#### **UNIVERSITY OF DENVER**

# CENTER FOR SUSTAINABILITY



# ANNUAL REPORT

2022-2023

#### **Gratitude to our contributors:**

Soffy Anderson | Brandon Arneson | Sarah Ball Audrey Hartfield | Yuliya Kim | Maeve Moran Max Meyer | Wren Pratt-Phillips

#### LETTER FROM OUR FACULTY DIRECTOR

The 2022-2023 academic year brought many changes to our staffing, structure, and function. We were sad to say good-bye to our colleagues Chad King and Emily Schosid and thank them deeply for the incredible work and determination they put in to create and maintain the Center under their leadership for over a decade. We welcomed in new staff, including Julia Senecal, LSW (DU alumna 2019) as the Assistant Director of the Center, and Derek Brannon, Ed.D. (DU alum 2023) in a new role for the Center as Undergraduate Program Manager, and myself also in a new role as Faculty Director. We are a small but mighty team, supported and bolstered by approximately 9 Graduate Fellows and 30 undergraduate interns each year.

The directives of the Center have also changed, from a call to address all things sustainability on campus, to a focused directive on curriculum and research under the supportive direction of Dr. Anne DePrince, Associate Vice Provost of Public Good Strategy and Research. We worked closely with our incredible Graduate Fellows last year to create our new guiding values that you will read about below.



Of important note, as a collective team and with colleagues from throughout our campus, we are moving beyond the current sustainability paradigm of harm mitigation to explore alternative and regenerative approaches to the creation and maintenance of socially and ecologically resilient communities on campus and beyond. Stay tuned for exciting programming in the 2023-2024 academic year to begin actualizing the creation of a more regenerative human relationship with each other, Earth, and all other species. As a teaser, some of that programming includes our very own student-run podcast, the first academic course out of the Center, Leveraging Eco-Distress to Create a Regenerative Future, and convening our first Community of Practice, Interdisciplinary Approaches to Teaching Global Environmental Change. Please join us!

We created our first formal strategic plan which you can review here: (insert link when available). Additionally, our leadership team participated in several state-wide and campus-wide initiatives to grow our involvement and impact, including joining the Climate Democracy Initiative, the Colorado Net Zero Campus Forum, co-submitting a proposal to Provost Mary Clark's Ideas2Impact program entitled *Beyond Sustainability: The DU Regenerative Futures Initiative*, and presenting at numerous campus and local conferences and venues to grow our reach.

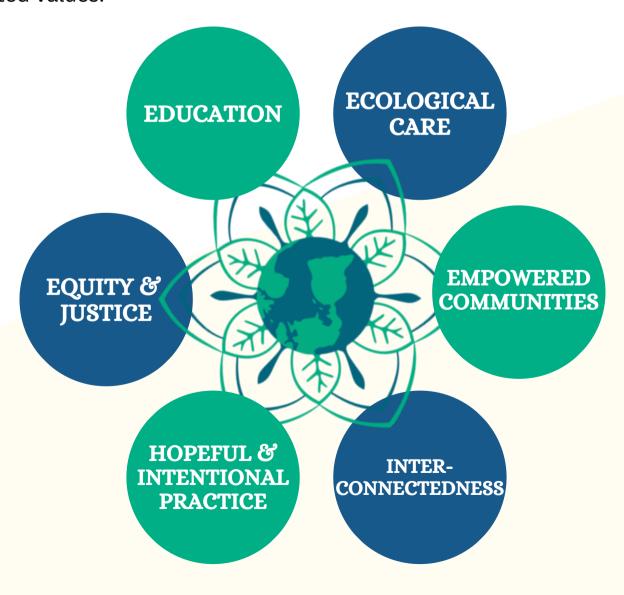
I hope you will enjoy reading about all of our 2022-2023 accomplishments below and follow us on social media (@sustainabledu) and our website and join our student run newsletter The Twist.

SARAH M. BEXELL, PHD

FACULTY DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR SUSTAINABILITY

## **OUR VALUES**

At the end of fall quarter, Center leadership hosted a graduate fellows retreat where, through team building and visioning exercises, the Center's values were co-created. Keeping with our commitment to live out our values through our organizational priorities and operations, we are excited to highlight this year's accomplishments in alignment with our revisited values.



# INTERNSHIP & GRADUATE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMS

#### Internship

The Center's Undergraduate Internship complements students' coursework by providing experiential learning opportunities. It is through these experiences that undergrads are supported in their development of skills related to leadership, regenerative sustainability, and social-ecological justice advocacy. Undergraduate students from all disciplines are welcomed to join the internship program; this year's academic program representation included Environmental Science, Journalism, Marketing, Computer Science, and History.

#### Graduate Fellowship

The Center's Graduate Fellowship offers grad students in any program an opportunity to engage in experiential learning that supports their development of leadership, regenerative sustainability, and social-ecological justice advocacy skills. Graduate students from all disciplines are welcomed to join the fellowship program; this year's fellows represented the following programs:









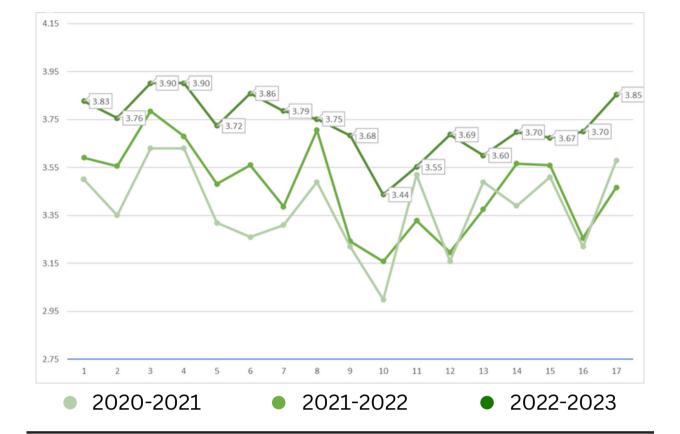
Each graduate fellow was provided \$200 to put towards a professional development opportunity of their choosing. The fellows engaged in a variety of opportunities, including:

**LEED Green Associate Rocky Mountain Land** Certification **Use Institute 2023** Conference (online course through Leading Green) Fashion's Future: Capra Course: The The Sustainable **Systems View of Life Development Goals** (online course through the Capra Institute) (online course through Fashion Revolution)



Every quarter, interns are asked to take a selfevaluation survey which is anchored to DU's Career Readiness Skills (critical thinking, communication, teamwork, technology, leadership, professionalism, career & selfdevelopment, and equity and justice) and the 4D Experience. Students are asked questions that help them to reflect on how they are developing these skills, as well as providing Center leadership with essential feedback to improve our program and better support students. Students rank their comfortability with each skill on a 1-4 scale and are also given the ability to leave open-ended answers to add context and provide a depth of feedback. The survey results are included on the following page.





- I understand the important functions and role of my Team at the Center
- I can accomplish tasks on my own when left up to my own devices
- I feel comfortable with my teammates and grad fellow
- I work well with my teammates and grad fellow
- I can engage and educate the greater DU community about issues of sustainability and how they relate to the Center.
- I am confident in my ability to write professionally for Center-related work (including communication such as chats, emails, etc.)
- I communicate clearly with my teammates/grad fellows and respond quickly via teams/email/phone
- I am able to use Teams and any other digital tool or program effectively to complete my tasks.

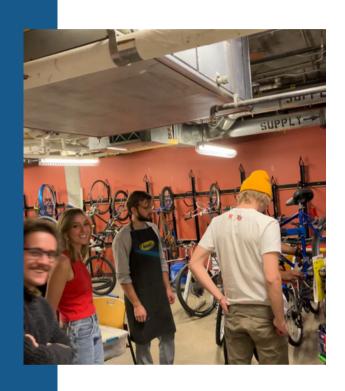
- I am confident in taking the lead on a project when needed
- (FOR LEADS/FELLOWS ONLY)
- I am punctual and attentive during team meetings
- ② I can balance my time when working on things for the Center
- (B) The tasks I complete support my personal growth
- The tasks I complete support my professional growth
- The tasks I complete allow me to pursue an area of passion
- Please rate your confidence in your ability to integrate concepts of social sustainability into your work at the Center
- I understand how the Center for Sustainability's mission and values intersect with issues of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion.

This year was a particular milestone as every single skill category saw significant improvements over previous years, and students' average score for their skill development was the highest it has ever been. Students purported feeling generally comfortable in their positions, felt continued support from teammates and leadership, were able to develop personal and professional skills, and were able to see how their work aligned with the pillars of diversity, equity and inclusion. This survey and its associated skills will be referenced frequently throughout this report.

# **PROGRAM AREAS**

#### Bike Shop

The Bike Shop is a student-run initiative that provides bike repair services and resources to the University of Denver community, providing free labor and only charging for parts at face value. The Bike Shop's goals are to be accessible, sustainable, and community oriented.





#### **Food Pantry**

The Food Pantry functions in close partnership with both the Center for Sustainability and Student Affairs. Students oversee the pantry on a weekly basis and ensure that its shelves are sufficiently stocked with both nutritious foods and fresh produce. The primary objective of the Food Pantry is to provide weekly supplementary nutrition for all members of the University of Denver community.



**Thrift Store** 

The Thrift Store team consists of one graduate fellow and five undergraduate interns who run our storefront on campus that aims to provide accessible dorm supplies and pre-loved clothes to students, staff and faculty of the University of Denver. The goal of the Thrift Store is to provide affordable and equitable items to the DU community while simultaneously helping reduce waste and encourage regeneration within the university.

### **Programming**

The Programming team is made up of one grad fellow and seven undergraduate interns who lead the brainstorming, planning, and implementation of on-campus community-building events and programs, such as Earth Week of DU-ing, designed to empower DU students, staff, and faculty with the knowledge and skills needed to promote social-ecological justice on campus and beyond.





#### **MarComm**

The Marketing and Communications team is made up of one graduate fellow and five undergraduate interns who manage the Center for Sustainability social media accounts, email and weekly TWIST (This Week in Sustainability News) newsletter. The primary goal of this team is to engage with the greater University of Denver community in conversations about sustainability and resiliency while embodying the values of the Center for Sustainability throughout all social channels.



34 posts 18 daily impressions 4,846 total impressions 313 engaged users



182 new followers
187 average story impressions
53 posts
21,456 accounts reached
454 engaged accounts
3,343 total likes across all posts

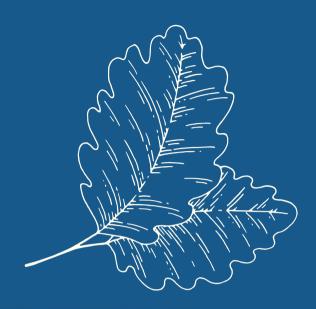


5 videos posted 306 total likes 51 total followers 8 comments 2,644 total views 13 total shares



TWIST Newsletter

170 new subscribers
8 weekly editions
published each quarter (24 total)
1,472 total subscribers
by the end of the year
40.6% average open rate
8,535 total TWIST opens



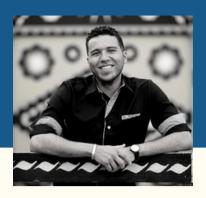
# OUR WORK THIS YEAR: EDUCATION

We believe that equipping our community with accurate information and thinking skills (critical, creative, systems) grounded in biophysical reality empowers them to take intentional and meaningful action to address social-ecological injustices. Each of the following events hosted by the Center were grounded in the mission of empowering our own staff, the DU community, or the broader Denver community about what it means to cocreate a regenerative future, together.





#### CFS ANNUAL REPORT



# Workshops for Center Staff



#### "Root Causes in Community Organizing"

Equity and community organizing consultant Rashon Bliss lead and issue-choice workshop, an important skill for anyone looking to community organize around specific issues. Issues are distinct from problems, as unlike problems which are monumental challenges that no single individual or community can solve, issues are smaller scale and actionable within local communities.

#### "Building a Just and Sustainable Food System"

Alexis Miller from the Factory
Farming Awareness Coalition lead
an interactive lesson that allowed
Center staff to co-construct
knowledge around our food system
and think critically about some of
the ethical quandaries involved.



### "Confronting Pronatalism & Human Supremacy: The key to advancing social and ecological justice"

Nandita Bajaj is the Executive Director of Population Balance, an organization that advocates for reproductive autonomy, ecocentrism, and degrowth. She is an adjunct faculty at the Institute for Humane Education at Antioch University, where she teaches about the combined impacts of pronatalism and human expansionism on reproductive, ecological, and intergenerational justice. Nandita led a presentation and Q&A session with the Center staff, engaging in important and meaningful dialogue around such nuanced and complex issues.



#### "Teaching How to Taste, Explore, and Delight in Vegetables"

Slow Food Denver, a nonprofit committed to the enjoyment of local food by all members of the community and to the advancement of just and sustainable food systems, hosted a "Teaching How to Taste, Explore, and Delight in Vegetables" workshop. During the workshop, Center staff had the opportunity to experience a typical school-based lesson taught by Slow Food during which students are walked through the experience of engaging all 5 senses in the preparation and consumption of a variety of greens.

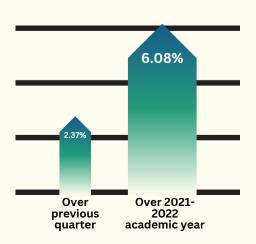
2022-2023 ACADEMIC YEAR

# Campus-Wide Education Opportunities

A creative distillation of the 3,900 page 2021 IPCC report, the Climate Fresk is a collaborative card game that guides teams of 5-8 people through the co-creation of a systems map highlighting the causes and effects of global environmental change. The game is designed to not only empower participants with digestible climate science knowledge, but also offers an opportunity to process their emotions around climate reality and think critically and creatively about what actions they can take to address the crisis in their communities. In January, the Center and Divest DU co-hosted a Climate Fresk on campus, engaging over 60 students, staff, and faculty.

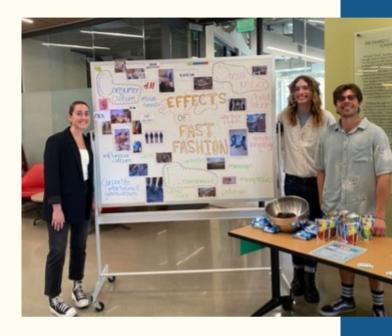






#### **Fashion Fresk**

An interactive tabling event built around the principles of the Climate Fresk, the Fashion Fresk broke down the many different contributors to the fast fashion industry and its environmental impacts. With this information, participants discussed their experiences with the fast fashion industry while learning ways that consumers can take action and decrease their personal impact, while also holding big brands accountable. This event was aimed at raising awareness about the environmental impacts of the fast fashion industry as well as learning from our peers about their personal experiences with sustainable fashion.



## Right to Repair Workshop

The Right to Repair event was a collaboration between the Center for Sustainability and many other oncampus groups and clubs. Our goal was to teach DU community members how to sustainably repair or repurpose items instead of discarding them. The Bike Shop and Thrift store teams worked alongside the Sewing Club, Alpine Club, Guerrilla Craft Society, and others. The Thrift Store was giving away damaged clothing and teaching people how to repair it themselves with sewing machines. The Bike Shop set up a bike repair stand to teach people how to fix a flat tire and loose brakes. The Bike Shop also offered one random student that came to our table a credit to buy a used bike from our shop. By doing this, we repurposed an old bike in our shop and gave a DU student free access to a bike!

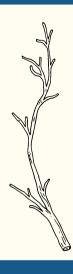


### Presentations by Leadership

#### "Higher Education: Responding to Global Environmental Change"

Dr. Sarah Bexell, Dr. Derek Brannon, & Julia Senecal, LSW

Internationalization Summit at the University of Denver (April 2023)



# "Regenerative sustainability education and the 4D experience"

Dr. Derek Brannon & Julia Senecal, LSW

The 4D Symposium at the University of Denver (May 2023)



#### "From Sustainability to Creating a Regenerative Future at the University of Denver"

Julia Senecal, LSW

National Jewish Health Denver
(April 2023, Remote)



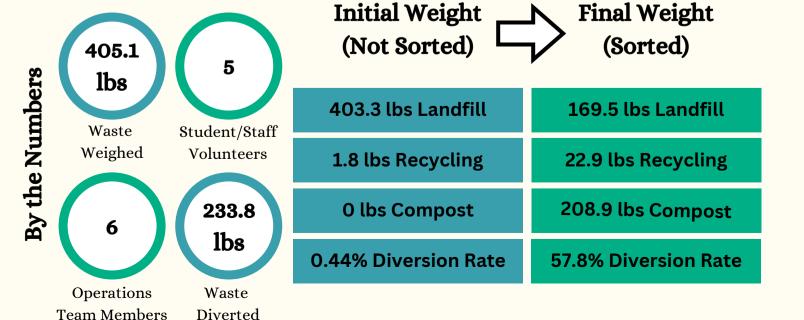
# "From Colonization to Creating Regenerative Futures"

Dr. Sarah Bexell Ross University Hills Branch of Denver Public Library (April 2023) During Earth Week,
Academy Award winning
screenwriter David
Sirota hosted a Q&A
session after a screening
of his blockbuster film,
"Don't Look Up,"
answering questions
related to his experience
writing and producing a
strong commentary on
the current political,
social, and ecological
landscape of the United
States.



## **Community Commons Waste Audit**

The Center's Operations Team led an educational waste audit within the Community Commons building during Earth Week. During this audit, the team determined how much building waste is correctly (and incorrectly) diverted, with the goal of educating and empowering building users to correctly divert waste out of the trash into recycling or compost. This year's waste audit results are portrayed below.





# OUR WORK THIS YEAR: ECOLOGICAL CARE

Taking a living systems approach to our work, we uphold the imperative of caring for ourselves, one another, our non-human kin, and the natural world through mindful and needs-based consumption and engaging in regenerative practices that create systems and ways of being that allow for all to flourish. Each of the following events, initiatives, or statistics highlight ways in which the Center was able to promote ecological care across the DU and surrounding community.







#### Sustain-O-Ween

Sustain-o-Ween is a one-night, Halloweenthemed event that involved all Center for
Sustainability teams working together to
create a fun and engaging event that
celebrated ecological care at the University
of Denver while connecting with students,
staff and faculty. Sustain-o-ween focused on
engaging with the DU community to
communicate how ecological-minded
actions and activities can implemented
throughout daily life. In 2022, the Center for
Sustainability partnered with Divest DU for
the first time, cultivating the collaborative
environment that the Center for
Sustainability strives for.

### Open Mic Night

Open Mic Nights have become a staple program at the Center, focusing on bringing the DU community together to enjoy refreshments and performances. This year, the Center partnered with DUPB and the event was wildly successful, enabling the Center to engage the DU community on sustainability issues, while also providing entertainment. We hope to continue this partnership in years to come.



## Promoting a Circular Economy

#### **Move Out**

At the end of each academic year, tons of waste is generated by students discarding items as they move out of their dorms. The Center diverts much of this waste from landfills by setting up sites within each dorm where students can drop off their unwanted clothing, books, furniture, unopened food, and household items. These items are then sold to incoming students at the Tent Sale at the beginning of the following academic year.



384 PARTICIPANTS

1,000 ITEMS SOLD

\$3,500 IN PROFIT



During Orientation Week at the beginning of each academic year, the Thrift Store hosts a Tent Sale during which incoming students can purchase lightly used dorm supplies, furniture, and clothing. This event sets the scene for the team to educate the DU community, especially new incoming students, about the Center for Sustainability, the Thrift Store, and the concept of circular economics.



# Promoting Regeneration: Gardens & Crimson Compost



The DU Bridge Community Gardens, co-hosted by Denver Urban Gardens, not only gives students, faculty, and neighborhood members a space to care for their individual garden plots, but also serves as a sanctuary for regenerative education and collaborative action. The Center for Sustainability has been supporting the gardens through internal and volunteer project management, funding applications, and event planning over the past year – and continuing to build this co-creative relationship!



Crimson Compost was restarted in the Fall Quarter, with operations being picked back up by the Waste Audit Lead. Through communications with Facilities and IT, the dumpster was located along with its code, and access to the online store manager was reinstated. Subscriptions remained low and intermittent, even with various attempts to advertise the service on social media platforms and in the Community Commons. In the future, outreach will be improved by trying to connect with more staff and graduate students, as well as communicating with other media forms like The Bridge.



### **Earth Week Volunteer Projects**





EARTH WEEK OF DU-ING MONDAY, APR 17 - SATURDAY, APR 22





During the Earth Week of DU-ing, DU student, staff, faculty, and alum community engaged in several ecologically-focused service opportunities, including:

- Observatory Park Clean-up, in partnership with Denver Parks & Rec and DU Alum in Sustainability
- Collegiate Recovery Center Garden
   Clean-up
- Prairie Park Clean-up, in partnership with University Park Community Council
- Rick's Center Garden Clean-up
- Bridge Community Garden Clean-up
- E-Waste Collection, in partnership with IT@DU
- Campus Clean-up, in partnership with Eco-Cycle



# OUR WORK THIS YEAR: EQUITY & JUSTICE

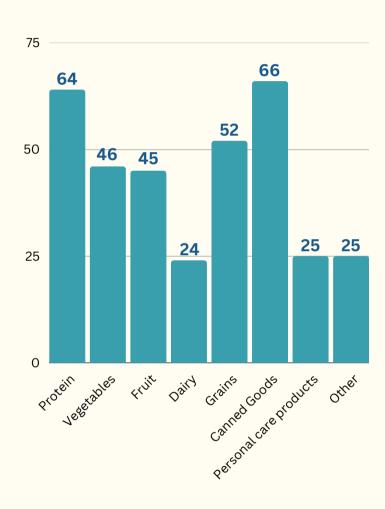
We uplift the connection between social and ecological regeneration and work to address systemic inequities with local action and by improving access to services and information. We recognize and work to address the role that power, privilege and oppression play in exacerbating or addressing social-ecological injustices. While many of the programs and initiatives out of the Center do promote equity and justice, it is important to note that this is an area of growth for our organization as we work to dismantle oppressive and exclusionary systems that have perpetuated injustices against humans, other species, and the natural world for many centuries. We are committed to centering equity and justice in all of the work we do, and will work to embody humility, reflexivity, and anti-oppressive practices along the way.

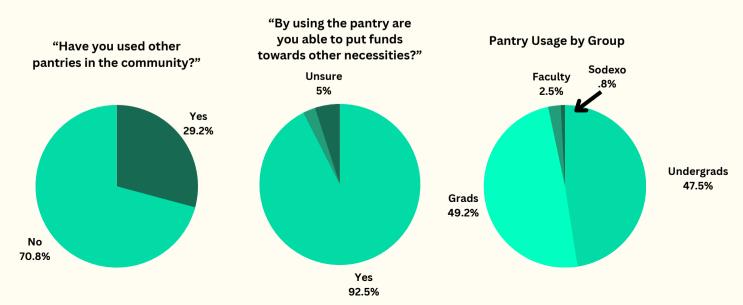




# Advancing Food Justice & Access

In the spring quarter of the 2023 academic year, the DU Food Pantry seized the opportunity to relocate to a central campus location. Following this transition to its new space in Driscoll South, the pantry has experienced a remarkable growth of over 25% in patronage. The strategic positioning of the new location, close to the heart of the campus, has substantially enhanced both the accessibility and visibility of the pantry. Alongside the influx of new patrons, the pantry has garnered increased support from diverse sectors within the DU community, such as the Health & Counseling Center and Housing & Residential Education.





## **Promoting Mobility Justice**

The Bike Shop promotes equity and justice by providing bike repair services either for free or at greatly reduced costs, thus increasing accessibility to sustainable mobility. Furthermore, the Bike Shop seeks out partnerships and offers support to community organizations with similar justice-oriented values. This year, the Bike Shop partnered with Transportation Solutions to promote Bike to Work Day and alternative transportation options for accessing ski areas.



103 Bikes Serviced



Four Community-Facing Events



Nine weeks of bike training

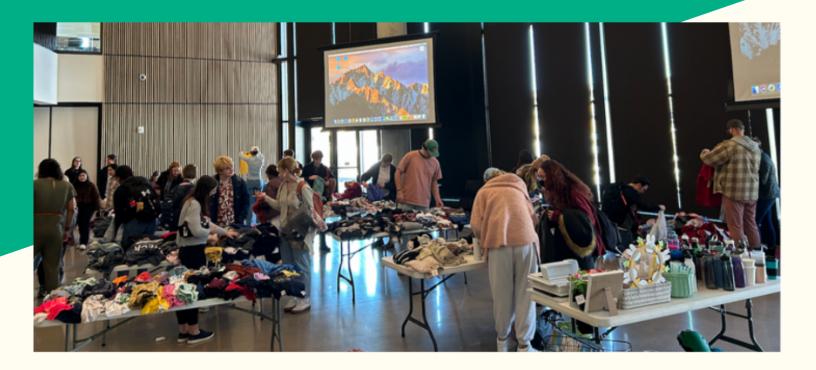




The campus Thrift Store actively promotes a circular economy and resource access by offering a platform for students, faculty and staff to donate and purchase second-hand items, thus reducing waste and encouraging regeneration. The Thrift Store allows to extend the life of products and reduce the demand for new items which conserves resources, energy and raw materials. Additionally, through affordable access to essential items and educational workshops, the Thrift Store encourages sustainable consumer behavior and raises awareness about waste reduction.

# Promoting a Circular Economy

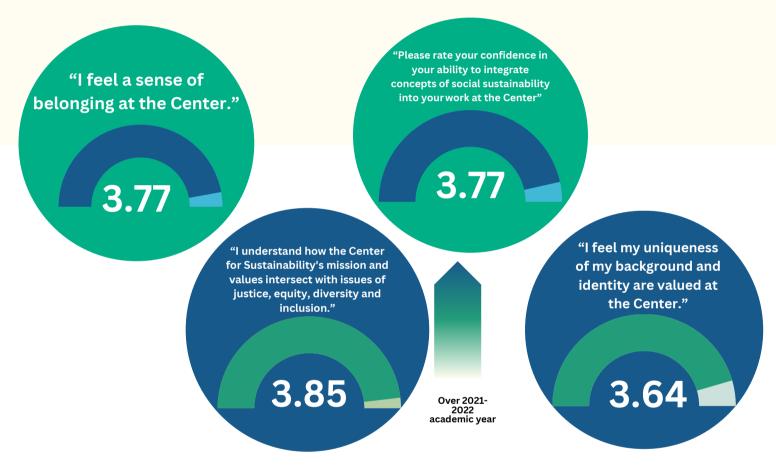




# Equity & Justice at the Center

This year, we wanted to put greater emphasis on equity and inclusion in our student self-evaluation, in which the students rate each item on a 1-4 scale. We tweaked the language of these three questions over the previous years and added two questions: "I feel a sense of belonging at the Center" and "I feel my uniqueness of my background and identity are valued at the Center."

By adding these questions, we were able to home in our strengths as well as how we could become a more supportive and inclusive space.





While we have made strides in equity and justice, based on feedback within the self-evaluation and anonymous comment box, we do know the ways in which we can continue to improve. This includes working to build bridges with other equity and justice groups on campus as well as work to diversify our staff and the voices who are included in our work.



# OUR WORK THIS YEAR: EMPOWERED COMMUNITIES

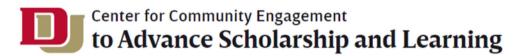
We learn from and partner with community members and organizations on and off-campus to advance our knowledge and skills to address social-ecological injustices. Our community partnerships are grounded in reciprocity, cultural and intellectual humility, and a shared commitment to elevating the well-being of all humans and the more-than-human world. Below, we highlight the units across DU's campus and the community organizations who have have had the privilege of partnering with this academic year.





# **Community Partnerships**

This year, the Center had the privilege of partnering with the below community organizations to advance ecological justice on and off campus.

























# **Community Partnerships**

This year, the Center had the privilege of partnering with the below community organizations to advance ecological justice on and off campus.





**Bridge Community Garden** 





















University Park Community Council

Your Neighborhood Voice



# OUR WORK THIS YEAR: HOPEFUL & INTENTIONAL PRACTICE

We support one another through the emotions associated with human-induced global environmental change while practicing honest realism. We choose to focus our energy on taking meaningful and informed action, building structures and systems that are emergent and inclusive, and focusing on what's in our control.

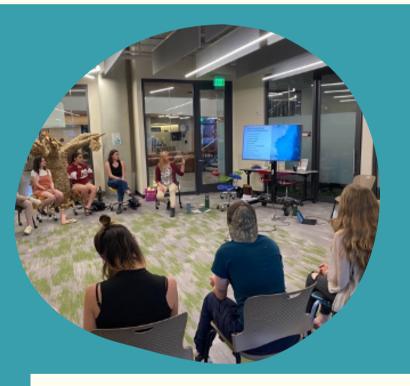






#### Forest Therapy Walk

In collaboration with student-run group EcoConscious, climate aware therapist Kristen Greenwald led a mindful walk for DU students during Earth week as a space to immerse oneself in nature – On campus! As a follow-up from the ecodistress workshop, this event was a safe space for students to quiet their minds and connect with Mother Earth through use of "shinrin-yoku" methods. By intentionally setting time for nature awareness, students can collectively fight the veil that impedes many from seeing their innate and important connection to Earth, aiming to increase initiative action against global environmental change. The event ended with a brief tea ceremony indoors to allow participants a chance to integrate their experience and engage in intentional connection with other participants.





## "Moving from Eco-Distress to Hopeful & Intentional Action"

Led by Graduate School of Social Work adjunct professor and clinical social worker, Kristen Greenwald, this workshop held a space at Center during Earth Week for students to not only engage in learning about eco-distress, but also share with fellow peers their feelings of grief, anxiety, helplessness (and even hope) in relation to our current ecological crisis.

# **CLIMATECAFÉ**

#### **Climate Cafe Facilitation Training**

A training completed by multiple students, faculty, and staff at the Center that offers skillsets necessary to facilitate a "Climate Café". A Climate café is an open space for individuals concerned about global environmental change and its many negative implications; a place to openly express one's feelings and emotions with like-minded people without judgement.

#### Family dinners & activities

Throughout the year, the Center spent meaningful and hopeful time together. This included "family activities" such as a board game night and consistent "family dinners" with vegetarian and vegan food from locally owned restaurants. This provided fellows, interns, and leadership important time to rest and connect.

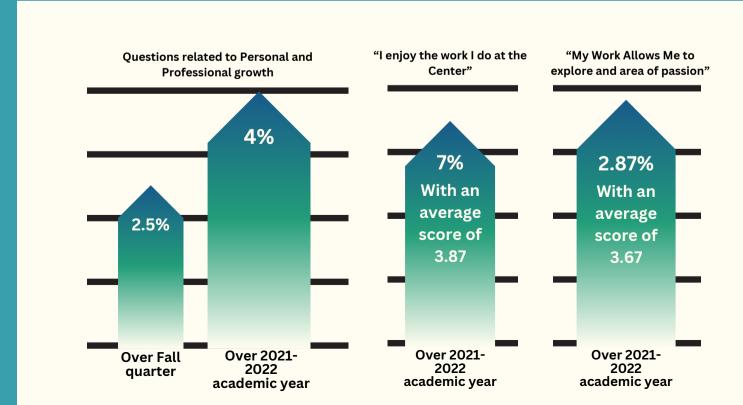


#### **Work Plans**

At the beginning of every quarter, interns were given a chance to envision and plan their learning, projects, and activities for that quarter. This included reflection on previous quarters, goal setting, and generating excitement for the possibilities of another quarter. Undergraduate leads and interns submitted work plans that include: a fleshed-out plan of the various projects, programs, and events they planned to work on. New interns and support staff provided a reflection on what they hoped to learn and accomplish in their role, and any steps that they planned to take to get there.

#### **Hopeful and Intentional Self-Evaluations**

Students expressed that they had learned and grown as part of their internships, one aspect that has stood out in the self-evaluations is the way that students are feeling passionate and hopeful about their work over previous years. The following self-evaluation questions demonstrate this point:





# OUR WORK THIS YEAR: INTERCONNECTEDNESS

We uplift living systems and demonstrate our interconnectedness with other humans, other species, and the natural world through our culture, communication, curriculum, programming, research, and partnerships. We recognize and honor that all social-ecological justice work is interconnected, and we uphold this by engaging compassionate, critical, and systems thinking in our work with on-campus and community collaborators. We will continue to ground our work in the principle of interconnectedness as we work to develop and advocate more regenerative systems at the University of Denver.





## **RESOURCES**

#### Campus resources:

- Living Sustainably on Campus
- Energy Management (Facilities)
- Sustainable Dining on Campus
- Campus Recycling Guide (including e-waste!)
- Travel & Mobility
- Sustainability Education (Majors & Certificates)
- Environmental Living & Learning Community
- Climate Justice Initiatives (iRISE)
- Sustainability Council
- Bridge Gardens
- Bike Shop
- Food Pantry
- Thrift Store

#### Resources for a Regenerative Future:

- Royal Arts Society
- Post-Carbon Institute
- The Regenerators

#### Center for Sustainability Staff

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