

THE WESTERN CENTER
FOR SOCIAL IMPACT
AND INNOVATION

ANNUAL REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR
20/21



Highlights

Over the course of the year, despite the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic presented, the Western Center boasted **1,206 participants** over all events, and 169 unique visitors to the space physically.

The Western Center for Social Impact and Innovation hosted its first conference, which brought scholars and practitioners together to explore the complexities of equitable and sustainable water access for all.

12 new Social Impact and Justice Scholars received \$2,000/yr scholarships, each of whom may be additionally funded through campus and community engagement.

Various social media accounts and resources were successfully launched:



Themed Programming Highlights

The biennial theme is WATER ACCESS. The Western Program for Individualized Studies offered related coursework, including deep dives into water governance (WST 301) and the Flint, Michigan Water Crisis (WST 231). Both courses were co-taught by sustainability scholar Dr. Wen-Ching Chuang and sociologist Dr. Jacque Daugherty.

In a culmination of our 2-year theme of water, the Western Center hosted the Valuing Water MiniCon: An Environmental, Social, and Cultural Exploration. Over 200 students and community members attended.



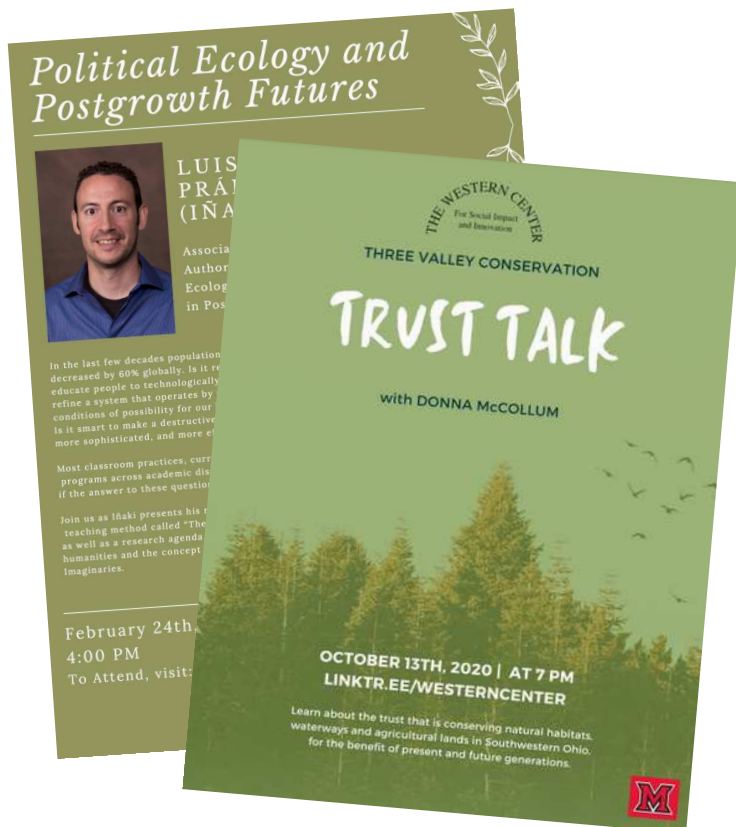
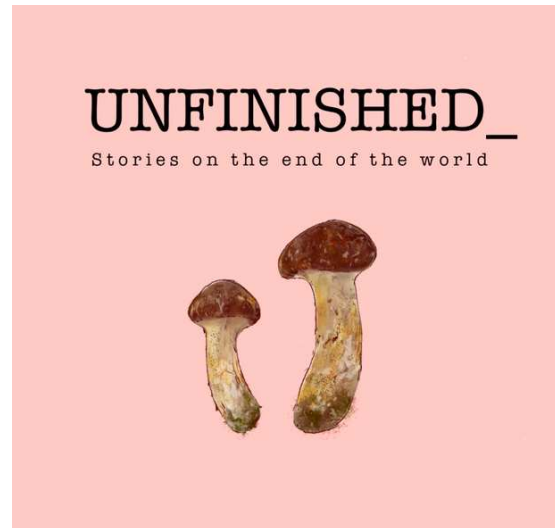
James Vinch, Judith LeBlanc, and Kathleen Rugel (clockwise) during the conference.

Speakers included: Keynote Judith LeBlanc (Director of the Native Organizers Alliance), James Vinch (Senior US EPA attorney), Hays Cummins (MU Marine Ecologist), Rod Northcutt (MU Sculpture Prof), Kathleen Rugel (Practice and Policy Fellowship at the National Socio-Environmental Synthesis Center), Kara Strass (Myaamia Center's director of tribe relations), and George Ironstack (Myaamia Center's assistant director).

Themed Programming Highlights

The Western Center wrapped up its theme of water access by exploring intersecting issues, such as a culture of care, economic drivers, and ecological corridors.

The final episodes of the *Unfinished: Stories on the end of the world* podcast are released on streaming services, seeing over 598 downloads today



Luis I. Prádanos (Iñaki) speaks on Political Ecology and Postgrowth Futures via Zoom (32 participants)

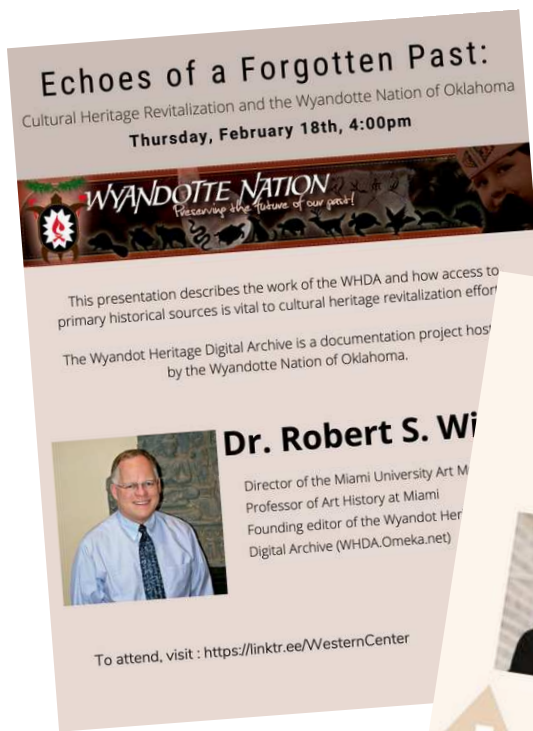
Three Valley Conservation Trust discussed conservation of natural habitats, waterways, and agricultural land via Zoom (34 participants)

Nicholas Money hosted a mushroom walk in the Western campus trails, in which 15+ students would attend and learn from his expertise about local mycology



Other Programming Highlights

Outside of our theme of water, we focused on bringing in speakers that would discuss perspectives on various DEI-related topics.

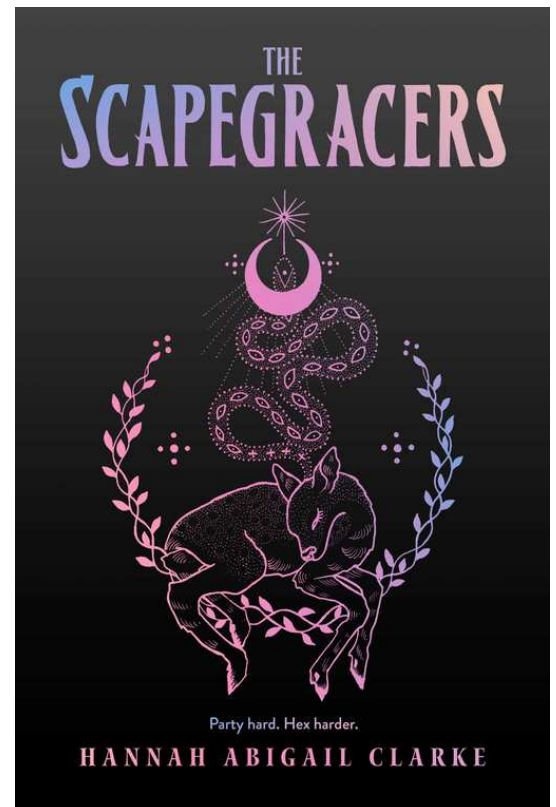


Leigh Ann Hirschman of Trinity Haven spoke about Indiana's first residential facility for LGBTQ youth experiencing housing instability (17 participants)



Dr. Robert S. Wicks discussed the work that The Wyandot Heritage Digital Archive is doing to revolutionize access to primary historical sources and the importance archiving has in revitalizing cultural heritages (22 participants)

We hosted a virtual book club culminating in a live reading from author Hannah Abigail Clarke, Miami alum, of their first novel *The Scapegracers*, which follows the story of a teenage lesbian witch (44 participants)



Building Western Community

Every week, Western Center student workers host various weekly programs both inside and outside of the physical space. Events are broadcast to Western Program students, WEST LLC members, and Peabody Hall residents via email in the form of a newsletter every Sunday.



Despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Center remained open for community access every week day.

Weekly programming in 2021 included:



Science Fiction game
Metamorphosis Alpha
roleplaying



Tea & Conversations with
Western students and
faculty



Disc Golf on
Western Campus'
course

The WEST Living Learning Community (LLC) welcomed its inaugural cohort of 15 first-year students to life in Peabody Hall. WEST students took a 1-credit hour class that helped them to better define their academic, personal, and professional goals at Miami, and received priority access to some Western Center programming.

Letter from the Director

Dr. Jacque Daugherty

In the midst of the Covid-19 global pandemic and historic protests for racial justice, the Western Center for Social Impact and Innovation embarked on its second year by organizing academic and co-curricular programming that responded to issues of inclusion, access, and justice. The center continued to explore its inaugural biennial theme of Water through courses about the Flint Michigan Water Crisis and future-oriented solutions to global water governance, co-taught by Dr. Wen-Ching Chuang with expertise in environmental science and policy and myself with expertise in sociology.

Throughout its two years, programming centered problems and solutions grounded in climate science with a focus on the relationship between equity and sustainability. Water programming culminated in the virtual Water Mini Conference (March 2021) that featured scholars and practitioners from many sides of the issue of water access. The center also organized programming the more broadly addressed issues of DEI, including Dr. Pradanos' (Miami University) talk on economic de-growth as a global strategy for equity and inclusion to Hannah Abigail Clark's reading of her first published novel *Scapegracers* about a lesbian teenage witch who finds her coven. The Western Center understands its mission of working at the intersections of science and social justice as critical to the project of moving forward into a more sustainable and equitable world.

Letter from the Coordinator

Billy Simms

The 2020-21 academic year had many unique challenges due to COVID-19 pandemic, and maintaining student connection and community was a priority. Despite these challenges we were committed to keeping the physical space of The Western Center in Peabody Hall open to students while still providing quality weekly programming for our students and faculty. To meet university COVID safety requirements we implemented special rules in The Western Center last year. These rules included frequent cleaning and sanitizing of tables and computers, contact tracing procedures, and a capacity limit in the Western Center to ensure appropriate social distancing.

Our weekly programming events, including Tea and Conversation, book club, and role playing games, were held virtually or, if weather permitted, on the front porch of Peabody Hall. Although campus life was far from normal during the 20/21 academic year, we did our best to make it as normal as possible and to provide a safe and welcoming environment for our students to study and congregate.

Partners & Acknowledgments

We would like to take the time to recognize and thank the following campus and community partners that have made our events possible:



Edge of the Farm Conservation Area



Special thanks also to our partners at the Western Alumni Association of Miami University and Miami University Art Museum and Creative Writing Program.

The Western Center is grateful for the generous support provided by the Western College Alumnae Association.



Western College
Alumnae Association, Inc.