



# COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING AT USU

Course Feature: ENVS 4700 Communicating  
Sustainability (2020-21 Impacts)



**UtahStateUniversity**



# CEL COURSE: COMMUNICATING SUSTAINABILITY

As a Community-Engaged Learning, or CEL-designated course, 45 students in Dr. Roslynn McCann's Communicating Sustainability course worked with various stakeholders and members of the public to develop on 13 socio-environmental projects during the 2020-21 academic year. The impacts of the 13 projects range from a system to reuse plastic fruit clamshells to eliminating the use of non-biodegradable stickers used to package Aggie Chocolate bars, and more.

Through USU's Center for Community Engagement office, each year Dr. McCann identifies potential project partners and alongside them gauges sustainability needs of each partner. She also allows students to select their own project and associated partner upon a case-by-case approval process. During the semester, students work in groups of 1-4 with their assigned partners; meeting topics include gauging sustainability strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, conducting a barrier-benefit analysis for the selected behavior, and more. They then use effective communication and marketing techniques (i.e. speaking to their partner organization's values, suggesting incentives, prompts, etc.) to help their partner become excited about engaging in the sustainability behavior selected. At the end of the semester, students share accomplishments via a media outlet, a final report shared with the instructor and project partners and a recorded presentation delivered to their partner.

## STUDENT CEL SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

### CRUSH CAFÉ

Crush, a local restaurant, started reusing plastic fruit clamshells from the USU Student Organic Farm's produce. This change will result in at least a 22% reduction of Crush's plastic container waste in 2021 with over 100 containers diverted from the landfill. Crush has also switched from using single-use plastic spoons to edible chocolate spoons, and workers started using compostable gloves rather than the typical vinyl option. Students worked with the business's owners to improve marketing techniques which helped customers remember to bring reusable straws. To further



sustainability efforts, the restaurant switched vendors to one that used less plastic wrap for their product purchases.

## USU DINING SERVICES

In the pursuit of continuous improvement, students worked with USU Dining Services to create a survey to gauge how the USU community felt toward sustainability efforts. Most of the 342 students who responded ranked environmental sustainability as “very important,” and the majority of students expressed an interest in reusable takeaway containers. As a result of the study, the executive director has made a commitment to display public student commitments for using reusable containers, train employees to ask whether a meal is for dine in or to-go and prepare the food accordingly, and expand reusable mug benefits.



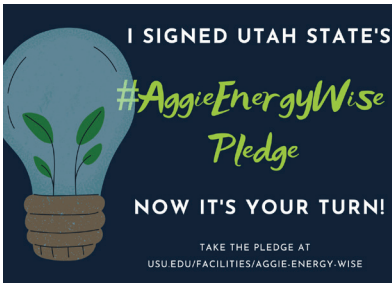
## CRUMB BROTHERS SEED SWAP

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many turned to outdoor hobbies such as gardening. To continue fostering sustainable garden-to-table efforts, a community seed swap event was hosted at the local restaurant Crumb Brothers Bakery in April. The goals of the CEL project were fostering sustainability, like reusing or trading old pots and tools, and lessening food waste in the community. Another component was making gardening more accessible — even for those with no experience or little space — and sharing the know-how and sense of fulfillment that comes from growing food in your own backyard. Of the more than 52 attendees, 32 signed a “green thumb summer” pledge.



## USU FACILITIES #AGGIEENERGYWISE PLEDGE

As Aggies, we are dedicated to lessening our environmental footprint by conserving our energy resources. The #AggieEnergyWise pledge, which encourages students, faculty, and staff to conserve energy, was launched in partnership with USU Facilities. More than



50 people signed on by the end of the spring semester in 2021 — including the entire Merrill-Cazier Library Government Information department, who also unplugged the mini-fridge in the conference room to reduce power — and on Twitter, it's received more than 5,000 impressions and 250 engagements. Even President Cockett signed the pledge as part of a press release in May. To learn more about the pledge and sign on, visit

<https://www.usu.edu/facilities/aggie-energy-wise>.

“Utah State University is a leader in energy innovation, climate science, water and natural resource management. Now more than ever, reducing USU’s carbon footprint is critical. I’m delighted to see students reducing energy consumption and working towards sustainability. Join me in taking the Aggie Energy Wise Pledge today.” – USU President Noelle Cockett. Shared here: <https://twitter.com/USUAggies/status/1392163644876541952>

## AGGIE CHOCOLATE FACTORY

By switching from non-biodegradable stickers to compostable ones to seal its products, the Aggie Chocolate Factory will keep over 4,000 plastic stickers with toxic adhesives out of the landfill per year. It has also eliminated the use of plastic clamshell packages by switching to biodegradable cellophane bags that break down after being buried for one week. This change will divert an estimated 2,600-plus clamshells from Logan’s landfill per year. USU Facilities is partnering with the factory to pick up 50 pounds of cocoa shells per week that were previously thrown out, diverting 2,600 pounds of landfill waste from the Chocolate Factory yearly.

## USU HPER “INFINITY GARDEN”

The Infinity Garden has been designed and will be installed this summer in front of the USU HPER building. Incorporating cocoa shells previously sent to the landfill by the Aggie Chocolate Factory, the garden will demonstrate the importance of composting, and by reducing turfgrass in front of the HPER, the garden will save an estimated 14,000 gallons of water each year. The design, in the shape of the infinity symbol, represents how composting is cycling nutrients back into the soil. In addition to its conservation properties, the garden





will feature educational signage to inform visitors and students about sustainable landscaping and establish a norm for these practices on campus. The garden will accommodate landfill, recycling, and composting bins, water-wise perennials, and espalier trees.

## TSC CAMPUS RAIN GARDEN

Students created a plan for a Campus Rain Garden which is approved and to be implemented next to the Taggart Student Center. By capturing rainwater in designated areas — and with drought tolerant/water-wise plants — the garden can reduce USU’s water footprint while simultaneously treating pollution and recharging groundwater. The rain garden will both add to the aesthetic of the TSC and be another example of how sustainable landscaping doesn’t have to sacrifice beauty.

## MALOUF

Local furniture and bedding company Malouf established an internal Sustainability Council in 2019 to both cut costs and decrease waste sent to landfills. Over the 2020-21 school year, the company’s waste receptacles for employees changed from a 1:1 bin-to-person ratio to a 1:4 ratio, reducing trash and creating a social norm of proper waste disposal.

## USU BLANDING

In a statewide effort, USU Blanding has committed to switch from disposable styrofoam to paper cups, diverting approximately 3,200 16 oz. styrofoam cups from the local landfill annually.

## AGGIE BLUE BIKES

Aggie Blue Bikes was founded in 2005 to encourage students to not only reduce driving — and therefore pollution leading to poor air quality — around the Logan campus, but also to rent bikes and teach the community how to maintain their own, fostering an attitude of sustainability and self-sufficiency. In 2021, CEL students launched a social media campaign with Aggie Blue Bikes to raise awareness of this service at USU.



# STUDENT IMPACTS

“This class helped me pay closer attention to my sustainability habits. I’ll catch myself when I’ve left a light on, left my electronics plugged in, or forgot to bring back my plastic to the grocery store. Every day my sustainability habits will grow stronger thanks to this class helping me pay closer attention. I’ll take my new communication skills with me into my career, and I am super thankful.” - *A. Allred*

“I’m really grateful that I was able to take this class. It has been one of the first opportunities that I’ve had to make sustainable actions in the real world, which makes this class very rewarding. Even though online classes are difficult, this class was a good in between of being remote but still connecting us to classmates and our partners...It feels a lot less daunting now to reach out to people, organize meetings, and facilitate change. So many of my classes so far have taught me the stats, science, and urgency behind the importance of becoming a more sustainable world, but this class taught me what to do with these ‘stats’ and how to communicate (or not communicate) them in order to facilitate change... After taking this class I feel less hopeless and less stuck in place in the battle for fighting climate change.” - *A. Briggs*

“This project has also given me a strong example of leadership, teamwork, and corporate sustainability to use in interviews. And it has given me the confidence to apply for sustainability internships.” - *K. Cunningham*

“Through my experiences and acquired knowledge from this class, I feel much more confident and informed on how to initiate lasting sustainable behavioral change in my community. The course reading was easy to follow and fun to read while conveying very important ideas as to how we can create lasting change. I also have learned so much from Roslynn; she has high standards for her students because she knows that we are all capable of creating change and having an impact on the world around us in a positive way. She encouraged us every class and practiced what she preached in all aspects of her life. Seeing Roslynn implement so many sustainable practices in her life (even when it isn’t convenient) has made me more conscious about my day-to-day routines, now I ask myself if I can bike instead of drive, I hang almost all of my clothes to dry instead of using my dryer, I have started composting, I take shorter showers and turn the water off when shampooing and conditioning, I am planting a garden for the first time armed with the knowledge of efficient watering practices in a drought, I am more picky about what I buy at the grocery store, etc. ... This class has had a lasting impact on me and my habits and hopefully I will be able to create this type of change in others’ lives as well during my lifetime.” - *S. DeWeerd*



“This class has taught me ways to be more successful in all aspects of my life, personal and professional.” - *O. Flores*

“Devotion and interest in this class has sparked in me to improve the world and advocate for that purpose” - *J. Gilbert*

“This class has given me a greater sense of urgency and responsibility about my future career, and I want to make sure all my clients know that sustainability will always be my goal, and they can take it or leave it.” - *K. Haviland*

“Overall this has been one of the best classes I have taken, I feel as though I have learned a lot as well as done a project that means something and will make a difference” - *I. Lionel*  
“I have gained more confidence in this class than I ever knew to be possible, whether it’s speaking my mind in the face of authority or holding others accountable. I feel immensely more prepared to enter the professional world after completing this course.”  
- *K. Kurtzeborn*

“My personal sustainability habits have drastically changed through the duration of this semester, and I now find myself considering the beliefs that guide my behavior.” - *P. Larsen*

“I am grateful to have these skills now so that I can apply them to my work as a grad student and into my career.” - *H. Lea*

“I now compost or recycle just about all of my waste, a sustainable change that this class is largely responsible for.” - *K. Lowry*

“This class has given me greater confidence to go out into the community to make changes.” - *M. McLoughlin*

“This class provided me with a newfound confidence in myself and my abilities... I feel stronger than ever in my communication skills.” - *R. Tom*

“Beginning last fall semester up until the end of this semester, I’ve been going through the Title IX process for my experience with sexual assault and dating violence. I don’t mean to get too personal or overshare. That’s not my intention. I’ve wanted to remain as private about it as possible. It’s just that these experiences have taken quite a toll on my confidence, and this class was something I did not know I desperately needed during this time. This class was hard. It pushed me in new ways, but despite the challenges and

frustrations, I could not be more thankful for this experience. Your class helped bring back a lot of my passion, hope, and confidence. It acted as a personal reminder that I am more than capable of making a difference. I cannot say thank you enough for that.” - *Anonymous*

“This course has expanded my knowledge on all things sustainability. I have always loved and respected the earth, but this course has given me a greater understanding of how I can better impact it, not only through my own doings but with the help of others as well. I found this course to give me the hope I needed for the belief of a brighter, more sustainable future. I have often found myself feeling hopeless due to ignorant corporations and careless peers, but this course has shown me that there are people who care and together we CAN and WILL make a difference!” - *S. Opheikens*

“Interacting with my fellow classmates and our community partner has inspired me and given me hope for the future of our community and the world at large.” - *J. Wilkinson*





# COURSE INSTRUCTOR

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## **DR. ROSLYNN McCANN**

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