challenges:

- Nitrogen Working Group: Sam has worked with this group in tracking UVA's reactive nitrogen emissions. He has worked on a variety of projects, including tracking how UVA's dining causes nitrogen emissions through fertilizer use and fossil fuel consumption. He was looking into expanding UVA's emissions tracking, including the contributions of paper and business travel purchased by UVA
- **Challenge:** reducing UVA's nitrogen consumption is not too difficult if UVA switches to serving a larger percentage of more plant-based options in their dining halls, though the corporate leadership at Aramark is not too motivated to do this
- Analyzing the local health impacts of UVA's fossil fuel combustion pollutants: Sam is working on this project in conjunction with his Global Sustainability Capstone. He is analyzing the effects of nitrous oxides and particulate matter less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter. He is using EPA software to get the health impact on the community, and using this to demonstrate how moving to renewable energy will be better for public health
- **Challenge:** program is a little tough to work with, as well as the impacts of being sent home due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Biggest Challenges He Sees at UVA:

- UVA is tied to big companies through contracts, and this can make it hard to be more sustainable if they are not on the same page.
- Sees stakeholders with a lot of power over UVA's impact that are not moving quickly enough on climate change matters
- Thinks Aramark is not the most ethical corporation and does not treat its workers properly, including not paying them a living wage. Frustrated that UVA just signed something like a 30 year deal with Aramark without putting in more requests in terms of sustainability. UVA could probably buy themselves out of the contract, but this is very unlikely considering how much it would cost

Internship at Pacific Marine Environmental Lab in Seattle

- Sam looked at model output for the Bering Sea to see how its chemistry is changing through a program with the National Ocean and Atmospheric Organization
- Continued to work on this fourth year with professor Scott Doney
- Got funding through the Hollings Scholarship, a scholarship second years can apply to for working on projects related to climate change's effects on ocean and atmospheric sciences

After Graduation

- Moving to Boulder, Colorado and starting a PhD in atmospheric and ocean sciences
- Specifically really interested in studying and modeling ocean chemistry because of climate change
- He is interested in ocean acidification. He says it is a hot topic because society will need to be able to predict when there are going to be extreme ocean acidification and temperature events. He wants to approve that capacity

After PhD

- Sam hopes to be a professor at a research university
- He could possibly work for a government agency such as the National Ocean and Atmospheric Organization
- Wants to improve modeling and use this to inform policymakers and local communities

Anna Cerf, Class of 2020



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How she got into sustainability:

- Anna became interested in sustainability and particularly climate change when she came to UVA. Living in first year dorms, she was confronted with the amount of waste that the entire building produced. She became interested in what happens to waste after it is taken from the curb, and focused much of her work at UVA on this fact afterwards
- **Challenge:** our waste system was designed such that consumers do not have a direct connection to the impacts of their waste. This can make it challenging to achieve behavioral change

Main projects while on Grounds:

- Most of her efforts focused on waste reduction, diversion, and education
- Nitrogen Working Group: investigated how adding labels to products detailing their environmental impacts might affect consumer choice
- Office for Sustainability Recycling Team
 - Composting pilots
 - Green Games (lowering waste as much as possible at a sporting event)
 - Behavioral change campaigns
 - Getting compost bins outside of the E-school (behind Thornton at the loading dock near Olsson)
 - Anna attributes her success in this infrastructural change to her close relationships with the Recycling Department at UVA, built largely through interviews she conducted her first year as well as her work for the OFS Recycling Team
 - **Challenge:** hard to raise awareness of these bins, as well as to get people to take the extra effort to bring their compostable waste out to the bins
- Engineering Student Council, Sustainability Committee:
 - Helped get a new bike station on the walkway between the Materials Science building and Wilsdorf in the E-School.
 - Helped to redesign the Wilsdorf patio, and these retrofits are slated for sometime in 2020.
 - **Challenge:** generally slow-going to get any infrastructural change done

After Graduation:

- Anna definitely wants to be involved in sustainability after graduation, and is debating whether to go into the water or waste sector. A lot of her curriculum focuses around water infrastructure, but she would like to be in a position in the waste management system in which she could make a larger impact
- **Challenge:** waste management jobs mostly involve system engineering topics, and her major is environmental engineering. She thinks it might be difficult to find the type of job she is looking for

- Anna got into a Grad school program for water resources and management in Germany, though she does not know how this is going to pan out because of COVID-19
- The summer of 2020 Anna is supposed to work for the Environmental Defense Fund in an internship through the Environmental Resilience Institute, though she also does not know how this is going to work out considering the pandemic. The topic is risk communication and perception of sea level rise in the Mississippi Delta region

Biggest Challenges She Sees at UVA:

- Anna thinks that the increasing administrative support for sustainability initiatives is really great, as this was the primary issue in the past
- She notes that there is a lack of a cohesive network for the sustainability movement. There is a lot of excitement and passion, but the community lacks clear rallying points to fight behind that could lead to true influence and impact. She emphasizes that the administration will listen to students, but that it really takes a coalition and large groups of people. This will take dissemination of more information and garnering support from different communities within the sustainability world. She notes that this has been improving since her first year, however

Advice to Someone Looking to Get Involved:

- Try something new!
- Do a little bit of research about what is out there, just show up to the first meeting and if it is not for you, then you don't have to commit. There is a space in the sustainability world for everyone

Jamie Wertz, Class of 2020



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How She Got into Sustainability:

- Jamie at first was really interested in where her food came from. She began to learn more about sustainable agriculture and the importance of healthy soils. She then shifted her focus to the equity side of sustainability, specifically where food is coming from as well as who has access to it. Now Jamie is interested in large scale impacts, from policy to finances to clean energy

Main Projects at UVA:

- Office for Sustainability:
 - Outreach Team helping to run the Sustainability Advocates program
- Morven Kitchen Garden
- Community Garden:
 - This was an initiative that was more active in Jamie's first year. The garden is across the street from O-hill, and has since lost

student involvement. There are efforts to rekindle work on this garden

- Equity and Environment Fund:
 - **Challenge:** people don't know about this fund enough, and there is not enough utilization of this resource to make sustainable impact
- GIFT Grant:
 - **Challenge:** same as the Equity and Environment Fund, the GIFT Grant is underutilized
 - Jamie got full funding to help UVA go paper neutral through the Print ReLeaf program with this opportunity. She stresses that if you want to accomplish something sustainability-related, there is funding for you!
- Capstone Project Focusing on Divestment:
 - Her fourth year, Jamie turned more towards large-scale impacts. Her capstone project focused on the divestment movement within U.S. higher education, and she specifically thought a lot about how UVA can invest in a more carbon-conscious way.

Biggest Challenges She Sees at UVA:

- Jamie sees this as changing recently, but in the past there was an issue of the administration claiming that students had "student governance" when they really would not listen to students' wishes, even if they were clearly presented with a large coalition. This primarily came when the students demanded larger action rather than simply promoting recycling and other end-use-type solutions
- She believes that the timeline is not as quick as it needs to be if we are to address our climate impacts as an institution to prevent the worst warming scenarios

Progress She has Seen at UVA:

- Jamie has seen an increase over her years in the number of people interested in sustainability issues. There are many, many students involved in the community now, and the average student is much more aware of what is happening sustainability-wise in the world

- Jamie likes the fact that there are so many sustainability groups, because this gives every person a place to fit into the sustainability community

After Graduation:

- Jamie is definitely interested in going into sustainability after graduation. This could be with an environmental non profit or foundation, climate or energy group. She wants to focus on the fact that we have very limited time as a society to take drastic steps to moving towards a clean energy grid if we are to meet climate goals

Advice for Someone Looking to Get Involved in Sustainability:

- Don't be afraid to dive right in even if you think you know nothing! The only thing that she has learned is that there is always something new to learn relating to sustainability
- No matter what your interest, there is a place in sustainability for you

Sonali Luthar, Class of 2021



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How She Got into Sustainability:

- Sonali always had an interest in sustainability, but did not get involved until her first year of college. She saw a note in the Office for Sustainability Sustainanewsletter calling for someone to join the Materials Working Group, and Sonali has been primarily involved with this group ever since

Main Projects while on Grounds:

- Materials Working Group (MWG):
 - Sonali has focused primarily on composting through this group, specifically implementing paper towel composting in buildings around Grounds. She has largely been successful in making this a practice at the University, and paper towel composting is slated to be active in many more buildings in the near future. Her success came through running many pilot programs, including some in her first year dorm. Then, a test was run in Rice and Nau halls, and then in the fall of 2019 a larger, 5-week trial at Newcomb and Clem. This last test was to verify whether or not paper towel composting stood up to areas of high traffic, and it

proved successful. The same outcome came from every test: paper towel composting resulted in a very low but consistent amount of contamination that was easy to pick out

- **Challenge:** communications between different departments and custodial staff can be really challenging
- Now the MWG is trying to move in the direction of not only diverting waste but reducing it through behavioral change campaigns
- **Tip:** Sonali attributes a lot of her success to the connection of the MWG with Facilities Management and otherwise with the UVA administration. For this reason, she focused all of her sustainability efforts on this group because she saw that it was capable of making institutional change
- **Challenge:** not many people are involved in MWG. This may be because it is a more niche topic, or because the group is not completely student run. The group has also not had the type of events that require a lot of student engagement. Sonali believes this may be a cyclical process of not creating the types of events that draw people because there is not much interest, and in turn not attracting more interest because there are no events.
- **Note:** Student co-chairs of committees under the Committee on Sustainability are paid!

Biggest Challenges She Sees at UVA:

- UVA is just so large that it requires a lot of collaboration and efficiency to achieve goals
- The amount of bureaucracy that one must move through in order to get things done

After Graduation:

- Sonali would love to incorporate sustainability into her career, but is struggling to find a way to do so that incorporates her computer science major. She feels limited on her knowledge of the opportunities available to her in this domain. Cyber security in the energy field interests her and will be her first exploration

Advice to Someone Looking to Get Involved:

- Find something that you really enjoy or are passionate about and stick with it for several semesters to see your projects through! It can be easy to get distracted by all that you can do in the sustainability field, but it is important to execute on your goals rather than jumping around too much

Updated as of: 04/14/2020