

Western Kentucky University  
Office of Sustainability  
2015 Annual Report

Prepared by Christian Ryan, Sustainability Coordinator

## Office of Sustainability 2015 year in review



2015 was a great year for WKU Sustainability, marked by significant new initiatives, special recognitions, and continued progress in advancing sustainability in the way Hilltoppers live, learn, and work. This report highlights the sustainability accomplishments of WKU students, faculty, staff, the Office of Sustainability, and the campus community in 2015.

## Go Tops, Go Green!

accolades and achievements

In 2015, WKU was one of nine colleges and universities honored with the inaugural U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools Postsecondary Sustainability Award. The U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools award honors public and private elementary, middle and high schools, districts and postsecondary institutions that are exemplary in three Pillars: Reduced Environmental Impacts and Costs; Improved Health and Wellness; and Effective Environmental and Sustainability Education.



Bryan Russell, Chief Facilities Officer displays our award with Hilltopper pride.

***“To represent higher education in Kentucky with this national award is a tribute to years of hard work and a changed culture.”***

*-President Gary Ransdell on Green Ribbon School recognition.*

The National Wildlife Federation recognized WKU's campus landscape in their new publication, *The Campus Wild: How College and University Green Landscapes Provide Havens for Wildlife and “Lands-on” Experiences for Students*. The guide, released Sept. 8, highlights how colleges and universities are playing a dynamic role protecting wildlife and restoring habitats in campus green spaces—including on-campus landscapes and natural areas, as well as distant campus-owned lands. It explores how such green places—dedicated to “The Wild”—also can benefit students, faculty, and staff with leadership opportunities, hands-on learning, energy savings, water conservation, and much more.

**Agriculture Commissioner James Comer officially inducted WKU as the 10th member of the Kentucky Department of Agriculture's Farm to Campus Program in March 2015.** Farm to Campus is the official state program for connecting Kentucky farmers and food producers with Kentucky higher education institutions. Under the Farm to Campus program, the Kentucky Department of Agriculture helps participating institutions locate and purchase fresh Kentucky Proud products to serve in their food service systems and shelf-stable Kentucky Proud products to sell in their campus bookstores.

WKU may be the 10th campus to sign on, but we have been committed to increased local sourcing for some time and our approach is unique: we establish direct relationships with our farmer so food is delivered directly from farm to dock!



On Campus Sustainability Day, October 28th, 2015, **WKU celebrated with a recognition ceremony for three LEED certified buildings.** The LEED recognition ceremony, hosted by WKU and the U.S. Green Building Council, began at Gary Ransdell Hall, which became WKU's first LEED certified building in 2011. Two other buildings – Music Hall and Augenstein Alumni Center – were also recognized for achieving LEED certification. LEED plaques and Governor's certificates were unveiled at each building. This spring LEED certification of Downing Student Union will be celebrated with student engagement activities planned in partnership between the Office of Sustainability and Student Government Association.



'USGBC Students' President Madison Thomas unveils the LEED Gold plaque in Gary Ransdell Hall.

## 2015 Sustainability Metrics

In January 2105, WKU submitted our third AASHE STARS report, earning Silver status.

Areas in which we demonstrated notable best practices:

Academics: Access to Research

Operations: Landscape

Operations: Biodiversity

Innovation Credit #4: Toppers@Sea Climate Change Challenge study abroad experience

Additionally, WKU was included in the AASHE 2015 *Top Performers, Best Practices, and Trends Index* for earning a perfect score in the area of Planning and Administration: Coordination and Planning.

To see the full index visit: <http://www.aashe.org/files/>



**WKU is working to reduce the campus carbon footprint.** The Office of Sustainability engages research students to assist with an annual greenhouse gas emissions report. Between 2009 and 2014, total gross GHG emissions decreased by 3,500 MTCO<sub>2</sub>e (5%). This reduction does not fully reflect the reductions associated with all the energy efficiency improvements on campus (Scope 1 and Scope 2). When isolated, these improvements have resulted in a reduction of 5,000 MTCO<sub>2</sub>e (7% reduction), however increases in student population have resulted in an increase in Scope 3 emissions, partly offsetting reductions made in Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions. The greenhouse gas emissions inventory for 2015 is currently in progress.



## On the Hill

### campus collaborations

WKYU PBS added a new program to their line-up in 2015: *Cooking 80/20 with Robin Shea*. Ms. Shea requested a **garden on the set**, and the Office of Sustainability was enlisted to make it happen. OoS student assistant and full time farmer Madonna May helps to keep the garden full of greens, herbs, and other edibles and makes sure that it is always camera-ready. The partnership is reciprocal: WKYU PBS gives the OoS an annual gift of \$1000 for Project Grow Fellowship scholarships to support the community garden.



2015 was the **Year of Ecuador** at WKU and the OoS partnered with the Office of International Programs to sponsor a visit from a representative of the Kallari Chocolate Cooperative. Kallari represents sustainable chocolate producers in Ecuador. We learned about how their chocolate is grown, produced, and distributed and even did some sampling. All in attendance developed a new appreciation for good chocolate!



The WKU Board of Regents held their annual retreat at the WKU Farm, where they enjoyed a **Farm to Table dinner**. The dinner featured food grown by farmers that are providing food for on-campus dining locations as part of our Farm to Campus program. Our farmers joined us to enjoy an amazing meal, prepared by WKU Catering chefs. Music was provided by WKU Alumni, the Green River Ramblers.



In 2015 Student Government Association demonstrated their commitment to a more sustainable WKU by creating a **SGA Sustainability Committee** to identify opportunities for positive change on campus. Their initial goals include working to reduce packaging in campus dining locations by making no bag the default, and initiating a reusable take-out container program in Fresh Food Company. The SGA Sustainability Committee is chaired by Student Sustainability Coordinator Chelsea Faught, and open to any WKU student. Meetings are conducted weekly.



In observance of **(PARK)ing Day**, WKU Parking and Transportation, Facilities Management, and Office of Sustainability teamed up to create a pop-up park in two metered parking spaces in Minton Circle. PARK(ing) Day is meant to promote the reclamation of public spaces for recreation, relaxation, artistic expression, and community. To help us celebrate, teachers from the Confucius Institute provided a lesson in Chinese Calligraphy, the perfect accompaniment to the temporary beautification of the space.

The WKU Parking and Transportation Department hosted the **Green Parking Council** to conduct Green Garage Certification workshop for parking professionals around the region in October 2015. After a morning of focused study, the participants were treated to a WKU tour, highlighting our sustainability initiatives.

The Office of Sustainability partnered with the Department of Gender and Women's Studies *M.A. Social Responsibility and Sustainable Communities*, and University College to award the **third annual Sustainability Scholarships** in October to support students engaged in sustainability related research and action. The 2015 recipients were Elizabeth Willenbrink, Jennifer Ottersbach, Aiste Dobrovolskaite, and Josh Corlew.



## At the OoS...

### In the garden.

The WKU OoS community garden continued to expand in 2015, under the careful nurturing of the

Project Grow Fellows. As a result, we were able to provide fresh vegetables for the Food Pantry for much of the growing season. Not only did we grow food, we grew relationships and knowledge.

The garden has become a space for people to come together for a common interest — getting in touch with nature through gardening. Every Friday volunteers from diverse backgrounds and disciplines come to help plant, harvest, water, and care for the garden in other ways. They learn from each other and reap benefits perhaps unexpected: new friendships. An added bonus: the Fellows often prepare food fresh from the garden, or send volunteers home with fresh veggies.

Two of the seven Fellows are conducting research projects in the OoS landscape: Alex Hezik is turning the front yard into an edible landscape as her Honors Capstone Project; Megan Lafoon is conducting research on Hugel gardening, specifically on yield comparison with other gardening



***“The Project Grow Fellow community is one of the only places on campus where I feel that I belong and have been present and involved in building a meaningful community.”***

*-Project Grow Fellow Cayla Baughn reflection excerpt, 2015.*

**The Project Grow Community garden is supported by volunteers from across campus and throughout community. In Fall 2015, the OoS logged more than 136 volunteer hours in the garden.**

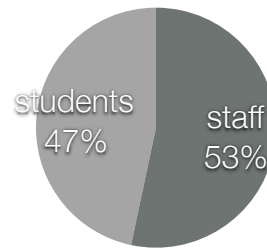


In fall 2015, the Project Grow Fellows visited Berheim Forest to learn from their edible garden and volunteer.

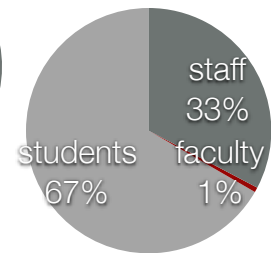
## In The Pantry.

In late 2015, the Chronicle of Higher Education reported the results of a study that suggests more than half of college students experience some level of food insecurity - meaning they have limited or uncertain access to nutritious and safe foods. This may explain why the WKU Food Pantry continues to see an increase in visits each year. From 2014 to 2015, visits increased by 260%.

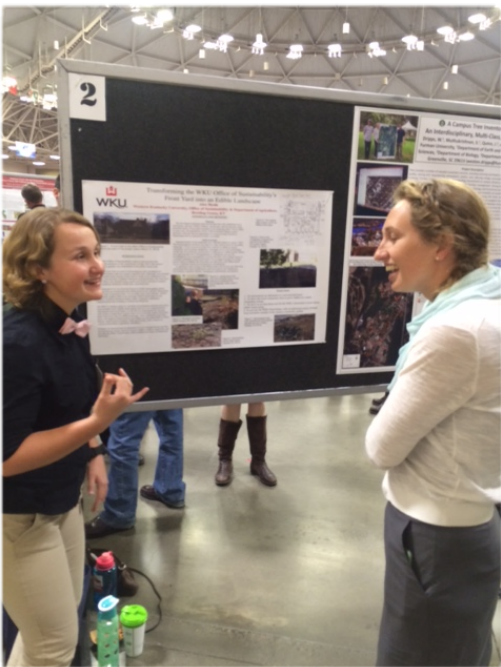
2014 Food Pantry visits (120 total)



2015 Food Pantry visits (310 total)



In 2015, the Office of Sustainability began working with **Nutritious@WKU** to increase awareness among students of the WKU Food Pantry. In November we hosted **Yoga in the Garden**, asking participants to bring one jar of peanut butter or similar protein donation. The student nutrition interns demonstrated how to cook an easy healthy meal with ingredients commonly found in the Food Pantry. In 2016, Nutritious@WKU will create a WKU Food Pantry cook book with easy meals based on ingredients found in the WKU Food Pantry.



Honors student Alex Hezik presented her capstone research project on creating an edible landscape at the Office of Sustainability at the 2015 AASHE conference in October.

## Bikes.

There were 131 Big Red Bike rentals in 2015, however this number does not reflect the demand. Many students were turned away for bikes, simply because we cannot meet demand. When alumna Carol Wedge heard of this challenge, she rallied her fellow alumni to donate gently used bikes. In 2015, eleven bikes were donated to the Big Red Bike program by alumni.

## Scholarship.

The Sustainability Coordinator served as an advisor to several student projects in 2015, including a Master's research project on sustainable waste management, a Masters research project on green tours, an Honors capstone project on edible landscape, and a marketing practicum. Each of these projects utilize the campus as a living laboratory, and resulted in performance improvements in sustainability.



## Beyond the Hill

### community partnerships and outreach

The second **Interfaith Coalition for Earth Care** conference was hosted in Bowling Green in April. The Office of Sustainability was a partner in the event, offering scholarships for student registration. WKU Sustainability Coordinator Christian Ryan was a guest speaker for the event.

The WKU Office of Sustainability partnered with community organizations to plan and host the first annual **'Pathways to Sustainability' Festival** April 17th and 18th. The free event included lectures, hands-on workshops, special guest speakers, art, food and music.



For **Earth Day 2015**, the Office of Sustainability partnered with the Community Farmers Market to offer a special treat: local food samplers available for campus delivery on Earth Day. More than 100 samplers were ordered for delivery in the Community Farmers Market bus by local farmers and Big Red. The President's Office was the first stop!

*Elizabeth Howell, of Need More Acres Farm, shows President Ransdell the contents of his sampler.*



In 2015, the WKU Sustainability Coordinator:

## Outreach.

...conducted 12 WKU Green Tours for groups such as the Alumni College, the local chapter of the Sierra Club, representatives from Johnson Controls, Inc., and colleagues from Berea College.

...appeared twice on WKYU PBS's Outlook with Barbara Deeb to discuss sustainability;

...guest lectured for the Logan Co Garden Club;

...and conducted a sustainability workshop for students, faculty, and staff at Centre College.



The Office of Sustainability partnered with GreenToppers, Nutritious@WKU, and the WKU Store to offer locally grown Coleman Brothers Farm pumpkins for sale on **Campus Sustainability Day** in October. *Carve Your Pumpkin and Eat it Too* featured a carving/painting contest, seed roasting demonstration and samples, and pumpkin recipe cards, provided by the Community Farmers Market.

The WKU Office of Sustainability partnered with **The Kentucky Student Environmental Coalition** to host their annual Fall Summit at WKU. The summit was attended by WKU students and students from higher education across Kentucky.

The Office of Sustainability and Project Grow have cultivated a wonderful partnership with the **Cumberland Chapter of the Kentucky Sierra Club**. The Chapter provided registration scholarships for Project Grow Fellows to attend their annual conference at Rough River State Park in October. Fellow Megan Laffoon presented at the conference on her research on hugel gardening as a sustainable best practice.

In fall of 2015, the Office of Sustainability website got a fresh new update, thanks to **Sports Media and Branding** graduate student Jordan Brown, who created new branding, social media expansion, and the redesign of [wku.edu/sustainability](http://wku.edu/sustainability) for his practicum.

Thank you for reading this report.  
Comments, questions, or suggestions  
should be directed to Christian Ryan at the  
Office of Sustainability.  
christian.ryan@wku.edu or 270-745-2508

An electronic version of this pdf can be  
downloaded from the WKU Office of  
Sustainability website at: [www.wku.edu/  
sustainability/documents/](http://www.wku.edu/sustainability/documents/)

