



# **MINDFULNESS FOR EARTH**

## **Charting a Path for Higher Education**

**October 19-21, 2022**  
**Old Saybrook, CT**

**Workshop**  
**Proceedings**



# Mindfulness for Earth: Charting a Path for Higher Education

October 19–22, 2022  
Saybrook Point, 2 Bridge St, Old Saybrook, CT 06475

## WORKSHOP PREMISE

The current environmental and spiritual crises are deeply intertwined. Mindfulness for Earth connects human consciousness and awareness of the present moment with an appreciation of the earth's ecosystems that we inhabit. Research indicates that time spent in nature improves both physical and emotional well-being, with active environmental engagement having more benefit than passive exposure. By focusing the mind on the natural world around us with intention, we can improve the health of socio-ecological systems.

Neuroscience research reaffirms mindfulness as a skill and lifestyle that can be developed to cultivate awareness of one's inner and outer environment. While the inner environment refers to one's habitual tendencies, the outer environment refers to planet Earth, its climate, bio-geochemical cycles and complex ecosystems.

The well-being of humans and the natural environment are intricately woven together. What that means for higher education is the focus of this workshop.

## WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

Workshop participants will explore mindfulness for earth in higher education and propose creative ways to promote community-wide mindful forms of environmental engagement. We will discuss relevant research as well. A key objective for the group will be to identify innovative mindfulness for earth practices specifically for higher education curricula, co-curricular activities and campus health and wellness services.

We hope to make a positive impact on student, faculty and staff emotional well-being while also transforming their personal relationships with nature, including more awareness of individual carbon footprints and environmentally destructive lifestyles. We will also be developing forms of pedagogy to help reduce human consumption of energy and natural resource exploitation more broadly.

The workshop will bring together approximately 35 scholars, practitioners, students and university administrators.

## VICE PRESIDENT'S NOTE

This workshop emerged out of conversations associated with the University of Connecticut Abrahamic Programs for Academic Collaboration in the MENA Region with colleagues at the United Nations Faith for Earth and the Center for Advanced Learning of Mindfulness (CALM). The workshop is recognition that we can no longer view current environmental and psychological crises as separate. As you are all acutely aware, ecosystem stress and human emotional stress are deeply intertwined. “Sustainable” environmental solutions, therefore, must also address the complex human mind-body dialectic.

And for this geographer, what we mean by social and economic “development” must be unpacked, and how we view societal “progress,” completely rethought. Rostovian enlightenment notions of human progress through mass consumption still dominate development theory and practice. This resource-intensive ideology is at the core of both crises. Building sustainable communities and a healthy planet will require a thorough rewiring of old paradigms and broad societal recognition that emotional health for humans is essential for promoting ecological health too.

Our goal for the next two days – as indicated in the title of the workshop – will be to chart a Mindfulness for Earth Path for Higher Education. We will be successful if we: 1) leave this beautiful location with concrete action items for UConn; 2) help to lead an emerging global conversation about implementing Mindfulness for Earth in higher education; 3) build collaborative Mindfulness for Earth research that is action-oriented; 4) have an opportunity to reflect on our personal journeys to be more mindful in our everyday lives; and 5) develop new friendships and working relationships.

This is a workshop, and not a conference, because listening and engaging collectively is our priority. We live in a society where people talk over each other, and narratives are created through discursive bullying and control over various forms of media. The lost art of listening, in my opinion, is also a core aspect of the contemporary nature and society crisis.

And now I am delighted to introduce you to Kumanga Andrahennadi, Founder/Director of the Center for the Advanced Learning of Mindfulness (CALM) and Co-Founder/Director of the Mindfulness for Earth (M4E) Initiative, Sri Lanka. We would not be able to have this workshop without Kumanga’s experience, wisdom and hard work.

# AGENDA

## WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2022

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6:00 – 9:00 pm      Welcome Dinner.....page 6

## THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2022

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8:00 – 8:45 am      Opening Breakfast

8:45 – 9:30 am      **Welcome and Participant Introductions.....page 7**  
**Daniel Weiner**, *Vice President for Global Affairs and Professor, Department of Geography, UConn*  
**Kumanga Andrahennadi**, *Founder/Director of the Center for the Advanced Learning of Mindfulness (CALM) and Co-Founder/Director of the Mindfulness for Earth (M4E) Initiative, Sri Lanka*

### SESSION I: MINDFULNESS FOR EARTH—A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

9:30 – 10:45 am      **Mindfulness for Earth: Concepts.....page 8**  
Session Leaders:  
**Kumanga Andrahennadi**, *Founder/Director of the Center for the Advanced Learning of Mindfulness (CALM) and Co-Founder/Director of the Mindfulness for Earth (M4E) Initiative, Sri Lanka*  
**U Dhammajīva Mahā Thero**, *Abbot, Chief Preceptor, and Meditation Master of Nissarana Vanaya Monastery and Founder, Sati Pasala Foundation in Sri Lanka*

10:45 – 11:00 am      Tea/Coffee Break

11:00 – 12:15 pm      **The Role of Mindfulness in Religious Traditions.....page 13**  
Session Leaders:  
**John Grim**, *Co-Director of the Forum on Religion and Ecology, Yale University*  
**Mary-Evelyn Tucker**, *Co-Director of the Forum on Religion and Ecology, Yale University*

12:15 – 1:15 pm      Lunch Break

### SESSION II: MINDFULNESS FOR EARTH RESEARCH

1:30 – 2:45 pm      **Environmental Compassion.....page 17**  
Moderator: **Zahra Ali**, *Ph.D. Student, Plant Science and Landscape Architecture, UConn*  
**U Dhammajīva Mahā Thero**, *Abbot, Chief Preceptor, and Meditation Master of Nissarana Vanaya Monastery and Founder, Sati Pasala Foundation in Sri Lanka*  
**Rana Al Qaimari**, *Program Manager, EcoPeace Middle East*

**Kumanga Andrahennadi**, *Founder/Director of the Center for the Advanced Learning of Mindfulness (CALM) and Co-Founder/Director of the Mindfulness for Earth (M4E) Initiative, Sri Lanka*

- 2:45 – 3:15 pm**      **Mindfulness Movement and Tea/Coffee Break**
- 3:15 – 4:30 pm**      **Research on Nature and Wellbeing.....page 23**  
Moderator: **Kumanga Andrahennadi**, *Founder/Director of the Center for the Advanced Learning of Mindfulness (CALM) and Co-Founder/Director of the Mindfulness for Earth (M4E) Initiative, Sri Lanka.*  
**Nashaw Jafari**, *Project Administrator, Sadhguru Center for a Conscious Planet; Department of Anesthesia, Critical Care, and Pain Medicine, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Harvard Medical School*  
**Dimitris Xygalatas**, *Associate Professor, Anthropology Department, UConn*  
**Sohyun Park**, *Assistant Professor, Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture, UConn*
- 4:30 - 5:00 pm**      **Reflections on the Day.....page 28**  
Session Leader: **Daniel Weiner**, *Vice President for Global Affairs and Professor, Department of Geography, UConn*
- 6:00 – 8:00 pm**      **Dinner**

## **FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2022**

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- 7:30 – 8:30 am**      **Mindfulness in Nature Outdoor Practice Session**  
*Phoebe Godfrey and Kumanga Andrahennadi will lead the group in this outdoor mindfulness practice session on the beach.*
- 8:30 – 9:15 am**      **Breakfast**

## **SESSION III: MINDFULNESS FOR EARTH IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

- 9:30am - 10:45am**      **Integrating Mindfulness and Nature-Based Learning.....page 29**  
Moderator: **Zahra Ali**, *Ph.D. Student, Plant Science and Landscape Architecture, UConn*  
**Phoebe Godfrey**, *Professor in Residence, Department of Sociology, UConn*  
**Kumanga Andrahennadi**, *Founder/Director of the Center for the Advanced Learning of Mindfulness (CALM) and Co-Founder/Director of the Mindfulness for Earth (M4E) Initiative, Sri Lanka*  
**Student Participation**
- 10:45 am– 11:00 am**      **Tea/Coffee Break**
- 11:00 am – 12:15 pm**      **UConn as a Living Laboratory: Nature Rx and Spring Valley Farm.....page 30**  
Moderator: **Zahra Ali**, *Ph.D. Student, Plant Science and Landscape Architecture, UConn*

Cynthia Jones, Professor, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology,  
UConn  
Jessica Larkin-Wells, Farm Manager, Spring Valley Student Farm

12:15 pm – 1:15 pm    Lunch Break

**SESSION IV: ROADMAP FOR MINDFULNESS FOR EARTH IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

1:30 pm – 3:00 pm    **Building a Mindfulness for Earth Roadmap for Higher Education.....page 31**  
(Curricula, Activism, Behavior Change, Health Services, Research, etc.)  
Moderator: **Daniel Weiner**, Vice President for Global Affairs and Professor,  
Department of Geography, UConn  
**Carol Atkinson-Palombo**, Professor, Department of Geography, UConn  
**Kristina Stevens**, Director of Mental Health, Student Health and Wellness,  
UConn  
**Kumanga Andrahennadi**, Founder/Director of the Center for the Advanced  
Learning of Mindfulness (CALM) and Co-Founder/Director of the Mindfulness for  
Earth (M4E) Initiative, Sri Lanka

3:00 – 3:30 pm    **Mindfulness Movement and Tea/Coffee Break**

3:30 – 4:30 pm    **Group Reflections and Action Items.....page 32**  
Moderators:  
**Kumanga Andrahennadi**, Founder/Director of the Center for the Advanced  
Learning of Mindfulness (CALM) and Co-Founder/Director of the Mindfulness for  
Earth Initiative, Sri Lanka  
**Daniel Weiner**, Vice President for Global Affairs and Professor, Department of  
Geography, UConn

6:30 – 8.30 pm    **Closing Dinner**

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22<sup>nd</sup> (DEPARTURE)**

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8:00 – 9:00 am    **Breakfast**

9:00 – 10.00 am    **Mindfulness in Nature Walk**  
*Kumanga Andrahennadi and Phoebe Godfrey will lead the group in this outdoor  
mindfulness practice session at the Florence Griswold Gardens*

10:00 - 12:00 pm    **Departure**

# PROCEEDINGS

[Note: These proceedings are an amalgamation of written talking points, presentations, quotes, paraphrases, and the workshop's transcribed recordings]

## WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2022 | 6:00 PM Welcome Dinner

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University of Connecticut's Vice President for Global Affairs Daniel Weiner gave a warm welcome to the group and provided remarks introducing the premise of the workshop and setting the tone for the next few days of discussion.

He explained that the workshop emerged out of conversations associated with the UConn Abrahamic Programs' environment initiative with colleagues at the UN Faith for Earth and the Center for Advanced Learning of Mindfulness (CALM). He remarked on how the workshop brings forth recognition that we can no longer view current environmental and psychological crises as separate since ecosystem stress and human emotional stress are deeply intertwined. He suggested that "sustainable" environmental solutions, therefore, must also address the complex human mind-body dialectic.

Weiner noted that we need to unpack what we mean by social and economic "development" and that the way in which we view societal "progress" must be completely rethought. He went on to discuss how Rostovian enlightenment notions of human progress through mass consumption still dominate development theory and practice, and that this resource-intensive ideology is at the core of both crises. Weiner stated that building sustainable communities and a healthy planet will require a thorough rewiring of old paradigms and a broad societal recognition that emotional health for humans is essential for promoting ecological health too.

Weiner set forth the aims for the following two days in charting a *Mindfulness for Earth* path for higher education. He noted that the group would be successful should the following be accomplished:

- 1) Leave with concrete action items for UConn;
- 2) Help to lead an emerging global conversation about implementing *Mindfulness for Earth* in higher education;
- 3) Build collaborative *Mindfulness for Earth* research that is action oriented;
- 4) Have an opportunity to reflect on our personal journeys and to be more mindful in our everyday lives; and
- 5) Develop new friendships and working relationships.

Weiner reminded everyone that they were attending a workshop rather than a conference and that the two were differentiated by the workshop's prioritization of active listening and collective engagement. He introduced Kumanga Andrahennadi, Founder/Director of the Center for the Advanced Learning of Mindfulness (CALM) and Co-Founder/Director of the Mindfulness for Earth Initiative, Sri Lanka. Weiner explained that the workshop would not have come to fruition without her experience, wisdom and hard work.

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2022**

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**8:45 – 9:30 am | Welcome and Participant Introductions**

**Daniel Weiner**, *Vice President for Global Affairs and Professor, Department of Geography, UConn*  
**Kumanga Andrahennadi**, *Founder/Director of the Center for the Advanced Learning of Mindfulness (CALM) and Co-Founder/Director of the Mindfulness for Earth (M4E) Initiative, Sri Lanka*

Daniel Weiner began the day by welcoming everyone to the beginning of the two-day workshop. He expressed high hopes for a productive dialogue that would result in a concrete path forward alongside the formation of new relationships. He explained that this first day would be focused on concepts and research related to *Mindfulness for Earth*. The second day would be focused on creating an action-oriented roadmap for the University of Connecticut and for higher education more broadly. Weiner shared his excitement about the workshop and its critical importance as multiple crises (environmental and psychological well-being) spin out of control. Weiner underscored that this work that everyone had gathered to discuss was a potential driver for positive impact and could help us understand what we, as individuals and as members of communities and families, can do to assuage the crises.

Weiner reiterated the goals for the workshop that were mentioned at the previous night's dinner:

- 1) First, we would like to have a concrete plan for the University of Connecticut. I think that's very, very important. We're really delighted that a lot of folks from the University of Connecticut are here.
- 2) Secondly, we would like to become leaders in the Mindfulness for Earth conversation and help to develop a roadmap for universities throughout the world. We're not the only university thinking about these things. There are other places like Lesley College for example, that have done some good work. So we'll link into a network.
- 3) Third, we want to do research and continue to monitor the impacts of mindfulness on our students, our faculty, our staff, and our community. The research is really, really important.
- 4) Fourth, have an opportunity to reflect on our own personal journeys. I think we all could.
- 5) And fifth, develop new friendships and working relationships. This is the beginning of a process. We expect to have a Mindfulness for Earth steering committee and we expect to begin the process of really developing both the research, the conceptual component and the applied component of what we're trying to accomplish here.

Weiner then directed attention to the group members for individual introductions (see participant biographies).

After the group members introduced themselves to one another, Kumanga Andrahennadi thanked the UConn team for bringing everyone together and thanked all participants for attending. She shared that, over the years, her work had felt a bit lonely, but witnessing this group of people come together gave her inspiration to keep going. Andrahennadi told the group that meeting them had nourished her sense of belonging. She gave a special thanks to the Venerable Dhammajīva Mahā Thero, who had accepted the workshop invitation in a heartbeat and traveled all the way from Sri Lanka.

Andrahennadi proceeded to introduce herself and recount her background, explaining that she had completed her Ph.D., which entailed the development of an eco-contemplative framework that could be implemented within the higher education sector. She noted that she had started off with working with young children (four- to five-year-olds) because after reading about ADHD, she felt driven to understand



what could be done to help these kids. She felt fortunate to have been born into a Buddhist family in which her parents regularly practiced meditation, which they taught her through example from a young age.

She ventured that this initial group meeting to begin a dialogue and practice together was the most important step toward reaching their goals. She said that some people had asked “What do you do?” and that, upon some reflection, she would call herself a practitioner: “That’s who I am. And I have been doing this for a long, long time. And what I love doing is sharing my practice with others. So here I am. So, thank you very much once again.”

Weiner concluded the session by noting that “the decision to do this workshop was made when Kumanga said she could come, because without Kumanga, there’s no workshop. So, thank you very much.”

## **SESSION I: MINDFULNESS FOR EARTH—A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

**9:30 – 10:45 am | Mindfulness for Earth: Concepts**

**Kumanga Andrahennadi**, *Founder/Director of the Center for the Advanced Learning of Mindfulness (CALM) and Co-Founder/Director of the Mindfulness for Earth (M4E) Initiative, Sri Lanka*

**U Dhammajīva Mahā Thero**, *Abbot, Chief Preceptor, and Meditation Master of Nissarana Vanaya Monastery and Founder, Sati Pasala Foundation in Sri Lanka*

Kumanga Andrahennadi called the session to order and turned the workshop’s attention to the Venerable Dhammajīva Mahā Thero to lead a short meditation. The Venerable Dhammajīva explained that this meditation would practice what is called “mindful sitting.” He noted that there is also mindful walking meditation, mindful eating, mindful drinking, mindful bathing, and so on, and that all these videos of his teachings can be found online. He proceeded to demonstrate the guided meditation on mindful sitting as the entire group practiced alongside him. When the meditation had concluded, Kumanga Andrahennadi thanked him and resumed the discussion by introducing Dr. Iyad Abu Moghli, Director of the United Nations Environment Programme’s Faith for Earth Initiative, who had been unable to attend the workshop but was responsible for making the connection between herself and UConn’s Abrahamic Programs. She explained that Alexandra Hussey, an intern for UN Faith for Earth, was in attendance as a representative.

Andrahennadi continued by explaining that the Mindfulness for Earth (M4E) Initiative consists of organizations or individuals interested in holding this dialogue and that UConn was now a part of this movement. She noted that, although the workshop group was small—consisting of only about 40 attendees—its energy would create a ripple that would travel throughout planet Earth. She proceeded to explain that ‘*Mindfulness for Earth* is about using our mind, our body, our prayers, our dearest and the deepest wishes for the wellbeing of ourselves and the wellbeing of our planet because we are not separate. So, when we address it as Mindfulness for Earth, we take away that individualism. It’s all included. We are all Mother Earth.’

Andrahennadi elucidated the events leading to her collaboration with UConn, explaining that she had met with the UConn team, Rana Qaimari from EcoPeace, and Iyad Abu Moghli from UN Faith for Earth. She stated that the higher education sector plays a key role in forming the next generation of leaders

who will go into the community and world stage to steer the course of dialogues and negotiations for our planet. She noted that understanding this and integrating *Mindfulness for Earth* into higher education must first include teachers, professors, and facilitators who practice it themselves and understand what it means to become a practitioner. She quoted two people whom she had interviewed for her Ph.D. thesis:

Akama, an educator, said that "True, long-term sustainable change towards building and creating an ethical practice cannot come from being told what to design or choosing the 'right' values to adopt. Neither does it come from simply undertaking community-based projects, taking up a social cause, or deploying participatory methods, it requires active creation and the practicing of practice that is truly human-centered and aware – aware of oneself, of the other, and of the world we live in."

Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh said, "There's a revolution that needs to happen and it starts from inside each one of us. We need to wake up and fall in love with Earth. We've been *Homo sapiens* for a long time. Now it's time to become *Homo conscientious*. Our love and admiration for the Earth has the power to unite us and remove all boundaries, separation, and discrimination. Centuries of individualism and competition have brought about tremendous destruction and alienation. We need to re-establish true communication—true communion—with ourselves, with the Earth, and with one another as children of the same mother. We need more than new technology to protect the planet. We need real community and co-operation."

She shared data from the UK, where she had studied, noting that the World Health Organization had warned that ill mental health would be the biggest burden of disease in developed countries by 2030 and that this warning demonstrates the need to take action to tackle this epidemic through new approaches. She posited that one of these approaches would be to establish the effectiveness of mindfulness as a prevention strategy.

She explained that, prior to becoming the Director of *CALM* and the *M4E Initiative in Sri Lanka*, she lived in Scotland and had served as a director of a meditation/community center in Dundee. She had worked with the Scottish Interfaith Council, which gave her the opportunity to travel and speak to universities and children and to work with all faith leaders. This allowed her to learn about other faiths and to connect with them. She realized that at the heart of all these teachings, we were connected by the common thread of being aware of our love for one another.

Furthermore, Andrahennadi noted that she completed her Ph.D. at the University of Dundee, Scotland, UK, and that during her initial research period in 2010–2011, she felt something was missing from the 'mindfulness world'. While the physiological and psychological benefits of mindfulness are very much present in the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and the Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) programs founded by Professor Jon Kabat-Zinn, the Oxford Mindfulness Centre, and others, she saw that they failed to address how mindfulness-based practices/methods can be used to explore our relationship with our planet. "How about if we practice mindfulness with our Mother Earth, because we are a part of her? We are her arms. We are her voice."

She then invited the workshop participants to partake in a simple practice session. "Let's close our eyes because it's easier to close our eyes when we do this. Now, bring to your mind a water body that you have recently visited or that you have really enjoyed. Let's connect with this water body. What kind of qualities can you connect with when you imagine and when you connect with this beautiful or serene

water body that you have visited recently? Could be the ocean, a lake, a waterfall, whatever that may be for you right now. What comes to your mind? As you contemplate with water, see if there is a teaching that comes to you, a message, whatever that may be. So now, very gently moving our fingers and toes, we can open our eyes. May I ask, what was your experience? Very quickly, like popcorn enquiry, let's share. Any qualities in a single word? If you can describe your experience?"

The group vocalized words and phrases: calm; changeability and permanence; energy and power; destruction; obstruction; I was looking at the water—when the water is settled down, always flat, always balanced. It reflects the other shore; light; teeming ... teeming, with life; movement; I thought about people that I've lost—remembrance; spaciousness or vastness; stillness; old age and wisdom; buoyancy while in the waves.

Andrahennadi explained that she leads this practice at the beginning of every class and that the similarities between what people express are incredible. She noted that some others have mentioned the perspective of turbulence as well. Andrahennadi reminded the group that our bodies are water and that when our water percentage goes below a certain percentage, we are dead. She exclaimed, "We are the elements; we are made up of the elements of Mother Nature, and our brain is floating in water, like 80% water." She shared a quote from 18th century poet and scientist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: "All is born of water and upheld by water, too." She noted that many artists use water for inspiration and a source of reflection, citing examples of the Trevi Fountain in Rome and Monet's many renditions of his lily pond.

She went on to discuss research she undertook after reading Dr. Masaru Emoto's work about how thoughts, feelings, and emotions affect the structure of water. She met Dr. Emoto and learned his methods, later conducting her own experiments by collecting water and exposing it to vibrations and meditation practices before freezing it. She showed images of the resultant ice crystals and recounted the conditions to which each had been exposed. This demonstrated how the ice crystals tell the story of the feelings they had been exposed to. Andrahennadi noted that, during his visit to London in 2015, His Holiness the Dalai Lama had blessed water, and that this sample was tested under Dr. Emoto's method. Andrahennadi further elucidated the connection between Buddhist meditation practices and water, and how water and nature can become the teachers that guide us along the spiritual path. She explained that Buddhist teachers call this the 'third teacher' or the 'symbolic teacher.' Andrahennadi noted that she uses water in her own meditation practice to connect with Mother Nature.

In discussing the neuroscientific aspects of mindfulness, she touched upon research on neuroplasticity, epigenetics, and innate capacities. She explained that research such as that of Dr. Richard Davidson from the University of Wisconsin-Madison crucially demonstrates that neuroplasticity is possible in adults. We have the capacity to change, the ability to alter the way in which we view the world, and to create new habitual tendencies. She further explained that epigenetic studies have shown that long-term meditators tend to have longer lifespans, suggesting that meditation positively affects our physical wellbeing. Moreover, our innate capacity or our inner qualities surface when we practice compassion after recognizing suffering or a person in need.

Andrahennadi stated that change is possible by training our mind through meditation practice. She explained that Mindfulness, attention, and self-awareness are the skills needed. She described how she has incorporated these three elements and the Four Noble Truths into her framework and 'Mindfulness for Earth 8-Week Program.' These truths are lessons from the teachings of the Buddha. First, we are all suffering, and in the context of Mindfulness for Earth, our earth is suffering. As a result, we are

suffering, our earth is suffering. Second is the truth of the origin of suffering and to investigate if it is a simple misunderstanding about each other. The third is the truth of the succession of suffering—an awareness that we can end our suffering. The fourth truth is actually laid out through an eight-fold path with mindfulness at its heart.

Andrahennadi clarified the Buddha's Four Establishments of Mindfulness: Mindfulness of the Body, Mindfulness of Feelings, Mindfulness of the Mind, and Mindfulness of Phenomena. She expounded on this and added her thoughts on an eco-contemplative aspect. "We contemplate together with Mother Nature through visualization practices, and through the sensory experience of Mother Nature. So we have a variety of practices that we do together, which we will experience in the coming days. And then we also use the Bohemian method of dialogue as a method to converse together." She explained that the Bohemian dialogue addresses fragmentation that occurs and that in dialoguing together, as workshop participants were doing, a *meaning pool* is created. A dialogue and sharing of meanings by individuals generate a shared consensus. Many different practices come together under the four foundations of mindfulness and with Mother Nature at the core of the mindfulness of phenomena.

Andrahennadi shared how, when the Pandemic hit, it gave her the opportunity to connect with more people from so many different walks of life around the globe. She had organized a delegation to visit His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala but it had to be canceled. After George Floyd's murder by police in the United States, she invited his Holiness the Dalai Lama to speak for the course she was running for UK police. She secured all the permissions necessary in the UK and had over 1,000 police officers attend the dialogue at five o'clock in the morning UK time. The dialogue was also broadcast in 13 different languages to over 10 million viewers.

Andrahennadi concluded her talk with two questions for the group:

- Why are we doing this?
- What is going to be addressed by doing this?

She said that for her, it came down to three main points:

- good health and wellbeing
- responsible consumption and production
- climate action

She noted that, to address the mental health crisis and the climate crisis, *Mindfulness for Earth* supports the full awakening of participants and "guides the thought process through detecting and transforming the suffering of the mind, body, and earth, through cultivating innate qualities, and recognizing this ripple effect of the interconnected nature of phenomena."

Following Andrahennadi's introduction to these concepts, the Venerable Dhammajīva Mahā Thero shared his thoughts and how his talking points had evolved after hearing Daniel Weiner's introduction. He explained that his initial aim was to connect three points—the environment, mindfulness and higher education, but after listening to Weiner's objectives for the workshop he realized it was much broader and he hoped he could help with the formulation of a concrete plan for the University of Connecticut.

The Venerable Dhammajīva went on to share an example of the education sector reform work that his foundation in Sri Lanka is enacting. The Sri Lankan education system has five sectors: 1) preschool, 2) primary and secondary schools; 3) Sunday schools; 4) religious schools, and 5) higher education. He explained that the foundation has formed an institute in Sri Lanka to which they hope to welcome

exchange students from different universities and to create a mindful village in which students can practice and learn from professors who give specific concentration to all mindfulness. He also gave examples of what some established universities were doing, such as creating a mindful meditation room and mindful research room, introducing courses on mindfulness, and starting a mindful farm that makes compost and bioenergy.

He explained that one of the challenges has been introducing these ideas globally. As he has studied the Sustainable Development Goals, he has noticed that, while it was well defined and planned, the core overarching theme that was missing was mindfulness. In Sri Lanka, it is part of the traditional knowledge and way of being. Having been born Buddhist, he was not taught mindfulness, but he stumbled upon it as a student of agriculture in his second year of college. That was when he decided to dedicate his life to it. He noted that it was easy to dedicate yourself to mindfulness living in a forest, but that it was more complex in society. He expressed his surprise that so much of the world is now not only aware of these practices but that he was heartened to find so many who aim to teach and incorporate mindfulness into education and a way of life. He no longer feels the burden of carrying the message alone.

The Venerable Dhammajīva noted that mindfulness for earth is a recent development, and that together the group would be introducing mindfulness to the world. It can be introduced in secular ways as has been done through education reform in Sri Lanka. He explained that in Sri Lanka, Buddhist, Catholic, Hindu, and Muslim religious leaders have come to a consensus upon four points: Being mindful; living in harmony with the environment; respecting cultural values; and respecting elders. He went on to share how, at home, living in a thick, temperate rainforest, with pure uncontaminated air and in harmony with nature, he feels protected and happy. When he ventures into town or abroad he sees the pollution and pace of life and how society is trying to develop strategies to restore the environment. He reminded the group—prevention is better than a cure. He cited examples of substance abuse and violence that they are attempting to abate in Sri Lanka through mindfulness programs (a cure) but that they also are trying to educate parents and trying to prevent adverse childhood experience and trauma that could lead to substance abuse and violence (prevention). He asked that the group, as they think of how to integrate mindfulness into higher education, not only think of it as a cure but consider how it can be used as a prevention. And to do this, it must expand beyond university students and faculty, to families and communities. He explained that some surveys were taken in Sri Lanka to understand the impacts of adverse childhood experiences, and that some children were resilient and were still able to overcome these experiences. Teaching mindfulness is also a tool that can help build this resilience. He suggested that this be designated an area of research.

He asked the group to also consider researching if mindfulness is practiced alongside compassion or if compassion is the result of mindfulness. The Venerable Dhammajīva explained that The Buddha taught that mindfulness must go in hand-in-hand with wisdom rather than compassion, and then compassion will be the outcome. He said that whenever one is trying to practice mindfulness, they must add wisdom—rational, verifiable knowledge—and that compassion will then be cultivated within. He stated that if there could be evidence of this, then it could add to the body of knowledge.

He cited psychologist and science journalist Daniel Goleman's coined term of 'emotional intelligence and emotional literacy' and ventured that mindfulness could be the way to introduce emotional literacy and develop emotional intelligence. The Venerable Dhammajīva continued to explain that the only way to achieve one's beautification is through mindfulness—that is, not the beautification of one's body but rather the beautification of one's mind and body. He said, "Therefore, without our mind beautified, whatever the thing we are doing, it may be just academic, it may be just extrovert, it may be just

materialistic.” He gave the group advice to help them on the path toward mindfulness: Be mindful and mind your own business—don't poke into others' lives unless they invite you to do so, and don't disturb the environment. He said, “When you are here and now, when you are here, now I am, you can feel the universal consciousness we are sharing ... Otherwise, Americans, Sri Lankan, Tamil, and Muslim and other religious, we have a secularism. But whenever we become mindful, it's a clear cut. We all are human.”

He reminded everyone that we should all think of ourselves as beginners on this journey toward mindfulness and, in that sense, we are just children, all learning and striving for inner self beautification. He suggested that the group take this concept to the UN for inclusion in the SDGs, noting that it is not for economic or political development but rather for the development of humanity.

The Venerable Dhammajīva concluded by sharing two ideas under development in Sri Lanka that the group could get involved in. The first was a *universal village* for youth programs to which students from around the world can come and learn about the local environment, local traditions, and the local way of farming. The second was a post-secondary university experiential learning program that will provide instruction and guidance on meditation practice and opportunities for solitary meditation in remote settings to train students in restraint and clarity of mind.

Daniel Weiner closed out the session by thanking the Venerable Dhammajīva for the important conceptual material that is the basis for what the workshop and what the group hopes to accomplish. He posed some broad themes and questions for the group to consider for discussion: given the individualism and identity politics that permeates society both in the United States and globally, how do we promote mindfulness for earth practice that takes us to wisdom and compassion as opposed to a form of mindfulness that is very self-oriented? Weiner elaborated on this, explaining that in the United States, “there is this movement of mindfulness, which is not about the earth, it's not about the community, it's not about social justice, it's about yourself. And so those are two really, really different paths and we want to make sure we're on the path for social justice, the path for ecosystem restoration, the path for mitigating climate change, the path for reducing consumption, not the path for self-involvement.”

### **11:00 – 12:15 pm | The Role of Mindfulness in Religious Traditions**

**John Grim**, *Co-Director of the Forum on Religion and Ecology, Yale University*

**Mary-Evelyn Tucker**, *Co-Director of the Forum on Religion and Ecology, Yale University*

John Grim started the session by thanking everyone for being part of the community and being present. He and Mary Evelyn Tucker both thanked those who had already presented and were grateful for the opportunity to share their research on mindfulness and briefly introduce some of the background as to why they have been doing this work.

Grim shared images and experiences he had during his field studies with the Crow or Absaroka people in Montana. One image showed the preparation for a festival after a ceremony that translates to “Sun Dance” in English. He explained that we use that term Sun Dance to encompass several Northern Plains and Central Plains ceremonies that are very different. The Crow call this ceremony *Ashkisshe Liswa*. *Ashkisshe* translates to ‘the big lodge’ and *Liswa* translates to ‘to dance.’ He noted that that term does not capture all of the preparation that goes into such ceremonies. “So, I wanted to start with

introducing myself as a student of native traditions in North America and the effort that they bring to mindfulness, all of these activities.” He then showed the participants a picture of two Absaroka people, noting that “This slide ... captures mindfulness in the direction I'm particularly interested in going towards, individuals and their composition of life, their composed life.”

He explained, “This is Adam. Adam Birding Ground and Violet Medicine Horse. These are the Crow individuals who adopted Mary Evelyn and myself into their family. And they are dressed as a water woman and a road man for the Native American church or Peyote Way. They are also very traditional Crow or Absaroka. There's a whole set of rituals of Sun Dances. They're also members of the Baptist church. So their understanding of religion is inclusive rather than exclusive. We tend to have in the West the idea that if you're Jewish, you can't be Christian. If you're Muslim, you can't be Buddhist. In these people's minds, if you are called to a religious path, you should follow it.”

Grim noted that his studies in Native American traditions are strongly oriented toward ritual and understanding the symbolic life. But in the last twenty-five years, through his relationships with native people themselves, he has become very committed to justice issues, but justice as mindfulness.

Tucker showed the group slides from her early studies in Japan in the early 1970s and explained that the intense environmental issues that have grown over the past 40–50 years motivated her to do this work. She noted that, on her first trip to China in the 1980s there were Gaian pristine waters, but now China is an absolute toxic environment of water, air, and soils. She explained that, with two-thirds of the world's people living in Asia, rapid industrialization has brought these major environmental changes; the health of land and people have and continue to suffer. Tucker noted that eco-spiritual and eco-justice responses are emerging, but to create a future that supports life on the Asian continent is incredibly important and the state of affairs is terrifying. She explained that we must think broadly—of urban mega-cities and the cost of living in those kinds of intense situations. Tucker explained that this is what drove her and Grim to study the world's religions in the mid-1990s and what they have to say about the environment. Tucker and Grim began at Harvard working on retrieval, reevaluation, and reconstruction of world religious traditions with over 800 scholars, environmentalists, and activists working on the project with them. Given that there was no field of religion and ecology at the time, they were blazing a trail. They published books on Western religions, Asian religions, and Indigenous religions, and then created a series on ecology and justice.

Tucker noted that “mindfulness, just as Dan has said, is more than human or personal enlightenment, but mindfulness practices exist in all of the world's religions clearly—prayer, meditation, music, yoga, tai chi, chanting, and so on. Yoga is deeply involved in the aspects of nature. I do chi gung, tai chi chuan, the elements, the birds, the water, the air. So we have many mindfulness practices to draw on for sure, but we can also go beyond them as was beautifully presented this morning.” She explained that the challenges we now face are beyond climate change; they now concern the whole range of planetary health. “So mindfulness calls us to eco-spiritualities that connect humans, all species, the living earth, and the sacred universe.”

Grim shared that he and Tucker propose that through the understanding of mindfulness, “we might begin to enter into eco-spirituality then as an appreciation for the sacred universe out of which the earth has emerged. And we're valuing the complexity of earth through eco-spirituality and this interdependence of life systems. This realization then is that human life emerged from the universe and earth and that we are responsible for the continuity of the earth community.” He emphasized that this

term “earth community” stemmed from the Buddhist tradition, *Sangha* or community, and extended the community of mindfulness into the earth community.

Tucker noted that the environmental crisis is, as many of the participants had already agreed, a spiritual crisis because the science, policy, laws, economics, and technology exist to foster a societal transition but the eco-spiritual transformation leading to eco-justice is nascent. “So what is missing? The need for the spiritual energies to overcome despair and disempowerment, especially of youth. So the spiritual ... not religious.” She explained that students are searching for meaning, purpose, and belonging, despite eco-anxiety that has infiltrated their being. She acknowledged that, while religions have their problems, they also have great potential for teaching moral and spiritual transformation with practices of mindfulness and ethics.

Tucker and Grim provided examples of the climate emergencies affecting the planet and noted that today the earth is witnessing extinctions as it never has before. They recalled their teacher Thomas Berry, and how he had written about the idea of eco-spirituality and the notion that humans and the earth are totally enmeshed in each other, positing that “if there is no spirituality in the earth, then there is no spirituality in ourselves.”

Tucker explained that Berry was speaking about this spirituality for all, not just those within a religion. Quoting Berry, she says that “we can no longer hear the voice of the rivers, the mountains, or the sea. The trees and meadows are no longer intimate modes of spirit presence. The world about us has become an ‘it’ rather than a ‘thou.’” Tucker explains that Berry is “speaking about reciprocity with nature, which is clearly at the basis of this new form of mindfulness. It is this renewed sense of reciprocity with nature in all of its complexity and remarkable beauty that can help provide the psychic and spiritual energies necessary for the work ahead. We can't afford despair, we can't afford the dismemberment of the spiritual and psychological energies, which is why mindfulness is so crucial. So he speaks of ecology as living systems. These are not dead systems to be studied mechanistically or with just data or totally empirically and objectively, these are living systems. And that's the difference that we need to elevate. Our studies in what we call ecology must lead to such intimacy with our natural surroundings. Only intimacy can save us from our present commitment to a plundering industrial economy. Look at one meditation on water and what it can do for people.”

Grim explained Berry's effort to call awareness to how cultures frame humans' understanding of themselves in relationship to the world as stories. He further explicated Berry's own understanding and story of a sacred universe, and that we as humans are not separate from nature, but embedded within it, living as an “earth community.” Grim noted that Berry's phrase, “the earth is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects,” was his summation of mindfulness, or eco-spirituality, and in this, Berry is exploring the arc between cosmology and ecology.

Tucker and Grim explored these concepts present in the various world religions and how their traditions create a sense of the divine embedded in the natural world, and the human covenant of responsibility to the natural world—to protect and steward, limit consumption, maintain balance, etc. They spoke of the differences between the Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and western dualisms and how they differ from East Asian traditional notions of energy, connectedness, and indigenous traditions' beliefs of kinship and interiority—a sense that the natural world can teach us how it can and should be used if we listen. Grim provided the example of the Standing Rock Reservation protests over the oil pipeline and explained that it was not framed as a resistance to the pipeline but as protection of water—their kin.



Grim and Tucker opened a dialogue with the workshop participants to talk about religions and what they can offer to the mindfulness space or an even broader eco-spiritual space. Yehezkel Landau noted that in Judaism, the Sabbath is essentially one day a week of mindfulness that unites everything in the cosmos: "It's the cosmic covenant. It's a sign of the cosmic covenant beyond planet earth. And the idea is to recharge your spiritual batteries or resources. So the other six days, you can make the world better out in space, but without centering yourself and connecting to the divine and time you can lose, not only can you lose that awareness of reverence, but you are likely to develop what I call the virus of territorialism or territoriality ... and the Sabbath is a kind of preemptive antidote or inoculation against that." Tucker agreed and mentioned the [Green Sabbath Project](#) started by Jonathan Schorsch.

The Venerable Dhammajīva posited that there are two dimensions to eco-spirituality—civilization and the individual. He asked the group if, in the development of civilization, do we destroy our spirituality or can we still continue our rate of development while holding onto our eco-spirituality? And then, what is the role of mindfulness? He explained that as an individual, one can practice eco-spirituality, as it is part of one's own spiritual development. "The Buddha says, if you wish to have a spiritual development, go to the forest, sit under a tree and go to a solitude place. But I am always thinking when people get together, have civilized society, how much that increasing of the dimension of the mega cities, how much they destroyed the environment. What is the responsibility of each person or political leaders?" Tucker thanked the Venerable Dhammajīva for his point about society and civilization and pointed back to Berry's notion that even our spirituality is earth-derived. She noted that there is a growing "sense of the communion of subjects that's impinging on human consciousness. And it's a huge shift as to what is sentient and where does spirituality actually lie."

One of the student participants explained that the younger generation is moving away from organized religion, and while they have some connection to a religion based on culture and family history, there is a lack of practice, belief, and in-depth knowledge. The student asked if Tucker and Grim believed youth could still be engaged in eco-spiritual practice without subscribing to an organized religion and how this could be done without co-opting religious practices and values.

Tucker clarified that what she and Grim were trying to convey was that these values are embedded in the world's religions, which is part of UNEP's and others' efforts to revive these conceptions of eco-spirituality. She noted that since approximately 85% of the world's population identifies with a religion, they cannot be ignored; however, there are those who do not adhere to an organized religion but have earth-based spirituality and that is why she and Grim developed the "journey of the universe."

Eric Assadourian, a sustainability researcher and founder of the Gaian Way, agreed with the perspective that mindfulness is a component of eco-spirituality. He posited that connecting with nature, through both experiential and intellectual learning as well as through rituals and activism, are all components of eco-spiritual practice. Similarly, he explained that mindfulness is part of a set of contemplative practices that comprise a sub-component of a holistic eco-spirituality. He added that a part of this discussion is the role that love and joy play in relationships with nature, and how these contribute to eco-spirituality. Assadourian explained this in relation to the earlier discussion of different indigenous traditions and views on kinship and reciprocity of love with the natural world.

Weiner asked if they were being too gracious to Abrahamic traditions, because on one hand the traditions put humans as stewards of the earth, but these traditions also create a dualism, taking humans out of the earth, which is problematic.

Tucker agreed that many Asian and indigenous religions and philosophies are deeply imbued with balance, reciprocity, and connectivity, but that doesn't mean that there are no instances in which they haven't also destroyed their environment. She concluded by explaining that we are clearly responsible for the care and the continuity of the living earth community, and asked the group, "What more great work is there than that? ... How can we marry an eco-spirituality and eco-justice in that context that will go forth for future generations, which is what this conference is about?"

## **SESSION II: MINDFULNESS FOR EARTH RESEARCH**

**1:30 – 2:45 pm | Environmental Compassion**

**U Dhammajīva Mahā Thero**, *Abbot, Chief Preceptor, and Meditation Master of Nissarana Vanaya Monastery and Founder, Sati Pasala Foundation in Sri Lanka*

**Rana Al Qaimari**, *Program Manager, EcoPeace Middle East*

**Kumanga Andrahennadi**, *Founder/Director of the Center for the Advanced Learning of Mindfulness (CALM) and Co-Founder/Director of the Mindfulness for Earth (M4E) Initiative, Sri Lanka*

Moderator: **Zahra Ali**, *Ph.D. Student, Plant Science and Landscape Architecture, UConn*

Zahra Ali began the afternoon session by welcoming everyone back from lunch and framed the afternoon discussion on environmental compassion, what it is, and how it can be cultivated in children, young adults, and adults. She shared that there was a recent study by the University of Michigan showing that people who lack compassion for the environment are less emotional in general. Participants who weren't affected by images of environmental destruction also didn't have emotional reactions to things like car accidents, crying babies, happy babies, or ice cream. Ali summarized another study conducted by researchers at the University of Wisconsin Madison in which young adults were taught to use Buddhist techniques of mindfulness practice, demonstrating that compassion and empathy can be cultivated. She further discussed how research shows that the constant barrage of violence that both adults and children are exposed to through the news, television, movies, and video games tends to desensitize people and suppress empathy and compassion. She described her own experience with her children, observing that, as they are exposed to more people and their social circle expands, the empathy that they had when they were younger begins to change. She realized that sometimes it is necessary to stop and take time to remind of and reinforce empathy. While humans might be naturally empathetic, empathy must be reinforced because it degrades as one ventures out into the world.

Ali then introduced the three speakers, their organizations, and the work they were doing in this vein. First, the Venerable Dhammajīva Mahā Thero would speak about his work through the Sati Pasala Foundation with young children. Second, Rana Al Qaimari from EcoPeace Middle East would discuss the work EcoPeace is doing with young adults and youth to cultivate environmental compassion. And third, Kumanga Andrahennadi would share the work that the Center for Advanced Learning of Mindfulness was doing with the police force in the United Kingdom.

The Venerable Dhammajīva Mahā Thero began the discussion by deconstructing the methods and purpose of meditation. He explained that the Buddha's teachings emphasize practicing meditation away from others, away from distractions and disturbing emotions. Further guidance, he added, comes in the form of four cardinal postures: sitting, standing, walking, and sleeping, and for beginners, the sitting posture is best. The Venerable Dhammajīva noted that for this reason, when he and his colleagues

introduced mindfulness to the school curriculum, they proposed that each school day begin with ten minutes of walking or sitting meditation guided by the class teacher. He shared the impetus for the education reform proposal. As a Buddhist monk living in a forest, he feels a change in himself when he ventures into society and then returns to his forest home; “It always feels like something fresh, something new ....” He disclosed that in the Buddhist faith there is a sect that focuses on meditation among plants, believing that communication takes place between the meditator and the plant— “good vibrations,” so to speak. This led to the introduction of walking and sitting meditation among the half-acre vegetable garden at the school. He has shared this experience of outdoor education with the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education. The Venerable Dhammajīva remarked that they observed the calmness that washed over the children during this twenty-to-thirty-minute practice. However, they want to test the impact on the plants as others have, so they are conducting experiments with mung bean seed germination. He divulged that their observations have not yet produced significant results and they are continuing to refine their experiment.

He professed that as one practices meditation, breathing patterns change and brain waves are less disturbed. One becomes composed and content. When one’s practice evolves from concentration meditation to insight meditation, one begins to feel the dissolution of boundaries and a merging with the surrounding environment. “You can’t figure out your body. At the beginning when you are sitting comfortably, you can figure it out, and you can feel the touch of the breath at the end of the nostril. But when you keep on practicing, the place either goes forward or backward, you can’t figure it [your body] out. That means that your body boundaries, in-breath and out-breath boundaries, mindfulness that means primary object and the sounds, disturbing thoughts and the pain boundaries are just merging. So that is the real point where the concentration meditation changes into the insight meditation.”

The Venerable Dhammajīva noted the importance of a teacher identifying this shift and explaining it to the student, as it involves one’s egocentric idea of self-dissolving as one slowly merges into the surrounding world. He explained that someone who is very egocentric will get upset and feel lost, in which case they must come back to concentration meditation, focusing on a primary object, before trying again the next day. He shared that one must be prepared to shed these boundaries and merge with the environment, and in this way, one expands one’s aura and impacts the calmness and vibrations of the people around them. The Venerable Dhammajīva recounted that his “teacher used to say, “If you are a regular practitioner, your mindfulness, your concentration, and your good vibration are contagious. Other people can feel [them].”

He shared some anecdotes and invited the group to come visit his monastery in Sri Lanka and forgo the luxuries and amenities of home to live in a cave for a day, with the sound of birds and flowing water, sitting on the ground and walking barefoot. He exclaimed that if everyone tried it for a day, he thinks they would also be happy.

Zahra Ali thanked the Venerable Dhammajīva and invited Rana Qaimari to share her views on environmental compassion and the work EcoPeace Middle East is doing to cultivate it in youth.

Rana Al Qaimari gave a brief introduction about EcoPeace Middle East and its establishment 27 years ago after the signing of the Oslo Accords. She conceded that the Accords had little to say by way of the environment, yet EcoPeace Middle East and its founders understood that the environment and natural resources—namely water—were the cause of much conflict. She exclaimed how during the earlier sessions of the workshop she was listening to Kumanga Andrahennadi speak about water and was astounded to hear others talk about water as a source for solving problems, for reaching inner peace.

She went on to explain that unfortunately, in the Middle East, the contrary is true. Water is a source of conflict and fighting, as the region's water resources dwindle, and water scarcity is only exacerbated by climate change and population growth. Al Qaimari explained that as people compete for this finite and scarce supply of water, rather than preserving and protecting the shared environment and shared resources, they are destroying them. She ascribes this destruction to a lack of cooperation on resource management.

Al Qaimari provides the example of the Jordan River. She explained the significance of the Jordan River and that it is not simply a resource; rather, it holds a sacred place in the Abrahamic faiths and sustains great biodiversity. She reveals her sadness: "It used to be a river. To tell you the truth, historically it used to be a river, but now it's not anymore. It's like a small stream, polluted, and you can tell that it's not a river anymore. A few years ago, it was a river with all of that diversity and all of these things, but now it's not a river."

She continues to explain that this is why EcoPeace is working to save these shared resources, "We are living in one area. We can't ignore each other. We are sharing these resources, and unfortunately we are not cooperating. Instead of this, we are fighting and we are competing. So to do so, we have to approach as an organization. We need to work with all of our people, not only one sector." She elaborates on this, noting the importance of all stakeholders understanding the crises underway and the work that must be done. She described the organization's two approaches. The first is to work from the top down, targeting decision makers and political leaders. The second is to work from the bottom up, working with communities, farmers, women, and the education sector. "The education program, I think, is the most important program that we are doing at EcoPeace. Through our education program, we are working with teachers," Al Qaimari says. She clarifies that they hold national and regional teacher trainings, after which the teachers are brought together to share ideas and experiences. The teachers carry the message of cooperation to save the environment back to their students and this is where the seeds of change lie for future generations.

Another program, Al Qaimari reported, was the work EcoPeace does with young professionals and university students, called *Climate and Water Diplomacy*. The main objective, she notes, is to provide young professionals with information about the environmental realities in the region, with water scarcity as a chief concern, and to equip them with the requisite skills to be leaders in the future.

She explained that while the young professional population was important, the most critical work was being done with the youth, "the teenagers, those who are from 15 to 18 years old ... they are the largest sector of our society. The three countries, I'm talking about Palestine, Israel, and Jordan. They are the most critical age because they are taking their information from their parents, their grandmothers, from the media, and it's very dangerous."

Al Qaimari detailed the youth program that consisted of environmental education, stewardship, dialogue, and cooperation. EcoPeace convenes groups of youth from Palestine, Israel, and Jordan to sit together and have face-to-face conversations to get to know the other's experiences and perspectives. Al Qaimari relayed the difficulties that abounded and how they decided to address the "blame game" that ensued from these encounters.

Al Qaimari recounted the experience of starting "neighbor path tours" to help break through the anger and resentment. She narrates the experience: "It's like hiking but in a different way, where we take these youth, the participants from the three countries, we start from a point, we explain to them: now

we'll start our journey in nature. We will work together. Okay? From this point, you are not from Palestine, you are not from Jordan, you are not from Israel. From this point, we are human beings who are walking together in this journey."

"Now you have your stuff on your back and everything but it's heavy because you have so many negative things on your shoulders and on your back. You have feelings like hate or blame or all these negative emotions ... that's why you will feel it is not easy to walk with them. So we will have different stops. At each stop, you have to throw something from these things. In the first, for example, we walk for 10 minutes and then we stop and say, "Yallah, we need to throw something." Each one will close his or her eyes and think about something that you don't like to have with you during this journey, and throw it here at this stop. And then we continue walking and from one stop to another we are getting and throwing all of these negative things on our way. During our walk we tell them, "You feel now that it's easy for you to walk. Imagine that these heavy things that you have now, are not with you anymore."

She says they keep walking until they reach the preselected location that is typically surrounded by nature. There, the group stops to sit in a circle or wherever they feel comfortable and everyone is asked to close their eyes, breathe deeply, and listen quietly to the nature that surrounds them. "The wind, the trees, if you have water at that location, just listen to the nature around you for five minutes and sometimes more, but that's with silence, with saying nothing. We notice that during this five minutes, they start to have that good contact with the nature because we can see some signs like they start touching the stones while they are closing their eyes and breathing. They start playing with the soil there and doing some actions that let you know that they are really connected to the nature there."

After this exercise the group is asked to open their eyes and to say one word about how they feel. Al Qaimari notes that the responses have been surprising. She gave examples such as "I feel that I'm flying," "I am not anymore," "I'm not that one who started this walking. I feel that now I'm more comfortable, more relaxed, more ready to talk and to say everything inside me with a very comfortable way." She conceded that of course there are some who have nothing to say or that feel the same as when they began the walk, but that is to be expected with teenagers. The group is then divided into smaller mixed groups that are asked to discuss issues and their feelings and to share something from their daily life.

Al Qaimari explained that before, these discussions proved very difficult as they did not understand the person next to them or have the listening skills required to hear them without becoming defensive. After this activity, however, the discussions were much more fruitful. They listened to each other and demonstrated empathy. Al Qaimari says that "they listen to each other and even sometimes, when someone says something about his or her suffering, we see that there are a few seconds of silence, which means that they are respecting what the others are telling them. That silence means that they are thinking about this one or this colleague or this participant from the other country. He's suffering like us. If I am Palestinian and hear one of the Israeli kids telling me that he's afraid from something, I will start thinking he's a human being and his suffering is like mine. If one of the Palestinians tell the Israelis and the Jordanians that we [haven't had] water since six months ago, we opened the tap and there was no water, they will understand that, "oh they are people like us, they are human beings and their needs are not there."

She explains that the hope is that they return home and remember what they learned—we are all human and we are suffering together. There is no win-lose situation, she notes; we either all win or all lose. Al

Qaimair expressed her gratitude for being at the workshop and having the opportunity to connect with everyone there and hopes that there would be opportunities for collaboration.

Ali thanked Al Qaimari for sharing her experiences and the work of EcoPeace. She noted that the collaboration that stems from workshops such as this is the reason that they are impactful. Ali noted that the work EcoPeace was doing not only connected mindfulness for nature and cultivating relationships with the environment, but also used it for conflict resolution and conflict negotiation. Ali then turned the group's attention to Kumanga Andrahennadi.

Andrahennadi explained that rather than speak further, she wanted to engage the group in practice. Before doing so, she noted that work she did with the police was grounded in environmental compassion. These police officers experience suffering on a daily basis and despite this, continue to walk toward danger for us. She explained that when they were practicing with nature, she witnessed the immeasurable compassion of mother nature, and that it engulfed them—opening them to shared experience. "Nature makes us free, free of all our suffering. So, with that said, let's come to a comfortable posture." Andrahennadi proceeded to guide the group through a mindfulness meditation.

When the practice was complete, Ali opened the floor to discussion about environmental compassion and the speakers' remarks. She asked if there were any thoughts on how some of these practices and cases might be applied in higher education.

Vice Provost for Faculty, Staff, and Student Development Michael Bradford expressed that being amidst this group felt as if he were among friends and that the conversation was easy, which made it easy to forget the challenges in the outside world.

"It's easy for me to forget that in the world outside of these walls, there are all kinds of ways people are trying to navigate their way to some peace, right? Peace in their person and their community and their life and the environment in which they live. And we have some difficult situations to think about in the world. And quite honestly, even in Higher Ed, whether it's mental health, whether it's the faith communities on campus that think about themselves in a different kind of way, whatever that is, what are the ways that we're going to navigate to peace? What are the ways we're going to navigate to communication? Some of the words that are just kind of practical on the ground, gritty things that we need to do. So, I don't have a question. I'm just saying I really appreciate the kind of ways that you've navigated us in those spaces today. And I can see a great many ways to practice that in the spaces that we find ourselves in, in higher ed in a very practical way. So thank you," said Bradford.

Weiner asked if the panel could discuss how environmental compassion could translate into loving oneself, as it is a core component of the mental health crisis.

The Venerable Dhammajīva began, expressing that mindful practice is a way for all ages to relieve stress, frustration, and burnout. He noted the importance of practicing before feeling stressed rather than waiting until stress is upon you.

He broached the topic of ecoanxiety, noting that the younger generation blames the older generation for the environmental issues of today. He agreed that yes, the older generation has significantly harmed the planet, but now we have the opportunity to move forward and work together. He asked the youth in the room, how they felt about the current state of environmental degradation and how much they attributed to the older generation and how much they share in the responsibility.

Alexandra Hussey, a Wellesley College student and UN Intern, noting she did not speak for the entire generation, responded that among environmental activists and professionals her age the concern is so large that many feel they should not have children because the planet has been destroyed and we are not on track to save it, and the only way to do so would be to slow population growth and production. She explained that perhaps the connection between older and young generations starts with connecting to your place, “a place to ground yourself in, of learning about both your heritage, but then also learning about the place you are physically from.”

The Venerable Dhammajīva followed up, asking if she felt animosity toward the older generation or wanted to work together.

Hussey noted that while some people did have animosity towards the older generation, right now it’s on everyone, and no one is making radical changes. She recognized that as she’s grown her perspective has changed, and things she may have held against the older generation when she was younger, she now understood the challenges in a new light and that change is not so easy.

Rana Al-Qaimari added that it’s good for the youth to have information, but our goal is to create agents of change. She explained that the goal of educators is to empower youth to run campaigns and programs to combat environmental change and to actively protect nature. The goal is for the youth to learn that they have the power to shift policy and how to navigate those systems.

Returning to Weiner’s question about translating environmental compassion into mental wellbeing, Kumanga Andrahennadi asked, “when we talk about mental wellbeing, mental health, what is the real issue there? Is it really our mind? Is it the problem? Is it that we give so much power to that, to this one particular issue? So what happens when we interact with nature is that, that aspect of our mind is still there, but we are choosing to activate our beautiful qualities that mother nature reflects in us. So when we did that practice with the water at the beginning, those are our qualities that you saw as a reflection of the water. So this is the mental wellbeing and the connection with nature and bringing out this joy, love, compassion that we all inherit already.”

Mary Evelyn Tucker, responding to Hussey’s point about having children, noted that many women and couples are considering whether or not to have children. She noted that for her and John Grim, their students were their children, and that compassion, care, and nurturing has many forms, but there must be space and acknowledgement of this to move forward and talk about population. Tucker was moved by the Venerable Dhammajīva’s call to pull back from despair and explained that mindfulness practice helped us move back from the internalized collapse. She thought it was important to also include journaling as part of the practice of self-reflection and healing.

Ali revisited Weiner’s question about how environmental compassion can translate to loving oneself, and recalled Hussey’s mention of place-based practice and learning. Ali commented on how youth, especially here in the United States, increasingly lack a sense of place, which is strongly connected to environmental and self-compassion. She used a conversation with her child as an illustrative example, explaining that we can learn from everybody, especially children, if we’re open to looking at how they see and think about the world. She explained that her son had been very disturbed upon seeing cracks in the foundation of a house and it scared him to the point of tears. She wondered why he was so disturbed about cracks in the foundation of a house, “and [she] realized: home is your place, it’s your

sense of safety. And what are we doing to the earth—our home? We’re destroying it. So how obviously does that have an impact on our mental health? We’re destroying our own home.”

Weiner responded with some points of reflection. The first was that he had been thinking about an idea of environmental rehabilitation as part of psychological rehabilitation, which he wanted to have a conversation about. The second was an idea about nesting as place-based. “We talk about nesting with bears, owls. What about humans? We need to nest too. And because we’re so placeless now in so many places, that maybe this idea of the environment as a place to nest.”

Manisha Desai commented that we should think carefully and more inclusively about nature. Further clarifying, Desai explained that, given that much of the Earth’s population lives in urban areas, we must think about the built environment and its relationship to nature as something separate, which has been the course of our industrialized world. Desai noted that even at UConn, other than Storrs and Avery Point, the campuses are urban; the sense of place and nesting is within this built environment. She asked the group, “how do we begin to think about the built environment differently so that mindfulness and nature are not only with beautiful forests and water, lovely as that is, and we all appreciate that, but for a lot of people that’s not the reality. So how do we think about nature more capaciously so that we can still have a relationship with earth and nature that allows us to transform?”

Phoebe Godfrey concluded the conversation by reminding the group that when talking about mindfulness we also interrogate the social construct itself, uncovering issues of racism and sexism and how our identities are embedded in our perceptions of nature and our perceptions of our own bodies. Godfrey explained that nature is not ‘out there,’ but in oneself. She went on to note the importance of critically questioning the implications of Western culture taking on the identity of separation, and why it takes the possibility of losing privilege to shake it. Moreover, people of color and indigenous groups that have maintained close relationships with nature over millennia, have recognized the environmental catastrophe spiraling toward us for some time. As part of the critical analysis that mindfulness provides, we must unpack privileged identities, and must not attribute this crisis to all cultures. Godfrey stated that western capitalist culture likes us to believe that “all humans are doing this, and humans are naturally aggressive, and humans are naturally greedy. And that’s capitalism kind of singing in our ears: ‘oh this is genetic.’ It’s not something we manufactured historically based on values, and those values are very embedded in hierarchies of superiority and inferiority.”

### **3:15 – 4:30 pm | Research on Nature and Wellbeing**

**Nashaw Jafari**, *Project Administrator, Sadhguru Center for a Conscious Planet, Department of Anesthesia, Critical Care and Pain Medicine, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Harvard Medical School*

**Dimitris Xygalatas**, *Associate Professor, Anthropology Department, UConn*

**Sohyun Park**, *Assistant Professor, Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture, UConn*

Moderator: **Kumanga Andrahennadi**, *Founder/Director of the Center for the Advanced Learning of Mindfulness (CALM) and Co-Founder/Director of the Mindfulness for Earth (M4E) Initiative, Sri Lanka*

Kumanga Andrahennadi opened the session with introductions of each speaker before ceding the floor to Nashaw Jafari.

Jafari briefed the workshop participants on the Sadhguru Center for a Conscious Planet, noting that it is part of the Harvard-affiliated Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston. She explained that the center’s mission is to weave science and spiritual wisdom through research, education, and outreach,



and also to enhance human wellbeing, specifically focusing on consciousness, cognition, and compassion. It's a multidisciplinary research center that investigates mind-body interventions through various modalities, including psychological and behavioral surveys, genetic markers, blood markers, and neuroimaging. Jafari provided context to the name of the center, clarifying that it was inspired by Sadhguru, who is an internationally renowned yogi, and whose work is to raise human consciousness through self-transformative yoga, meditation programs, and taking conscious action in the world. Jafari stated that Sadhguru also launched the global *Save Soil Movement*, which is dedicated to raising awareness about the degradation of our soil and calling leaders of all nations to implement soil policies to safeguard the health of our soil for future generations.

In her presentation, Jafari went into detail on the research that the Center has been conducting on the impact of yoga and meditation practices on our physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. Connecting yoga with the human-environment relationship and the desire to protect and preserve, Jafari quoted Sadhguru: "Yoga essentially means to obliterate the boundaries of your individual nature and become universal. And once you experience all lifeforms as part of yourself, no one has to tell you to conserve nature, anyways you will take care [of it]."

She went on to note that the Center's studies have been looking at the impact of these kinds of practices on mental and emotional wellbeing, but also on our neurological and physiological systems. One study they conducted evaluated IT professionals that participated in an online self-paced seven-session program called "Inner Engineering" to determine its impact on stress and work outcomes. The program is meant to address all aspects of wellbeing (mind, body, emotions, and energy) and integrates intellectual discourse, breath work, meditation, and a system of yoga called upa yoga, also known as pre-yoga or sub-yoga.

Jafari reported that the study found an over-50% decrease in stress levels among the IT professionals, with adherence to the daily yoga practices correlating to better outcomes. In studying a more diverse range of professions taking the program, positive effects on subjective wellbeing such as joy, vitality, restfulness, and mindfulness were noted in addition to reports of feeling more connected with nature. Jafari commented on the positive work-related outcomes participants experienced, such as meaningful engagement and psychological capital, including self-efficacy, hope, and resilience.

Jafari mentioned that the Center's researchers also conducted a pilot study investigating the impact of a 15-minute online guided Isha Kriya meditation on anxiety and depression in the general population. The results demonstrated that the anxiety scale among participants with a severe to moderate initial baseline saw a dramatic reduction in their symptoms within the first two weeks of doing Isha Kriya regularly, and that this was sustained for up to six weeks. She reported that similar impacts were seen on the depression scale.

Another study conducted by the Sadhguru Center evaluated the effects of the inner-engineering online program and a three-minute breath-based practice called Simha Kriya on 7,500 participants, Jafari explained. Results demonstrated that the inner-engineering practitioners had the lowest stress levels and highest wellbeing scores, and the Simha Kriya practitioners had decreased stress and higher wellbeing trends. Meanwhile, the placebo group had the lowest wellbeing scores although results showed a small change over time.

Jafari further commented on the Center's studies on changes in brain activity and body chemistry that occur with meditation and yoga. She shared various studies and results showing impacts on theta and

gamma bands that support creativity, inward focus, memory, and problem solving; improved lipid profile and a decrease in HbA1c, a marker of diabetes; as well as increased neurotransmitters and endocannabinoids, which are important for mood enhancement and reducing anxiety and depression. She concluded that the studies demonstrate that yoga can change gene expression resulting in particular aid to the immune system.

Participants asked more about the inner-engineering trainings and Jafari shared that they were developed by Sadghuru and are available on the [Isha Foundation website](#).

Andrahennadi introduced the next speaker, Dimitris Xygalatas.

Dimitris Xygalatas began by introducing himself as an anthropologist of religion that has studied ritual throughout his entire academic career. He shared that he conducted a survey in one of his field sites and found that the average person spends about 700 hours per year (two hours per day) performing different kinds of rituals that are key to their identity. He selected his focus to understand this phenomenon by combining the approaches of anthropologists and psychologists to bridge the gap between the humanities and the sciences.

He introduced his current field site, Mauritius, noting that it's one of the most diverse societies in the world because of its history. Showing a picture of the island nation on the screen, he asked, "what is the first thing you would notice?" Participants called out various observations. Xygalatas explained that people see different things, and what he sees is the reef, which protects the island from big waves and tsunamis, blocks the sharks from coming in, and allows fishermen to fish in the lagoon—even those who cannot swim or do not own a boat.

Xygalatas offers insight into the significance of the differentiation between lagoon and ocean, recalling anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski's observations during field work in the Trobriand Islands in the southwest Pacific. Malinowski observed rituals performed before venturing into the open ocean but not into the lagoon, positing a causal relationship and proposing that ritual helps people soothe anxiety. Xygalatas explained that he, along with some of his graduate students, are now researching the relationship between ritual and anxiety.

In one study, they studied people in anxiety-inducing situations in a lab and found that behavior became more ritualized as the subjects were exposed to higher anxiety. Before taking the lab into the field, they conducted a study at UConn to ascertain correlation between anxiety levels and rituals by measuring cortisol in hair. Findings showed a negative correlation between participation in ceremonies and levels of anxiety. The next study sought to uncover the causal effect of ritual in Mauritius, allowing for both random assignment and a natural setting. With the use of wearable devices, Xygalatas and his team studied heart rate variability in a group practicing prayer rituals at a temple and a control group at a secular location not engaged in rituals. He explained that preliminary findings show that people who go to the temple demonstrate a greater reduction in anxiety after performing prayers—both in self-reported perceived stress and in heart rate. Xygalatas explained that they also study painful rituals through health monitors and self-reported data and are finding increases in subjective wellbeing and quality of life as a function of intensity (i.e., the greater the suffering, the greater the increase). Xygalatas explained some of the team's conclusions, theorizing how and why these rituals impact human wellbeing and the interface between culture and societies we live in. Importantly, Xygalatas mentions, "we're finding that after participating in collective rituals, people become more cooperative. They cheat less in economic games, in real life tasks, they give more money to charity after engaging in those rituals. So in a lot of

context, rituals have been proposed to be mechanisms for social coordination and for solving social dilemmas.” Relating this to the earth and environment, he notes that rituals recreated in labs have a weaker effect, so context is important; “Why? Because ritual does more things than just provide structure. One of the things that a ritual does is create a sense of the sacred ... Demarcate something as being special, something as being worthy of protection from pollution. And this pollution can be symbolic or it can be literal.”

Concluding his remarks, Xygalatas provided two examples of how ritual and views of sanctity foster coordination and collaboration to prevent over-exploitation and a ‘tragedy of the commons’ situation—the Balinese water temple system and the addition of water from the Ganges to a lake in Mauritius. In Bali, the lake is given personhood, and the temples make it sacred; elaborate rituals are conducted throughout the growing season that maintain coordinated use and stewardship of the lake. Changes made by the government that disturbed the system that had been in place for centuries resulted in a disastrous ripple effect. In Mauritius, due to a ceremony in the 1970s that entailed water from the sacred Ganges being added to a lake, the lake is held sacred, and the ecosystem is not disturbed; meanwhile, other lakes are overfished.

The group discussed the meaning of ritual and Xygalatas offered that in his view, it is not necessarily religious, rather it is a repetitive sequence of actions that is deemed to be special either with no specific goal, or if there is a goal, with no connection between the action and the goal. He explained that rituals are not exotic, and we all partake; he provided examples of everyday rituals people participate in yet do not identify as rituals (e.g., weddings, graduation ceremonies, holidays, etc.). Xygalatas noted that rituals are a fundamental part of personal and collective identity, and while there are positive examples, there are also dark and destructive examples.

Andrahennadi introduced the next speaker, Sohyun Park.

Sohyun Park began her presentation with a discussion on her and her colleagues’ research, published in the Nature Scientific Report on Parks and Green Spaces, entitled *Perception Changes Before and After the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Park explained that while it was evident that use of parks and outdoor public spaces increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, she and her colleagues sought to examine where these new users were coming from, the impetus for the behavior change, and how changing human perceptions of nature can be studied. Park noted that while an array of methods for this type of study exists, they can be costly and time-consuming. Moreover, she shared that participants in a social survey may ascertain the researcher’s intention simply by agreeing to participate, and thus skew the results. “Whereas a social media platform will give you really immediate data ... there is no sampling biases,” she said. Elaborating on the use of social media as a data source, Park detailed this particular study’s methods, which used Twitter and an API (a coding key) to access aggregated data from March through May 2020, immediately after the World Health Organization declared the pandemic worldwide. The research team focused on keywords pertaining to open/green spaces (e.g., parks, trails, forests, arboretum) and outdoor activities (e.g., walking, biking, walking the dog) that started to appear in Twitter posts. The 2020 data was then compared against the same months pre-pandemic in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. The study further honed in on the Eastern Tri-state area (Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York).

Simply put, this comparison demonstrated that during the pandemic, people were tweeting more about nature than in previous years. But a more in-depth look uncovered patterns and brought about more potential areas of research. Using machine learning and allowing AI to categorize the data by topical

groups, Park and her colleagues found interesting patterns and clusters that showed increased attention to sensory aspects of the landscape (e.g., bird sounds) versus physical activity. A further pattern emerged regarding spirituality, gratitude, and wellbeing.

Park closed her discussion with a comment on the role landscape architects might play in designing public outdoor spaces that enhance mindfulness and sensory awareness.

Weiner asked whether that data showed people getting more joy out of consuming nature as opposed to more environmentally destructive forms of consumption? Xygalatas added that there is a great deal of research that shows that long-term happiness is not increased through consumption and investment in material possessions. Rather, a correlation exists between long-term happiness and investment in experiences.

Park responded that we all have our everyday battles with consumption, greed, and fulfilling desires versus needs. She shared that this applies even more to the younger generation who, like her children, want the new iPhone every two years and can't be forced to go outside because they're old enough to make their own decisions. "And so, I think there is a lot of dinner conversation about where we are, where our world is going, how the world is structured, ... how secure the nature which they might have is," she said. However, on the other hand, she reminded the group, it's more complex: "we [also] have so many urban areas that we are losing nature spaces and the lack of access to quality nature. There is a social equity issue ... there [are] a lot of puzzles. It's not really between the consumption and the mindfulness for nature, there's a lot of complexity that is coming into place."

Other participants added their thoughts on the idea that humans often consume nature to its detriment even when we are simply enjoying time outdoors (e.g., tourism). Another participant questioned whether people are going to protected natural areas to be mindful or to take pictures, and why does 'nature' have to be pristine and untouched nature when it's all around us and should be accessible to all.

Park explained that from her perspective we need to increase biodiversity and 'natural' settings in urban areas, as projections are that 60% of the world's population will be in urban areas by 2030 and 80% by 2050. She suggested that more accessible landscapes near urban populations are necessary so that people do not have to drive long distances to visit a national park or wilderness. She noted that it is also a question of social equity.

Answering another participant's question about whether it is a temporary phenomenon, Park noted that further research is needed to ascertain whether the behavior change during COVID-19 pandemic will have a lasting impact.

Ngozi Taffe commented that we should ask "how did we get here?", noting that over the past five years, especially in the United States, we have had a very difficult political landscape in which a lot of rituals were broken down. The social structures that connected students in classrooms, at home, and everything else broke down. This layered with a culture of young people connected to their devices at all times, Taffe noted, "it's no wonder we have this mental health crisis now." She suggested that as the group thinks about framing the following day's discussions, it should consider how there is an opportunity to create structures to help our current state, change the narrative, and build structures to prevent us from repeating history. "There are very fixable things that we can probably do or prevent to help us navigate some of the spaces that our young people and ourselves have to navigate currently," she said.

Weiner thanked the panelists and participants for the important discussions and transitioned into the wrap-up session.

### **4:30 – 5:00 pm | Reflections on the Day**

Session Leader: **Daniel Weiner**, *Vice President for Global Affairs and Professor, Department of Geography, UConn*

Weiner reflected on the three different conversations that took place during the day, asking participants to share their thoughts. A discussion on direct versus indirect mindfulness arose, questioning whether intentional mindfulness was necessary or whether unintentional awareness of surroundings (e.g., bird sounds) is the same? There was some agreement that simply being outdoors awakens a natural instinct of unconscious awareness. Speakers noted the pitfalls of specifying intention and motivations and the stigma around associating an initiative with mental health and/or spirituality. Karen McComb posited that if everyone was working toward a culture of well-being—whether intentional or unintentional—it might naturally reinforce nature relatedness, mental health, physical health, learning, inclusion, etc.

Manisha Desai expressed that she thought intentionality, naming and framing connections is important, especially in academia, to better understand how we relate to things and engage.

Rana Al Qaimari reminded the group that while the research and data is interesting and important, we need to understand how to apply it and what we can do to change outcomes for the better. How do these results translate into a better life?

Oksan Bayulgen asked if perhaps there was too much meaning or value being put into the word ‘mindfulness.’ She likened it to other words— ‘sustainability’ and ‘democracy’—cautioning that using it as a catch-all term would render it meaningless. Bayulgen suggested that the group was circling two themes: the mental health of the individual and interconnectedness with nature. It would be useful to articulate exactly what the group hopes to achieve and what the working definition of ‘mindfulness’ would be.

This led to discussions and examples of how being in nature can both enhance mental health and the sense of interconnectedness necessary to avoid moving toward an individualistic and materialistic perspective. Participants discussed how sensory experiences, particularly touching soil, can impact that connection, and that there are different paths such as guided mindfulness meditations and ‘free-flowing’ mindfulness such as gardening that help an individual connect with the ‘planet of others.’

Angi Seth asked how mindfulness would translate into skillful action to address the challenges we face.

The discussion and day ended with an anecdote and advice from Kumanga Andrahennadi. She began, “How do we get from being this [individual] to being feeling as one? So with mindfulness, why do we consume? Our consumption habits, where did it begin? It began in our mind. It didn’t come from anywhere else. It’s our habitual tendencies. The community that we grew up in.” She explained her shock when she came to the US, where the consumption, and waste, is astounding. In comparison, in her home of Sri Lanka she remembers sleeping on the floor sometimes as a child in her grandparents’ home. She has memories of running in the rice paddies and talking to water. Her upbringing, connection to nature, family, and community guided her through her academic life as well as shaped her personal

habits. She explained, “How we’ve been supported, this influence matters .... It’s about me coming back to myself and doing my work in this world. So this is where, again, mindfulness comes. To be patient with everybody else. If they’re not in the same plane as I am, just to be mindful and be compassionate about others, I’m aware of this. So this awareness, all of this, comes through my practice. That’s the bottom line for me. If I didn’t have a practice, I wouldn’t know any difference.” She told the group how she can now recognize and enjoy the simple luxuries, “so when I wake up now in Sri Lanka, I wake up to the sun and that’s my luxury. I wake up and I go play with my nephew. That’s my luxury. And I go barefoot in the garden. My husband and I, we are growing vegetables and I do prayers for the vegetables, that’s my luxury. And being able to pluck a vegetable from the garden all year round ... these things are simple luxuries, and we don’t need very much to live. And all of this comes through practice and being aware of one’s habitual tendencies and knowing how to change that. So this is where the self-awareness, acceptance of others, compassion, heart is mindfulness. And this is where I’m so appreciative to the land that I was born in, Sri Lanka. It gave me that, those foundations.”

## FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2022

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### SESSION III: MINDFULNESS FOR EARTH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

9:30am – 10:45am | Integrating Mindfulness and Nature-Based Learning

*Phoebe Godfrey, Professor in Residence, Department of Sociology, UConn*

*Kumanga Andrahennadi, Founder/Director of the Center for the Advanced Learning of Mindfulness (CALM) and Co-Founder/Director of the Mindfulness for Earth (M4E) Initiative, Sri Lanka*

*Athulya Narayanan, Undergraduate Student, UConn Sociology*

*Juan Pablo Yepes, Undergraduate Student, UConn Environmental Studies*

Moderator: *Zahra Ali, Ph.D. Student, Plant Science and Landscape Architecture, UConn*

Daniel Weiner called the group to order and welcomed everyone to day two of the workshop, where discussions would transition from theory to practice.

Zahra Ali welcomed the group and started the session with introductions of the speakers. This was immediately followed by Athulya Narayanan leading the group in a short meditation.

Phoebe Godfrey began with a brief discussion and exercise on identity. She explained that sociologists are very interested in the social construction of reality and how it is created in relationships of power. Godfrey explained that it is important to understand one’s positionality and embodied intersectional identities when undertaking a journey to mindfulness. She led the group in an exercise to demonstrate how these views of oneself impact student wellbeing. Participants shared their reflections from the exercise.

Kumanga Andrahennadi led the group in a mindfulness eating meditation using a single grape for each individual, which reinforced the earlier discussion of links between mindfulness and understanding our consumption.

Juan Pablo Yepes shared his personal experiences with mindfulness meditations and what the incorporation of such practices in an educational setting has taught him. He detailed struggles he faced and how the introduction of mindfulness and nature in his academics has helped him heal.

Narayanan agreed, noting how not only was Godfrey’s persistence as an educator and mentor critical in helping her overcome academic challenges but she found comfort and strength in meditating.

A participant asked how these practices shaped their relationship with nature. Yepes explained that Godfrey’s course intertwined nature with mindfulness, and that when one realizes life and animism within the planet, a new respect and affection for nature is formed. Narayanan confirmed that while she has always had an intense connection with nature, the class had increased her awareness.

Zahra Ali closed the session asking participants to consider the discussions and the student experiences heard up to this point when thinking about how existing activities and efforts might be integrated with Mindfulness for Earth on campus at UConn.

**11:00 am – 12:15 pm | UConn as a Living Laboratory: Nature Rx and Spring Valley Farm**

*Cynthia Jones, Professor, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, UConn*

*Jessica Larkin-Wells, Farm Manager, Spring Valley Student Farm*

Moderator: **Zahra Ali**, *Ph.D. Student, Plant Science and Landscape Architecture, UConn*

Zahra Ali welcomed the group back and started the session with introductions of the speakers and the two UConn cases—Nature Rx and Spring Valley Student Farm—that were going to be discussed.

Cynthia Jones started off the discussion with the origins of the Nature Rx program that she started at UConn. She explained that UConn is part of the Campus Nature Rx Network started by Cornell University faculty member Donald Rakow and Director of Counseling Gregory Eells. It was an offshoot of the Parks Rx program that was started by Robert Zarr, a pediatrician in the Washington DC area. Jones shared that Zarr found that there was no less expensive and more effective way to treat the issues that he was seeing (obesity, diabetes, and hypertension) than to get patients outside in nature; he began to write prescriptions for spending time in nature.

Jones noted that over the past 15 years, numerous studies have shown that general wellbeing, mood, creativity, cognitive function, and imagination all improve when people engage with nature. These studies come from fields ranging from occupational therapy to eco-psychology and ecology. She explained that Rakow and Eells recognized that poor mental health among college students was reaching crisis proportions, so they pulled together a group of volunteers at Cornell to get the movement off the ground. The premise was to look at how to work with mental health services to write prescriptions for spending time in nature (the Nature Rx piece) as well as to develop a course to foster connection between humans and nature.

Jones was disappointed that the efforts by Cornell and other universities to integrate the prescription for nature have not succeeded for a variety of reasons, and therefore efforts have been redirected to increase connection with nature and advertise to students the benefits of spending time in nature. Jones noted that the NatureRx program at UConn is nascent as it kicked off in 2020, right as COVID hit. They have built a GIS map showcasing all the outdoor spaces and recreational opportunities near the Storrs campus (e.g., trails, gardens, forests, etc.). In addition to providing this resource to the UConn community, the Nature Rx program hosts activities ranging from planting days to arboretum tours and

forest-bathing events. Jones stated that there has been some difficulty expanding attendance and that partnerships with other units on campus would be worthwhile.

Next, Jessica Larkin Wells shared her experience living and working on the Spring Valley Student Farm, first as a UConn student and subsequently as the Farm Manager. Larkin-Wells explained that the one-acre residential student farm produces vegetables for Dining Services. There are between eleven and fifteen student farmers that live in two different houses and work on the farm for ten hours a week in exchange for reduced housing costs. Everything grown on the farm goes directly to either the dining halls or to the on-campus farmer's market, which is an opportunity for the students to have direct dialogue about the work they do on the farm with UConn staff, students, and the general public.

Larkin-Wells explained that her position is unique in that she is a full-time staff member that must manage the farm for Dining Services, but also lives on the farm somewhat like a residential advisor. She explained that Residential Life's reduction in the housing fee is a huge contribution to making the farm a sustainable place for students who would otherwise struggle to afford on-campus housing. She also noted that it's important to understand that while working on the farm is an educational experience, it is not meant to be an academic program. While the farm has some internship and independent study students participate, the student farmers who live and work at the farm do not receive academic credit.

Larkin-Wells acknowledged that the farm is built on the native land of the Mohegan and Nipmuc peoples, and that she and the student farmers are trying their best to uphold the responsibility for stewarding it according to their example; this includes delving into issues of sustainability and ethical growing. Students are allowed to take on projects specific to their interests, such as solar thermal panels to heat the greenhouse, permaculture, edible forest gardens, beekeeping, etc. The student farmers also cultivate native wildflower seedlings to give to the community and practice gleaning (harvesting produce that would otherwise go to waste from other farms).

She explained that due to its 'student-run' nature, almost all decisions at the farm are reached by consensus with the students. Larkin-Wells notes that this extends to decisions on accepting new students to live at the farm: "That's a community decision. And that's one of the ways where we're practicing our social sustainability is that we are figuring out how to live as a community, work as a community, and make decisions as a community. And so this is critical education for students to receive. That includes who is sweeping the kitchen."

Participants discussed the feasibility of expanding the experiential learning opportunities on the student farm to reach a broader student population and what resources and opportunities could be leveraged.

## **SESSION IV: ROADMAP FOR MINDFULNESS FOR EARTH IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

**1:30 pm – 3:00 pm | Building a Mindfulness for Earth Roadmap for Higher Education**

*Karen McComb, Director of Health Promotion and Community Impact, UConn*

*Kumanga Andrahennadi, Founder/Director of the Center for the Advanced Learning of Mindfulness (CALM) and Co-Founder/Director of the Mindfulness for Earth (M4E) Initiative, Sri Lanka*

*Claire Dutton, MA student, Higher Education and Student Affairs, Neag School of Education*

*Moderator: Ngozi Taffe, Associate Vice President for Global Affairs*



Ngozi Taffe began the session with a recap of discussions that transpired over the past sessions and a discussion of how to frame a roadmap. She then asked each panelist to introduce themselves.

Karen McCombs began the discussion by explaining her role in UConn's Student Health and Wellness (ShaW). She then detailed her hopes to foment collaboration across UConn to create a culture of wellbeing and to build a community effort in which everyone has a role to play. She discussed current mental health crises as well as the positive strides society has made in reducing the stigma around mental health issues and being more proactive in educational settings to diagnose and address concerns. McComb noted that ShaW is developing a wellness coalition to help create a supportive network of faculty and staff committed to community wellness. She also stressed the importance of faculty and staff knowing what resources to direct students to and not feeling overwhelmed by taking on a counselor role.

Next, Claire Dutton spoke on her experience as a student whose professor brought mindfulness meditations and contemplative writing into the classroom. Dutton further elucidated on her experience working in a mental health clinic and the clinicians' attempts to explore the use of outdoor space and meditation in treatment regimens.

Participants shared what they were doing in and out of the classroom, what they thought needed further development, and how they would benefit from training and designated mindfulness space at the university. Andrahennadi agreed that teacher training was important as was connecting mindfulness practices in the classroom to nature.

### **3:30 – 4:30 pm | Group Reflections and Action Items**

Session Moderators:

**Kumanga Andrahennadi**, *Founder/Director of the Center for the Advanced Learning of Mindfulness (CALM) and Co-Founder/Director of the Mindfulness for Earth (M4E) Initiative, Sri Lanka* **Daniel Weiner**, *Vice President for Global Affairs and Professor, Department of Geography, UConn*

The previous session entitled "Building a Mindfulness for Earth Roadmap for Higher Education" merged with the group reflection and served as the entry point for a discussion of next steps. The action items that emerged resulted in the creation of a Steering Committee and subcommittees (Research, Curricula and Student Services, and Built Environment) to engage in agenda-setting and planning for moving a culture of *Mindfulness for Earth* forward at UConn and to expand research collaborations.

## PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES

**Iyad Abumoghli, Ph.D. ([iyad.abumogli@un.org](mailto:iyad.abumogli@un.org))**  
**Founder and Director, [Faith for Earth, UN Environment Programme](#)**

Iyad Abumoghli has more than 38 years of experience with international organizations, the private sector, and scientific institutions. Abumoghli's expertise is in strategic planning, sustainable development, interfaith collaboration, knowledge, and innovation. Currently, Abumoghli is the Lead Principal Advisor on Engaging with Faith-Based Organizations at UNEP. Previously, Abumoghli held several leading positions including those of the Regional Director and Representative of UNEP in West Asia 2012–2017, Director of Knowledge and Innovation at UNDP's Regional Office in Cairo 2009–2012, Senior Environment Advisor at UNDP's Sub-Regional Resource Facility in Beirut 2006–2009, Global Practice Manager for the Energy and Environment Group in New York 2003–2006, and Assistant Resident Representative of UNDP in Jordan 1997–2003.

Abumoghli adopts a holistic multi-sectoral approach to development, ensuring cross-thematic integration with internal and external partners.

Abumoghli holds a Ph.D. in Bio-Chemical Engineering from the University of Bath, UK, an outstanding graduate of the Virtual Development Academy – Johns University, and a BA in Chemical Engineering from the University of Jordan.

**Zahra Ali ([zahra.ali@uconn.edu](mailto:zahra.ali@uconn.edu))**  
**Ph.D. Student, [Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture, UConn](#)**

Zahra Ali joined the Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture Ph.D. program in Fall 2022. Her research focuses on the impacts of outdoor learning environments and nature/place-based curricula on learning outcomes, health, wellness, and long-term relationships with the environment—with a focus on equitable access to nature in urban communities both locally and globally. Ali is a research assistant in Dr. Sohyun Park's Sustainable Urban Planning and Ecology Research Lab, as well as for Vice President for Global Affairs Daniel Weiner's Mindfulness for Earth initiative. She also continues to serve on the Abrahamic Story of the Tree working group for the Office of Global Affairs.

Prior to starting her doctoral studies, Ali was the Director of the Global Partnerships and Outreach in UConn's Office of Global Affairs. She worked in collaboration with faculty, university leadership, and partners around the world to advance UConn's global initiatives and foster engagement with global networks.

She holds an M.S. in Global Affairs with specialization in energy and environmental policy from New York University and a B.S. in International Business from the University of Rhode Island.

**Rana Al Qaimari ([rana@ecopeaceme.org](mailto:rana@ecopeaceme.org))**  
**Program Manager, [EcoPeace Middle East](#)**

Rana Al Qaimari is the Program Manager at EcoPeace Middle East, Palestine Office. Originally from Ramallah, Palestine, Qaimari holds an MA from Birzeit University in Water Science and Technology. Qaimari has fifteen years of professional experience in education directly related to water and environmental education. Additionally, she has three years of experience working as a Program Officer for the EU Erasmus+ Office in Palestine. Qaimari has been an Environmental Coordinator for youth environmental awareness programmes for the Palestinian Academy for Science and Technology, the Royal Society for Protection of Nature, Latin Patriarchate Schools, and the Hellen Medien Projekte/Peter Maffy foundation. Qaimari worked as deputy principal for Al-Ahliyyah College School, Catholic High school in Ramallah from 1998 to 2014.

**Kumanga Andrahennadi, Ph.D. ([kumiwater@gmail.com](mailto:kumiwater@gmail.com))**  
**Co-Founder of [Mindfulness for Earth](#)**  
**Founder of [CALM: Centre for the Advanced Learning of Mindfulness](#)**

Kumanga Andrahennadi is a co-organizer of the 'Mindfulness for Earth' workshop and has been critical to efforts to pull this workshop together. She is a mindfulness researcher, educator, and consultant with over twenty years of experience in delivering mindfulness-based programs in the West for children, young people, and adults. As the Founder of CALM: Centre for Advanced Learning of Mindfulness, Andrahennadi pioneers delivering the eco-contemplative framework under the 'Advanced Mindfulness-Based Practices (AMBP)' Programmes within the public, private, and government sectors including to Mental Health, Education, Police Organizations, and Private Corporations in the U.K. and internationally. The AMBP Programmes consists of the onsite and online 'Mindfulness for Earth' and 'Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy' 4/8-week courses, the 'AMBP Teacher Training Programme,' and the 'Mindfulness in Nature' retreats.

Through CALM, Andrahennadi co-organized the first-ever dialogue between His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama and a Western Police Force (the Metropolitan Police, U.K.), which took place as a live online dialogue on July 8, 2020 (watch the full dialogue here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5EDL8ITJ-w>). Andrahennadi is also the Co-Founder of 'Mindfulness for Earth,' an international initiative established in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Faith for Earth.

**Erik Assadourian ([gaianspring@gmail.com](mailto:gaianspring@gmail.com))**  
**Director, [Gaian Way](#)**

Erik Assadourian, a sustainability researcher, writer, and consultant, is the founder and director of the Gaian Way, a new ecophilosophy and religious community ([gaianism.org](http://gaianism.org)). For 17 years Assadourian served as senior fellow and researcher with the Worldwatch Institute. There he directed two editions of Vital Signs and five editions of State of the World, including the 2017 edition (EarthEd: Rethinking Education on a Changing Planet); the 2013 edition (Is Sustainability Still Possible?); and the 2010 edition (Transforming Cultures: From Consumerism to Sustainability). He also designed Catan: Oil Springs, an

eco-educational scenario for the popular board game The Settlers of Catan. Recognizing that a sustainable future requires radical cultural change, Erik founded a new philosophy and religious community of practice in 2019.

**[Carol Atkinson-Palombo Ph.D. \(Carol.Atkinson-Palombo@uconn.edu\)](mailto:Carol.Atkinson-Palombo@uconn.edu)**

**Professor, Department of Geography, UConn**

Carol Atkinson-Palombo is a Professor in the University of Connecticut's Department of Geography, and served as the Director of UConn's Environmental Studies Program from 2017 to 2022.

Having trained for five years as a National Science Foundation IGERT scholar in Urban Ecology, she has been trained to collaborate with interdisciplinary teams to pursue use-inspired policy-relevant research. She uses geographical techniques such as GIS-based spatial analysis, statistical modelling, and qualitative methods to assess the impact of policies intended to promote sustainable cities. Much of her work to date has focused on transportation sustainability, which shapes a wide array of societal concerns such as air pollution, land use, global climate change, and social and environmental equity.

An emerging area of interest is the ongoing transition to a low-carbon economy in the United States and the debates about what role technology will play in this transition. She is also interested in understanding what factors shape the social acceptance of technology, particularly renewable energy technologies.

She engages in a wide range of service activities for the university, as well as national and international bodies, and has a deep and abiding commitment to equity and diversity.

**[Oksan Bayulgen, Ph.D. \(oksan.bayulgen@uconn.edu\)](mailto:oksan.bayulgen@uconn.edu)**

**Associate Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies  
Department of Political Science, UConn**

Oksan Bayulgen is a political scientist with specialization in energy transitions, environmental politics, democratization, and development. She has conducted extensive fieldwork in Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Norway, and Turkey with the help of numerous external and university grants. Her first book (Cambridge University Press 2010) was on the relationship between regime types and foreign investments in the oil industry. She has numerous articles in leading journals such as *Environmental Politics*, *Energy Research and Social Science*, *Journal of Human Rights*, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, and *International Studies Review*. She teaches courses on politics in developing countries, politics of oil, introduction to comparative politics, politics and foreign policies of Russia, democratization, and sustainable energy. Her new book (Michigan University Press, 2022) is on the politics of clean energy development in developing countries.

**[Michael Bradford \(michael.bradford@uconn.edu\)](mailto:michael.bradford@uconn.edu)**  
**Vice Provost for Faculty, Staff, and Student Development**  
**Professor, Department of Dramatic Arts, UConn**

As Vice Provost for Faculty, Staff, and Student Development, Michael Bradford oversees all activities in the Provost's Office aimed at transforming the experience and success of all members of our community. This role includes faculty recruitment, retention, and onboarding; faculty and academic staff development and recognition; faculty and academic staff equity and access; and student success and equity initiatives.

At UConn, Bradford has held roles as department head of Dramatic Arts, artistic director of the Connecticut Repertory Theatre, and faculty director for the SchOLA<sup>2</sup>RS House Learning Community. Bradford is professor of dramatic arts and teaches theatre history, dramatic literature, and playwriting. His full-length and one-act plays have been produced at various venues in New York, including Off-Broadway at the American Place Theatre, the LARK Play Developmental Center, and the Ensemble Studio Theatre. Regionally and internationally, his work has premiered at the Hygienic Arts Theatre (New London, CT), eta Creative Arts Foundation, Inc. (Chicago), the Playhouse on Park Theatre (Hartford, CT), the HERE Art Center (NYC), A Contemporary Theatre (Seattle), the Connecticut Repertory Theatre (Storrs, CT), and the Brixton East Theatre (London). His workshops, readings, and residencies include the Manhattan Theatre Club Playwriting Fellowship (NYC), The Negro Ensemble Co. at the Signature Theatre (NYC), Liminal Studios (London), the LARK Developmental Theatre (NYC), the New York Stage and Film Company Residency (Vassar, NY), and the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism Writing Fellowship. In 2013 his play OLIVES AND BLOOD was translated into Spanish for a staged reading in the Federico Garcia Salon at the Centro Cultural Dulce Maria Loynaz (Havana, Cuba).

Internationally, he is the recipient of the Research Scholar Fulbright to Granada, Spain, has led writing workshops at Teatro Oficina Theatre Company, Guimareas, Portugal and the University of Theatre, Tirgu-Mures, Romania. His work is published by Dr. Cicero Press (Woodstock, NY), Broadway Play Publishing, Inc. (NYC) and can also be found in the anthology "Seven More Different Plays," edited by Mac Wellman.

Bradford holds a Master of Fine Arts from Brooklyn College CUNY and a bachelor's in general studies from UConn.

**[Jeanne Ciravolo \(jeanne.ciravolo@uconn.edu\)](mailto:jeanne.ciravolo@uconn.edu)**  
**Director, Alexey von Schlippe Gallery of Art, Avery Point Campus**  
**Assistant Professor in Residence, Department of Art and Art History, UConn**

Jeanne Ciravolo is a visual artist whose work amplifies female narratives in painting and experimental drawing practices on found domestic textiles. She earned an MFA from the University of Connecticut, a BFA from the University of Miami, and currently teaches studio art and is the Director of the Alexey von Schlippe Gallery at the University of Connecticut Avery Point campus.

Ciravolo has exhibited her work nationally in museums and galleries including the Yellowstone Museum, Coral Springs Museum, and the New Britain Museum of American Art. Publications of her work include Manifest Gallery's International Painting Annual 10 and International Drawing Annual 15. She has been awarded the Walter Feldman Fellowship from the Boston Arts and Business Council and artist

residencies at the Hambidge Center for Creative Arts and Science, the Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts, and the Anderson Center for Interdisciplinary Studies.

Ciravolo is also a commissioned portrait painter whose works are in the public collections of the Connecticut Appellate Court, the New Haven District Superior Court, and the Hartford Juvenile Court.

**[Manisha Desai, Ph.D.](mailto:manisha.desai@uconn.edu) – ([manisha.desai@uconn.edu](mailto:manisha.desai@uconn.edu))**  
**Head and Professor, Department of Sociology**  
**Professor of Asian American Studies, UConn**

Manisha Desai is the Head of the Department of Sociology, Professor of Sociology and Asian and Asian American Studies at the University of Connecticut, and a Senior Research Fellow at the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) in Geneva, Switzerland. Her areas of research and teaching include gender and globalization, transnational feminisms and women's human rights, and social movements in India. Her most recent book is *Subaltern Movements in India: The Gendered Geography of Struggles Against Neoliberal Development* (Routledge 2016). In addition, she has four other single authored or edited and co-edited books and numerous articles and book chapters. Currently she's working on several projects including what UNRISD calls the new Eco-Social Contract, examining how women's rights, land rights, and climate change intersect in women's movements in Northeastern CT and India; decolonizing the academy and social theory; as well as contemporary feminist campaigns against Hindu fundamentalism in India.

**[Claire Dutton](mailto:crd21005work@uconn.edu) ([crd21005work@uconn.edu](mailto:crd21005work@uconn.edu))**  
**Graduate Assistant, Dean of Students Office, UConn**

Claire Dutton joined the Dean of Students Office staff as a graduate assistant in August 2021. She is pursuing her masters degree in Higher Education and Student Affairs at UConn through the Neag School of Education. Dutton attended Kenyon College, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology. After graduating from her undergraduate institution, Dutton worked at an eating disorder treatment center in Boston as a mental health worker and then as the program coordinator. She then moved to Los Angeles where she was the project manager for a mental health and wellness retreat company.

**[Zoe Folsom](mailto:Zoe.Folsom@uconn.edu) ([Zoe.Folsom@uconn.edu](mailto:Zoe.Folsom@uconn.edu))**  
**Ph.D. Student, Department of Sociology, UConn**

Zoe Folsom (she/they) is in her second year of the UConn's sociology graduate program. She's currently working on a thesis analyzing the governance and mythology of the voluntary carbon offset market. She also writes creatively about the importance of relationship and intimacy for confronting our current ecological crises.

**Jeremy R. Geller, Ph.D. ([JeremyRGeller@gmail.com](mailto:JeremyRGeller@gmail.com))**  
**Affiliate, [Gateway International Group](#)**

Jeremy Geller is an international education consultant with the [Gateway International Group](#) where some current and potential clients are committed to re-visioning international education with attention to UN Sustainable Development Goals and in more sustainable and reciprocal modes. The bulk of his professional career was as an administrator for international education, and particularly as an advisor and director of study abroad, at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Ramapo College of New Jersey, and the University of New Haven. Since retiring from full-time work he completed UConn's School of Public Policy [Encore! Connecticut](#) program during which he undertook a carbon footprint study for Hartford's [Operation Fuel](#), a project that refreshed in a policy and energy-justice context his interests in the place of human actors in natural systems, which evolved through archaeological fieldwork in the Nile Valley and work as a park ranger in the semi-arid Southwestern U.S. His "Warhol moment" as an archaeologist was the discovery and identification of the world's oldest known brewery at Hierakonpolis, Egypt. Along the way he has taught anthropology, archaeology, and seminars in experiential learning.

**Audrey Girard ([Audrey.Girard.Ag@gmail.com](mailto:Audrey.Girard.Ag@gmail.com))**  
**Assistant Teacher, [Center for the Advanced Learning of Mindfulness \(CALM\)](#)**

Audrey Girard is an Assistant Teacher of the Advanced Mindfulness-Based Practices (AMBP) 4/8-Week Courses for CALM, and an Associate Teacher Trainer of the 'AMBP Teacher Training Programme.' She is also a Yoga Alliance certified Yoga Teacher. Girard has over ten years of experience practicing yoga, meditation, and dance with a current focus as a practitioner, educator, and researcher of contemplative practices. She is passionate about opening the curtain to a healthy body, knowing the mind, and cultivating wisdom. Girard is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Montreal studying contemplative practices in organizational contexts. She is interested in understanding how practices such as meditation and yoga can benefit workers and industry.

**[Phoebe Godfrey, Ph.D. \(phoebe.godfrey@uconn.edu\)](mailto:phoebe.godfrey@uconn.edu)**  
**Professor in Residence of Sociology, UConn**

*"An ounce of practice is worth more than tons of preaching." – Gandhi*

Phoebe Godfrey has come to recognize the truth of Gandhi's wisdom and so her interests are focused on how to put her personal commitments to equality, justice, and ecological/social sustainability into practice through her research, teaching, activism, and art, all of which she sees as inseparable. To this end she teaches courses on Society and Climate Change, Sustainable Societies, Sociology of Food, as well as Social Theory and is currently developing a new course, Human Societies and the Living Earth. In all these courses she focuses on student engagement and empowerment through creative critical thinking, as well as embodied health and healing. She sees her teaching as activism and seeks to invite students to collectively find ways to put social justice ideas into practice. In addition, she seeks to help students develop their own academic and professional skills in multiple ways including publishing with them, working with honors students, supporting student research, activism, grants, and other areas of interest.

This commitment to highlighting practice and not just ‘preaching’ is showcased in her first book *Understanding Just Sustainabilities from within: A Case Study of a Shared-Use Commercial Kitchen in Connecticut*, published in summer 2021 by Routledge. She is also the co-editor of another book focused on ‘just sustainabilities,’ *Global [Im]-Possibilities: Exploring the Paradoxes of Just Sustainabilities*, also published in the summer of 2021 published by Zed Books/Bloomsbury Press. Her other two co-edited volumes, *Systemic Crises of Global Climate Change: Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender* (2016) and *Emergent Possibilities for Global Sustainability: Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender* (2016) are also both published by Routledge and are the ones she uses in her classes Society and Climate Change and Sustainable Societies. She uses her most recent book in her Sociology of Food course.

**[Amy Gorin, Ph.D. \(amy.gorin@uconn.edu\)](mailto:amy.gorin@uconn.edu)**

**Interim Vice Provost for Health Sciences  
Professor, Department of Psychological Sciences, UConn**

Amy Gorin is a Professor of Psychological Sciences and Interim Vice Provost for Health Sciences at the University of Connecticut. For several years, she served as Director of the Institute for the Collaboration on Health, Intervention, and Policy (InCHIP). Her research focuses on developing and evaluating innovative treatment strategies to improve long-term weight loss and maintenance with an emphasis on environmental processes that impact weight management. Recent projects include a couples-based approach to weight loss and obesity prevention programs for children and emerging adults. Gorin’s research has been continuously funded by the National Institutes of Health.

**[Ian Granit \(Ian.Granit@hotmail.com\)](mailto:Ian.Granit@hotmail.com)**

**Master’s Student, International Development and Management, Lund University**

Ian Granit is currently pursuing a master’s in International Development and Management (LUMID) at Lund University, with a thematic focus on sustainable natural resource management. He has work experience from seven countries and has lived in Mexico, Indonesia, and Australia.

During his bachelor’s degree, Granit focused on the interlinkages between international development and environmental issues, working as a research assistant at Griffith University, Australia, and interning as a researcher for an NGO in Indonesia and the Mexican Senate at the Commission for Environment, Natural Resources, and Climate Change.

**[John Grim, Ph.D. \(john.grim@yale.edu\)](mailto:john.grim@yale.edu)**

**Co-founder, Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology  
Senior Lecturer and Senior Research Scholar, School of the Environment, Divinity School, and  
Religious Studies Department, Yale University**

John Grim is a Senior Lecturer and Research Scholar teaching in the joint MA program in religion and ecology at Yale University School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and the Yale Divinity School. He is co-founder and co-director of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale with his wife, Mary Evelyn



Tucker. With Tucker, Grim directed a ten-conference series and book project at Harvard on “World Religions and Ecology.”

Grim is the author of *The Shaman: Patterns of Religious Healing Among the Ojibway Indians* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1983) and editor of *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology: The Interbeing of Cosmology and Community* (Harvard, 2001). Grim and Tucker are co-authors of *Ecology and Religion* (Island Press, 2014). Together they edited Thomas Berry’s books and published *Thomas Berry: A Biography* (Columbia University Press, 2019). They have edited the following volumes: *Worldviews and Ecology* (Orbis, 1994); *Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change?* (Daedalus 2001); *Thomas Berry: Selected Writings on the Earth Community* (Orbis, 2014); and *Living Cosmology: Christian Responses to Journey of the Universe* (Orbis, 2016), and with Willis Jenkins the *Routledge Handbook on Religion and Ecology* (Routledge, 2016). Grim is the co-executive producer of the Emmy award winning film *Journey of the Universe*.

Grim holds a Ph.D. and MA in the History of Religions from Fordham University and BA in Theology and History from St. John’s University.

**[Alexandra Harden \(alexandra.harden@uconn.edu\)](mailto:alexandra.harden@uconn.edu)**  
**Ph.D. Student, Department of Geography, UConn**

Alexandra Harden is a geography Ph.D. student at the University of Connecticut. Her research focuses on climate change adaptation and adaptation labor. As an area of focus, climate adaptation labor remains a missing component of climate change scholarship and policy initiatives. Therefore, her dissertation work seeks to understand and identify how climate change adaptation labor is framed, implemented, valued, and maintained in global initiatives.

Prior to UConn, Harden completed her MA at Columbia University in climate and society and received a BA from Colgate University in political science and writing and rhetoric.

**[Alexandra Hussey \(alexandra.hussey@un.org\)](mailto:alexandra.hussey@un.org)**  
**Intern, UN Faith for Earth, UN Environment Programme**

Alexandra Hussey is a senior studying International Relations and Political Science with a teaching study minor at Wellesley College. In addition to her role as an intern for UN Faith for Earth, this year she also serves as a fellow at the Madeleine Korbelt Albright Institute for Global Affairs. Her engagement with environment studies spans earth science education, clean energy policy advocacy, and bioluminescent research.

**[Nashaw Jafari \(NJafari@bidmic.harvard.edu\)](mailto:NJafari@bidmic.harvard.edu)**  
**Project Administrator, Sadhguru Center for a Conscious Planet, Department of Anesthesia, Critical Care and Pain Medicine, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Harvard Medical School**

Nashaw Jafari graduated from Soka University of America with a BA in Liberal Arts and a concentration in Social and Behavioral Sciences. She continued to Alliant International University where she received

her MA in Clinical Psychology. She also completed a Master of Acupuncture (M.Ac.) with a Chinese Herbal Medicine specialization at Emperor's College. Jafari's research interest is in exploring the impact of mind-body interventions on emotional and mental well-being.

**[Cynthia Jones, Ph.D. \(Cynthia.S.Jones@uconn.edu\)](mailto:Cynthia.S.Jones@uconn.edu)**  
**Professor Emerita and Research Scientist,**  
**Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, UConn**

Cynthia Jones is Professor Emerita and Research Scientist in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Connecticut. She first became captivated by plants as an undergraduate in the University of California system and has had the great fortune to spend her career researching, teaching, and promoting her passion for plant form and function. She has served as the President of the Botanical Society of America and is currently the Director of the UConn Plant Biodiversity Conservatory and Research Core (otherwise known as the EEB Greenhouses). In 2019, she received a University Award and an AAUP Award for Teaching Innovation for her development of a studio-type model for traditional lecture-lab courses that resulted in deeper, more inquiry-driven engagement of students with the material. In both teaching and research, she has taken to heart the words of her Ph.D. advisor at UC Berkely, "Ask the organism."

Growing up in a small mining town in the California desert allowed hours upon hours of time outside, as did family vacations that always involved camping. She has always known intuitively what scientists are now demonstrating in a myriad of ways—she is happier when in contact with nature. In the fall of 2019, she discovered the national campus program called NatureRx and initiated a version at UConn as a way to encourage a deeper connection with nature among UConn students and facilitate research in this area among scholars.

**[Kinga H. Karlowska – Kinga.H.Karlowska@uconn.edu](mailto:Kinga.H.Karlowska@uconn.edu)**  
**Global Initiatives Coordinator, Global Partnerships and Outreach,**  
**Office of Global Affairs, UConn**

Kinga H. Karlowska works as part of the Global Partnerships and Outreach team in the Office of Global Affairs, providing support for special initiatives such as the Norian Armenian Programs, Abrahamic Programs, and more. Previously, Karlowska worked at the Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants, building youth programs and delivering essential services for refugee children. After, she aided legislators at the Connecticut General Assembly as a constituent engagement coordinator. Karlowska holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science and a master's degree in International Relations from UMass Boston. During her education, she studied in France, Poland, and Kosovo, in addition to conducting research in Turkey for her master's thesis.

**[Samuel King \(S.King@yale.edu\)](mailto:S.King@yale.edu)**  
**Research Associate, Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology**

Sam King is an environmental educator, writer, and activist. He serves as Project Manager for the Emmy Award-winning *Journey of the Universe* film and multimedia project, hosting the *Journey of the Universe*:

*10 Years Later* podcast and curating the monthly newsletter. He is also lead mentor for the Yale/Coursera Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in Religions and Ecology.

King received a Master of Arts in Religion and Ecology and a certificate in Educational Leadership and Ministry from Yale Divinity School. He also served as a Teaching Fellow at the Yale School of the Environment. A former Philosophy and Religion teacher at The Hotchkiss School, Sam was a Fulbright Scholar in Sri Lanka, where he taught at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura and researched agrarian Buddhism. King is passionate about the power of story in building a just and sustainable future.

**[Yehezkel Landau, D.Min. \(Yehezkel.Landau@gmail.com\)](mailto:Yehezkel.Landau@gmail.com)**

**Consultant, Landau Interfaith**

Yehezkel Landau, a dual Israeli-American citizen, is an interfaith educator, leadership trainer, author, and consultant working to improve Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations and promote Israeli-Palestinian peacebuilding for over 40 years. Landau earned a Bachelor of Arts from Harvard University, a Master of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School, and a Doctor of Ministry degree from Hartford Seminary.

**[Jessica Larkin-Wells \(Jessica.Larkin-Wells@uconn.edu\)](mailto:Jessica.Larkin-Wells@uconn.edu)**

**Farm Manager, UConn Spring Valley Student Farm**

Jessica Larkin-Wells manages the Spring Valley Student Farm (SVSF), an educational farm where eleven undergraduate students live and grow produce for UConn's Dining Services. SVSF sprouted in Spring 2010 and has blossomed over the past 12 years into a thriving farm community, deeply rooted in local food systems. Student farmers learn a range of skills while engaged in community-driven, project-based experiential learning. Spring Valley Student Farm aims to be a "living laboratory" where students, faculty, staff, and Storrs-Mansfield community members can come together to learn about the connections between land, food, and people; model efficient, effective regenerative organic farming techniques that yield healthy productive soil, increased farm biodiversity, and hundreds of varieties of high quality vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers; and encourage imaginative, innovative, and creative thinking to achieve more sustainable lifestyles.

Larkin-Wells graduated from the SVSF program in 2018 and worked in direct production for several years before returning to work for Dining Services as the SVSF farm manager in July 2021. She draws often on her previous experiences as a farmer, baker, and factory worker and is pleased that her current job requires her to work outdoors and pay attention to plants, people, and seasons. She loves working with students and is endlessly curious about how to be a better farmer, teacher, and friend.

**[Beth Lawrence, Ph.D. \(beth.lawrence@uconn.edu\)](mailto:beth.lawrence@uconn.edu)**

**Associate Professor, Department of Natural Resources and the Environment and Center for Environmental Science and Engineering, UConn**

Beth Lawrence is a plant ecologist interested in the consequences of anthropogenic stressors (e.g., invasive plants, nutrient loading, sea-level rise, deicing salts) on community composition and ecosystem function. She primarily works in wetlands, where she examines the consequences of invasion and

management activities on community structure, nutrient and carbon cycling. She is particularly interested in how different plant communities influence ecosystem function and how we can manipulate species composition during restoration to promote diverse, functional communities. She is committed to finding sustainable solutions to improve natural resource management. Beth teaches introductory and graduate courses on wetland ecology, as well as a cohort-building class for Environmental Science majors focusing on environmental problem solving.

Lawrence received a BS in Natural Resources from Cornell University in 2001, an MS in Botany and Plant Pathology from Oregon State University in 2005, and completed her Ph.D. in 2011 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the Botany Department. She was a post-doctoral researcher at Loyola University Chicago during 2011 and 2012, and was an Assistant Professor at DePaul University from 2012 to 2015 in the Dept. of Environmental Science and Studies. She joined the faculty at the University of Connecticut in 2016 and holds a joint appointment in Natural Resources and the Environment and the Center for Environmental Science and Engineering.

**[Karen McComb](mailto:Karen.McComb@uconn.edu) – [Karen.McComb@uconn.edu](mailto:Karen.McComb@uconn.edu)**

**Director of Health Promotion and Community Impact, UConn Student Health and Wellness**

Karen McComb joined UConn in August 2019 as the Director of Health Promotion and Community Impact in the Student Health and Wellness department. In her role, she leads a team of health promotion professionals focused on mobilizing the UConn community to cultivate conditions that foster student wellbeing, empower students, and dismantle systems of oppression which impact health. Current initiatives include activating and facilitating UConn's Wellness Coalition, a group of students, staff, and faculty from over 20 UConn departments, schools, and colleges focused on collaborative strategies to create healthy academic spaces and support student behavioral health; and the Innovate Wellness Design Lab, a space where students work through the design-thinking process to innovate solutions to address health and wellness concerns they see on campus. Prior to UConn, McComb served for fifteen years at the University of California Riverside in various student development roles, most recently as the Senior Director of Student Wellness. McComb received her MS in Counseling from San Francisco State University and is currently pursuing her Ed.D. in Higher Education Management at the University of Pennsylvania.

**[Kathryn Moore, Ph.D.](mailto:Kathryn.Moore@uconn.edu) – [Kathryn.Moore@uconn.edu](mailto:Kathryn.Moore@uconn.edu)**

**Assistant Professor, Department of Art and Art History, UConn**

Kathryn Blair Moore received her Ph.D. in art history from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, and has previously taught at Texas State University, the University of Hong Kong, the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Pittsburgh. Her research and teaching span the Medieval and Renaissance periods in Europe and the Mediterranean region, with a particular focus on cross-cultural exchange between Christian and Islamic cultures. Her first book, *The Architecture of the Christian Holy Land: Reception from Late Antiquity through the Renaissance* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), received a Prose award in art history/criticism and the Medieval Institute's Otto Gründler Book Prize. With Hasan-Uddin Khan, she is the co-editor of *The Religious Architecture of Islam*, a two-volume study published by Brepols in 2021-22. She is currently writing a monograph on the emergence and development of the concept of the arabesque in a European context. Her research has been supported

by grants and fellowships from Harvard University's Villa I Tatti, the American Academy in Rome, the American Philosophical Society, and the American Council of Learned Societies.

**Athulya Narayanan – [Athulya.Narayanan@uconn.edu](mailto:Athulya.Narayanan@uconn.edu)  
Undergraduate Student, Environmental Studies, UConn**

Athulya Narayanan is an undergraduate student at the University of Connecticut interested in Environmental Studies. She has been vegan for the last 7 years. She is passionate about environmental issues and plans to pursue a career in environmental sustainability.

**[Eleanor Ouimet, Ph.D.](mailto:Eleanor.Ouimet@uconn.edu) – [Eleanor.Ouimet@uconn.edu](mailto:Eleanor.Ouimet@uconn.edu)  
Assistant Professor, Department Anthropology, UConn**

Eleanor Ouimet is an environmental anthropologist and assistant professor of environment and human interactions in the Department of Anthropology at UConn. Her research and teaching are focused on human-environment interactions, including environmental justice, disaster preparedness, community response to natural hazards, green energy, and the effects of climate change. Ouimet's recent journal publications have addressed pedagogical approaches to teaching climate change, the health effects of climate change, anthropological approaches to the study of environmental repair, the influence of anthropocentrism in the social sciences, and facilitating cooperative efforts between social scientists, natural scientists, engineers, and local communities. She is the PI of the DISASTER (Designing Interdisciplinary Science And Strategies To Enhance Resilience) Research team at UConn. In addition to teaching and researching issues pertaining to the environment, she is also involved in research initiatives focused on increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion at the University level, and leads the Microaggression Research Team at UConn. Her publications include *Culture and Conservation: Beyond Anthropocentrism*, as well as four volumes, including: *The Routledge Handbook of Environmental Anthropology*, *Sustainability: Key Issues*; *Environmental Anthropology: Future Directions*; and *Environmental Anthropology Today*. Here at UConn, Ouimet teaches 'Climate Change and Global Society,' 'Peoples and Cultures of the World,' and 'Culture and Conservation' in the Anthropology Department.

**[Sohyun Park, Ph.D.](mailto:sohyun.park@uconn.edu) ([sohyun.park@uconn.edu](mailto:sohyun.park@uconn.edu))**

**Assistant Professor, Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture, UConn**

Sohyun Park is assistant professor of landscape architecture in the Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture at the University of Connecticut. She serves as Chair of the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture (CELA) Resilience and Climate Action Track (2020–2022) after four years of service as co-chair for the Sustainability Track (2016–2020). She is also a Chair of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) Ecology and Restoration Professional Practice Network (2019–2022). She is an affiliate faculty member of the Sustainable Global Cities Initiative at UConn Hartford campus, and co-chairs a national multistate research group called NE 1962. Park is a certified SITES AP (#0000001945) and is devoted to the promotion of ecosystem services in cities and landscapes through her scholarship, education, and professional engagement.

Park's research interest includes the pattern, function, and services of urban green spaces and their relevance to environmental sustainability and community resilience. Target sites of interest include various spatial scales ranging from a larger urban region and metropolitan area to a neighborhood and urban block. With her research topics on urbanism, landscape, and ecology, she seeks to understand a unifying theme of "landscape" as a holistic socioecological system. Her work has been supported by the U. S. Department of the Interior National Park Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, United Nations Development Programme, Korea Ministry of Environment, and other national, regional, and local organizations. She has published numerous peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, book reviews, and translated books. She has given fifty presentations at national and international conferences, including the keynote speech at the 2022 International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) World Congress in Korea. Her expertise has been sought out for thirty-seven invited lectures by various individuals and organizations across the U.S. and beyond. Park is the recipient of the 2021 CELA's Faculty Award on Service Learning and the UConn Provost's Emerging Faculty Award for Excellence in Community Engaged Scholarship.

**Zareen Reza – [Zareen.Reza@uconn.edu](mailto:Zareen.Reza@uconn.edu)**

**Undergraduate Student, Department of Environmental Studies, UConn**

Zareen Reza is a fourth-year undergraduate student at the University of Connecticut majoring in environmental studies with a minor in writing. She is passionate about environmental justice and equity. She recently interned at Women's Earth Alliance, a non-profit organization dedicated to training, supporting, and funding women leaders in the environmental field worldwide. Currently, she is creating an environmental justice leadership program with Professor Phoebe Godfrey and other students.

**[Anji Seth, Ph.D. Anji.Seth@uconn.edu](mailto:Anji.Seth@uconn.edu)**

**Professor and Interim Head, Department of Geography, UConn**

Anji Seth earned a Ph.D. in Atmospheric Sciences from the University of Michigan with an Advanced Study Fellowship at the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR). Her research centers on understanding regional processes within the context of global climate: from the role of vegetation, to precipitation extremes during El Nino events, to understanding how monsoon systems change in warmer climates. Much of this research employs numerical climate models to examine past, present, and future climates. Seth has recently led an assessment of climate change for the state of Connecticut, and is currently examining extreme heat events in past and future climates. She is the Chair of the UConn Atmospheric Sciences Group, and co-founder of UConn@COP.

**[Kristina Stevens, LCSW – Kristina.Stevens@uconn.edu](mailto:Kristina.Stevens@uconn.edu)**

**Director of Mental Health, Student Health and Wellness, UConn**

Kristina Stevens is the Director of Mental Health with Student Health and Wellness. She brings over thirty years of experience in the field of mental health with a focus on promoting optimal health and wellbeing for children, youth, and families. Stevens started her work in the non-profit sector, then spent over sixteen years in various leadership roles with the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) and worked for the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services. Stevens has also served as

Adjunct Faculty both at Smith College and Post University where she had the opportunity to teach, mentor, and support undergraduate and graduate students as they traversed the challenges of balancing school, work, and life.

Collectively, through these various roles, Stevens has benefitted from direct service and system level roles. She has developed and implemented integrated systems to address the whole person and has led system-level, comprehensive reform efforts resulting in actionable, sustainable solutions. Throughout her career, she has had the opportunity to influence systems by partnering with leadership teams, key stakeholders, and constituents, keeping children, youth, and families at the center of her work and setting a path forward through strategic planning, implementation, design, and delivery.

**[Ngozi Taffe, Ph.D. – Ngozi.Taffe@uconn.edu](mailto:Ngozi.Taffe@uconn.edu)**  
**Associate Vice President for Global Affairs, UConn**

Ngozi Taffe was appointed Associate Vice President for Global Affairs on July 1, 2022. Prior to this role, she served as the Assistant Vice President for Global Affairs where her responsibilities included the oversight and development of Experiential Global Learning Programs, Risk, and Program Assessment; prior to that, she served as the Director of UConn Information Technology Services' Project Management Office (PMO). Taffe is a three-time alumna of UConn, where she earned a BS in Management Information Systems, an MBA, and studied Global Business Strategy in Lyon, France. Taffe also earned a Ph.D. in Learning, Leadership, and Education Policy at the Neag School of Education. Her research focuses on factors that enable persistence among minority groups. She believes that as a global society, our greatest assets are in the richness and diversity of our collective experiences, which is why she encourages people to find and use their voice in spaces where voices are muted.

Before returning to UConn in 2014, she spent eighteen years of her career working for United Technologies Corporation (Raytheon Technologies) and Computer Sciences Corporation in positions of increased responsibility, including working on commercial and military projects and global project implementations with various facilities overseas.

**U Dhammajīva Mahā Thero - [Dhammajiva@gmail.com](mailto:Dhammajiva@gmail.com)**  
**Abbot, Chief Preceptor, and Meditation Master of [Nissarana Vanaya Monastery](#)**  
**Founder, Sati Pasala Foundation**

Venerable U Dhammajīva Mahā Thero is the Abbot, Chief Preceptor, and Meditation Master of Nissarana Vanaya Monastery and Founder of the Sati Pasala Foundation in Sri Lanka. Venerable Uda Eriyagama Dhammajīva Mahā Thero is a revered present-day teacher and is the fourth Abbott and Chief Preceptor of Mitirigala Nissarana Vanaya. He is highly respected for his widely encompassing knowledge of the various meditation techniques, including Samatha as well as the Burmese Vipassanā methods.

**[Mary Evelyn Tucker, Ph.D. – MaryEvelyn.Tucker@yale.edu](mailto:MaryEvelyn.Tucker@yale.edu)**

**Co-founder, Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology**

**Senior Lecturer and Senior Research Scholar, School of the Environment, Divinity School, and Religious Studies Department, Yale University**

Mary Evelyn Tucker is a Senior Lecturer and Research Scholar at Yale in the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, the Divinity School, and the Department of Religious Studies. She directs the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale with her husband, John Grim. She received an Inspiring Yale Teaching Award in 2015.

She earned her Ph.D. from Columbia University in Asian Religions. Since 1997 she has been a Research Associate at the Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies at Harvard and has published five volumes on Confucianism. She also served on the International Earth Charter Drafting Committee.

Her concern for the growing environmental crisis, especially in Asia, led her to organize with Grim a series of ten conferences on World Religions and Ecology at Harvard (1995–1998). They were series editors for the ten volumes from the conferences. After these conferences she and Grim founded the Forum on Religion and Ecology. They wrote *Ecology and Religion* (Island Press, 2014) and with Willis Jenkins they edited the *Routledge Handbook on Religion and Ecology* (2016). They also are series advisors for the *Ecology and Justice Series* at Orbis Books.

Tucker and Grim studied with Thomas Berry and worked closely with him for thirty years. Tucker edited Berry's books and, with Grim, she wrote *Thomas Berry: A Biography* (Columbia, 2019).

Tucker created a multi-media project with Brian Thomas Swimme and John Grim called “Journey of the Universe”, which includes an Emmy award-winning film, a book from Yale (2011), Journey Conversations, and online classes.

**[Sean Vasington, PLA, ASLA – Sean.Vasington@uconn.edu](mailto:Sean.Vasington@uconn.edu)**

**Director and University Landscape Architect,  
University Planning, Design, and Construction, UConn**

Sean Vasington is the University Landscape Architect and Director of Site Planning in the Office of University Planning, Design, and Construction at UConn. Sean is a steward of the environment and is primarily responsible for the immediate and long-range planning, design, and construction of exterior initiatives and improvements related to the University’s capital program.

Sean is a proud alum of UConn and grew up in southeastern Connecticut. He completed his landscape architectural studies at UConn in 1999 and received his Bachelor of Science degree in 2000. He holds professional landscape architectural registration in Connecticut and is certified by the Council of Landscape Architectural Registration Boards (CLARB). Prior to returning to UConn in 2014, Sean was a Principal with CRJA-IBI Group—a renowned landscape architectural and site planning practice founded by Carol R. Johnson, a pioneer in the profession.



**[Daniel Weiner, Ph.D. – Daniel.Weiner@uconn.edu](mailto:Daniel.Weiner@uconn.edu)**  
**Vice President for Global Affairs and  
Professor, Department of Geography, UConn**

Daniel Weiner, Ph.D., joined the University of Connecticut (UConn) in 2012 as Vice Provost for Global Affairs and Professor of Geography. In February 2016, he was promoted to Vice President. Prior to joining UConn, Weiner spent four years as Executive Director of the Center for International Studies at Ohio University and eleven years as Director of the Office of International Programs at West Virginia University. He earned a BA in 1979, an MA in 1981, and a Ph.D. in 1986, all in Geography at Clark University.

In his role as Vice President, Weiner serves as the University's Senior International Officer (SIO) and leads the UConn Office of Global Affairs. With more than two decades leading as a public research university SIO, he is one of the longest serving SIOs in the country. Weiner serves as Chair of the Global Business Council of the Metro-Hartford Alliance, as well as on the Board of Directors of the World Affairs Council of Connecticut, for which he is a former President.

Weiner is a development geographer with area studies expertise in Eastern/Southern Africa, Appalachia, and the Middle East/North Africa. He is a specialist in the theory and practice of participatory geographic information systems (GIS). His research areas include agricultural geography, climate and society, energy, GIS and society, land reform, and political ecology. He has received 15 externally funded grants totaling over \$2.5 million, published three books, thirty journal articles, and twenty-nine book chapters. Weiner lived in Kenya, South Africa, and Zimbabwe for almost three years during the 1980s.

**[Dimitris Xygalatas, Ph.D. – Xygalatas@uconn.edu](mailto:Xygalatas@uconn.edu)**  
**Associate Professor, Department Anthropology, UConn**

Dimitris Xygalatas's interests include ritual, sports, cooperation, the interaction between cognition and culture, and the impact of cultural practices on psychophysiological wellbeing. His research combines laboratory and field methods to study human interaction in real-life settings. He has conducted several years of fieldwork in Southern Europe and Mauritius. Before coming to UConn, he held positions at the universities of Princeton, Aarhus, and Masaryk, where he served as Director of the Laboratory for the Experimental Research of Religion (LEVYNA). At UConn, he directs the Experimental Anthropology Lab, which develops methods and technologies for quantifying behavior in real-life settings. He is affiliated with the Cognitive Science Program, the Connecticut Institute for the Brain and Cognitive Sciences, and the Institute for Collaboration on Health, Intervention, and Policy.

**Juan Pablo Yepes – [Juan\\_Pablo.Yepes@uconn.edu](mailto:Juan_Pablo.Yepes@uconn.edu)**  
**Undergraduate Student, Department of Sociology, UConn**

JP Yepes Tobon is a Sociology Undergraduate from UConn and a student of Professor Phoebe Godfrey. He is involved in the Arctic Refuge Defense Campaign, and is studying to pursue cultural/mental health activism and intersectional environmentalism.



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