

PLSC Productivity

NEWS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF
PLANT & SOIL SCIENCES



UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
**AGRICULTURE &
NATURAL RESOURCES**

Chair's Corner

Welcome to a more in-person summer! We just finished a spring semester where most lectures were still online, but most labs were in-person. With vaccinations in full swing and COVID cases way down, we celebrated our 2021 and 2020 graduates in unique, memorable ceremonies at Delaware Stadium from May 27-30. We have 18 new freshmen planning to join us this fall, and I am happy to report that 100% of PLSC classes are slated to be delivered in-person! We had three Ph.D. and four M.S. students graduate this year with a large incoming class of 11 this summer and fall. Almost all of our graduate students are funded by research grants so big kudos to our faculty who hit home runs in terms of submitted and funded grant proposals over the last year. Working from home was very productive for many! See the list later in this issue.



Celebrating faculty, staff, and student accomplishments is another theme of our newsletter this month. Two faculty received the highest awards of distinction available at the university, two graduate students received CANR's highest award for dissertation and thesis research, and numerous seniors were recognized with departmental and major-specific awards. Finally, three faculty were promoted this cycle: Dr. Rodrigo Vargas to Professor, Dr. Tara Trammell to Associate Professor with tenure, and Ms. Anna Wik to Associate Professor. Dr. Emmalea Ernest was promoted to Scientist with the Cooperative Extension Vegetable & Fruit Program as well.

Our interns are back! Funded by donors, our Center for Food Systems and Sustainability (CENFOODS), and produce sales, we have seven students completing internships this summer at our Fresh-to-You organic vegetable operation. Seven other undergraduates are conducting research funded by CENFOODS, and one undergraduate and two graduate students were awarded CENFOODS donor funding for supplies and analyses expenses related to their summer research projects. Lastly, there are five interns helping get the UDBG grounds back to pre-pandemic shape this summer. A robust online spring plant sale, with in-person browsing at pickup, is in the books! A big thanks to Valann Budischak, Andrew Adams, Melinda Zoehrer, volunteers, and donors for keeping UDBG successful and beautiful through the pandemic!

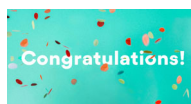
Here's to a relaxing summer filled with enjoying plants, soils, cool waters, great food, and tasty beverages with friends and family!

Honorifics



The **UD Francis Alison Faculty Award** is the University's highest competitive award for faculty. The award criteria states: "The award, which was established by the Trustees of the University, is to be given each year to a faculty member of the University of Delaware who has made notable contributions to his or her field of study. Notable contributions may be defined in the context of [UD's founder] the Rev. Dr. Francis Alison's achievements. Alison's contemporary, President Ezra Stiles of Yale, called Alison 'the greatest classical scholar in America'... 'few schoolmasters [in the American colonies] ever taught a larger number of pupils who afterwards acquired such distinguished reputations'... [This award] recognizes those individuals who best characterize the scholar-schoolmaster. Distinction as a research scholar is primary. Evidence of contributions as an educator in one's field or at UD is also essential for demonstrating that the candidate is an outstanding scholar-schoolmaster." PLSC is proud that the 2021 winner is Dr. Yan Jin!

The **UD Mid-Career Faculty Excellence in Scholarship Awards** are given each year to two mid-career faculty members in "recognition of extemporary scholarship and creative endeavors that represent outstanding contributions to their scholarly field, and who have demonstrated leadership in this respect. Nominees who demonstrate the following qualities... will be considered: 1) documented evidence of outstanding research/scholarship/creative accomplishments while at the University of Delaware; 2) demonstrated impact of their work on their discipline; 3) significant national and international recognition; and 4) record of engaging University of Delaware students, including members of under-represented groups, in their scholarly activities." One of the two 2021 winners is Dr. Rodrigo Vargas!



Read more about these esteemed professors in Volume 3 Issue 3.



The **Green Hen Awards** are an annual celebration of extraordinary sustainability efforts on and off campus at the University of Delaware. Given out by UD's Sustainability Council, these awards are an opportunity to recognize outstanding research, curricula, and projects that help the wider UD community move closer to a greener and more sustainable future. Awards are given at the student, staff, and faculty levels. Dr. Angelia Seyfferth came away with the faculty award for her work with CENFOODS and her research group's work searching for ways to prevent plants from taking up arsenic and cadmium from the soil. Go Hens - whether blue or green!

PLSC STUDENT AWARDS ~ Presenting 2021 as well as 2020 winners (where applicable)

<u>Benton Graduate Student Award</u>	Awarded annually to two graduate students (one Ph.D. and one M.S.) who have excelled in research and have an outstanding record of academic accomplishments and service to their profession.	2021: Ryan Moore (Ph.D.) 2021: Emma Ruggiero (M.S.)
<u>PLSC Faculty Award</u>	Awarded to an outstanding departmental major who has excelled in academic studies, participated in undergraduate research or internships, and holds great promise for success in his/her career.	2021: Olivia Boon 2020: Joshua Zalewski
<u>Dean's Award for Excellence</u>	Awarded to a departmental major who demonstrates evidence of success in leadership, academics, and service throughout the undergraduate career, with a commitment to the department or the college through undergraduate research and involvement in a student organization.	2021: Christian Stoltz 2020: Erin Fogarty
<u>Landscape Architecture Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award:</u> 2021: Jessica Toy 2020: Alexandra Hubler	<u>Landscape Architecture Engaged Excellence Award:</u> 2021: Christopher Fettke von Koeckritz 2020: Donald (DJ) Bromley	<u>Outstanding Representative of the BLA Award:</u> 2021: Amy Matusheski 2020: Olivia Boon
<u>Landscape Architecture Outstanding Student Award:</u> 2021: Leigh Muldrow 2020: Connor Armstrong	<u>Outstanding Leadership in the Philadelphia Flower Show:</u> 2021: Austin Dill, Alexandra Hubler 2020: Erick Jones	<u>Landscape Architecture Foundation (LAF) Olmsted Scholar:</u> 2021: Olivia Boon
<u>DE/PA Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architecture Awards</u>	2021: Leigh Muldrow - Honor 2021: Haochen (Y) Niu - Honor 2021: Donald (DJ) Bromley - Merit 2021: Nick Bruce - Merit	2020: Connor Armstrong 2020: Christopher Bonura 2020: Olivia Boon

Faculty Highlights

Editors' note: So much good news about our faculty and their groups has come out in our UD press, space does not allow for a lengthy description. If you are interested to read more about these headlines, please search www.udel.edu/udaily or email mpautler@udel.edu for the UDaily links.

March 2021:

Dr. Rodrigo Vargas' Lab: Backyard Carbon – Researchers quantify carbon emissions from lawns and lawn maintenance in cities

April 2021:

Dr. Harsh Bais' Lab: Why Can't We Be Friends? – Not all good bacteria get along

May 2021:

Dr. Rodrigo Vargas' op-ed on thehill.com: Our Coastal Wetlands Absorb CO₂ – but environmental changes alter that
The Vargas Lab was also featured on NPR.

June 2021:

Dr. Jules Bruck's comments on zippia.com: Comments on the future of the job market in landscape architecture

The following grants were awarded this spring to our talented PLSC faculty and their UD colleagues.

<u>Principal Investigator(s)</u>	<u>Title/Topic</u>	<u>Sponsor</u>
Dr. Amy Shober Dr. Jarrod Miller <i>and others</i>	A Solutions-based Evaluation of Barriers to Farmer Adoption of In-season Nitrogen Decision Support Tools	USDA
Dr. Mark VanGessel	Northeast Region Minor Crop Pest Management Program	USDA
Dr. Jeffrey Caplan	Spinning Disk Confocal and Single Molecule Localization Microscope	Department of Health and Human Services
Dr. Erin Sparks	Quantifying Crop Biomechanics across Plant Lifespans	National Science Foundation
Dr. Kalmia Kniel (Animal & Food Sciences) Dr. K. Eric Wommack	SARS-CoV-2 Wastewater-based Epidemiology Research Agreement	New Castle County
Dr. Erik Ervin Dr. Harsh Bais	Characterizing Immune System Responses of Select Plant Health Products for Putting Greens	U.S. Golf Association

Faculty Spotlight

Let's hear from someone who was compelled to come to work in (or near) Delaware 35 years ago!

Dr. Tom Evans, Professor of Botany and Plant Pathology

When did you first come to UD and why?

I came to UD in March of 1986 just after completing my Ph.D. in Botany and Plant Pathology at Michigan State University ("Go Green!"). My wife was born and raised in Rehoboth Beach and lived only a block from the beach. I was born and raised in Los Angeles and was a beach bum, body surfing in the very cold Humboldt Current from the north. We were married in Rehoboth Beach in the summer of 1983. When I first body surfed in the Atlantic Ocean in July, and it was 10 degrees warmer than the Pacific with no shore break of waves and no rock outcrops, I was sold on finding a job in or near Delaware. Fortunately, there was a job opening at UD in early 1986 and Sturges and I moved to Rehoboth Beach.



How did you progress in your work over all of these years?

The lab in which I did my Ph.D. work at Michigan State was directed by Dr. Christine Stephens who was a young assistant professor and extension specialist in plant pathology. We were all working on projects that had a direct impact on our clients: tomato growers, asparagus growers, muck vegetable growers of radish, lettuce, etc. We were a group of four graduate students who were immersed in the philosophy of service to agriculture. I have always maintained the focus of my work at Delaware in the same way, on a smaller scale: find out the needs of the growers and do basic and applied research that solves their problems. (That is, or should be, the mission of a Land Grant University and our College.) The other wing of my research has always been in global food security, funded primarily by USAID, and this has taken me and my team of colleagues to Ecuador, Morocco, Egypt, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic, solving problems of limited resource farmers in those countries. I have estimated that I have spent about three years of my life working and traveling in these countries over my 35 years. It also led to my being elected both Treasurer and Vice President of the International Society of Plant Pathology. It has been a fun and rewarding run, but I am not done yet!



Dr. Tom Evans is shown here as a young assistant professor with the first multimedia laser disc teaching platform for teaching plant pathology. The disc was published by the American Phytopathological Society. Photo courtesy of Tom Evans.

Events and Outreach

PLSC DEI News: The PLSC Diversity Caucus has become a formal committee within PLSC. It has been named “JEDI” – Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion. The committee consists of faculty, professionals, administrative staff, and students who have an interest in promoting and advocating justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion within the department. The committee will elect a chair who will serve a 2-year term. The functions of the committee are to plan events around the topics of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Events may include, but are not limited to, invited speakers, educational challenges, book clubs, and social gatherings. Subcommittees currently include books clubs and challenges, social, seminar, and communications and marketing. The committee will provide recommendations to faculty and departmental administration for policy or administrative changes that can facilitate a more inclusive environment. *Email mpautler@udel.edu if you are interested in the work of the PLSC JEDI committee.*

Ready – Set – Grow!

You may have heard that for the first time in its long history, the Philadelphia Flower Show was held outdoors in June (rather than indoors in early March). Long-time PLSC alumna and current UD Soil Testing Director Karen Gartley captained the UD team which produced an excellent in-the-ground exhibit in keeping with the show theme of “HABITAT: Nature’s Masterpiece.” The display featured the drought-tolerant, native plant *Agastache foeniculum*, commonly known as anise hyssop or hummingbird mint. The other team members were students, staff, and faculty: Ashlin Davis, Elisabeth Davis, Austin Dill, Alexandra Hubler, Eduardo Limon-Cortez, Susan Biddle, Gail Ferry, Samantha Gartley, David Murter, Dr. Stefanie Hansen. Karen and Stefanie won a blue ribbon for another exhibit, a miniature display! Thank you, Team, for growing PLSC’s presence at the Flower Show!



We encourage alumni to send us news to keep us informed! A new job, a promotion, a personal or professional award... they’re all accomplishments we want to know! Email a note or a press release, including your graduation year, to mpautler@udel.edu

We are seeking to showcase alumni stories on a bulletin board in the PLSC corridor of Townsend Hall. We would like to highlight the career paths of our former students to current and prospective students and their families. If you are interested in providing a 250-words or less description of your career path from your PLSC education to your current job, along with a photo showing you at said job, please email mpautler@udel.edu for more details.

Back Porch Business

Make a gift to the Plant & Soil Sciences Department (www.udel.edu/makeagift/plsc) to support student success. Gifts to the department provide funding for student travel to research and professional development events as well as stipends for undergraduate summer research and Extension Scholars. You may also give to the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources or another PLSC program by selecting “Other” and searching for the fund you wish to support. Contact Dan Sarkissian, Sr. Director of Development, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at 302-831-4595 or djs@udel.edu with any questions or concerns.

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