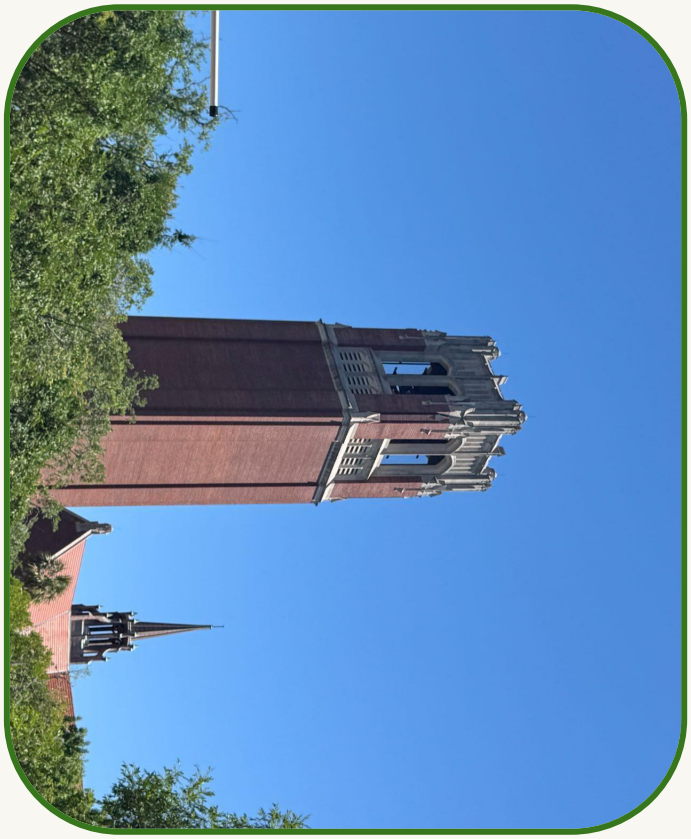
Summer 2025 / Volume 12

SUSTAINABILITY STUDIES NEWSLETTER

IN THIS ISSUE



ABOUT

The Sustainability Studies Newsletter provides information about events, people, and places dedicated to sustainability. It is published at the beginning of fall, spring, and summer semesters and is exclusively available to University of Florida Sustainability Studies students and alumni. This edition focuses on events and opportunities in and around the Gainesville community.

Summer 2025
Volume 12

UF | UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

GLOCAL IN GAINESVILLE

Find out more about sustainable stores, restaurants, organizations, places to visit, events to participate in, and career opportunities that think glocal in Gainesville.

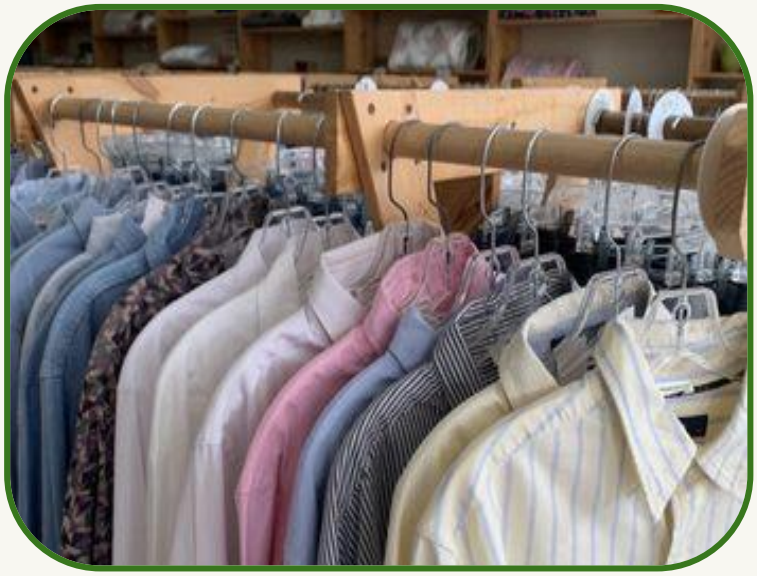
glo·cal
/ˈglōk(ə)l/
adjective
Considerate of local and global impacts, essential to sustainability

VINE Sourdough Bakery

VINE is a sourdough based bakery in Gainesville, Florida that is committed to providing fresh, organic, sourdough baked goods to the Gainesville Community. They specialize in organic ingredients, slow fermentation, and community support. Visit them here!

Urban Thread

Urban Thread is a local second-hand shop that features name brand clothing items. Located in Harper's Corner, they offer vintage, secondhand, and pre-loved items that are trendy and affordable! They care about where their clothes comes from, and where its going. Learn more about them here!



GLOCAL IN GAINESVILLE

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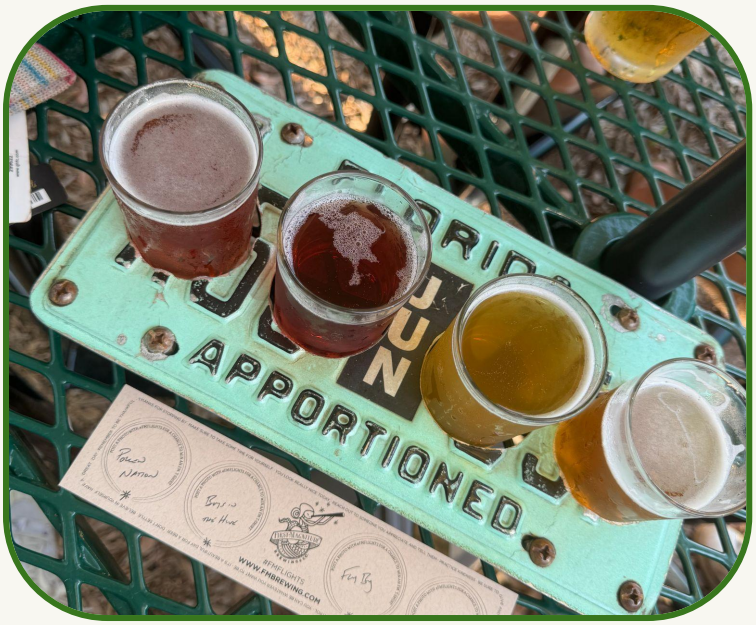
more info
LOCAL ORGS

Visit https://gatorsvolunteer.ufl.edu/for-volunteers/volunteer-with-environment/ for more information.

Pollinator Palooza



First Magnitude Brewing Co is hosting Pollinator Palooza! This event takes place in their beer garden and will feature local vendors, food trucks, and specialty pollinator themed beers. Proceeds from this event will be used to support pollinator and plant conservation. Click here to learn more about this event and the importance of pollinators in our community.

Local Events

recurring

Weekly Walk & Talk at Tuscawilla Preserve
Fridays, 8:00am
Click here for more info!

Alachua County Farmers Market
Saturdays, 8:30am
Click here for more info!

upcoming

Birds & Brew Guided Bird Walk
Depot Park
June 1st, 2025
Click here for more info!

National Trails Day! ACT and FTA Accessible Trail Event
June 7th, 2025
Click here for more info!

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more info
LOCAL ORGS

For more information, visit this website here

We Are Neutral

we are neutral

We Are Neutral is an environmental nonprofit that helps businesses and individuals understand, track, reduce, and offset their comprehensive environmental footprints, giving them the opportunity to take responsibility for their environmental impact to work towards environmental (carbon) neutrality. We emphasize comprehensive environmental footprint calculations, industry accountability, and environmental education.

Opportunities

Florida Climate Institute

Florida Springs Institute

Gainesville Environmental Citizens Organization

Green Market Plant Nursery

North Florida Land Trust

Pure Energy Solar

Project Sunshine

Agroecosystem Ecology Laboratory

Carbon Solutions

Cinema Verde

Conservation Initiative for the Asian Elephant

Field and Fork Gardens

GATORS TRAVEL

Some new ideas to improve your summer vacation and explore new places both within and beyond the Gainesville community!

Beyond120: Clearwater Marine Aquarium

Clearwater Marine Aquarium (CMA) hosts College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Beyond120 students, along with select marine biology students, for a day of marine life career and non-profit management exploration. In this excursion, students hear from industry experts on a conservation efforts panel, get an exclusive behind-the-scenes tour of the aquarium, and learn about future opportunities for internships with CMA.

Beyond120 and the Archie Carr Center for Sea Turtle Research

CLEARWATER MARINE AQUARIUM IMPACT REPORT

Beyond120 and the Archie Carr Center for Sea Turtle Research partnered on an excursion to the Clearwater Marine Aquarium for a full day of career exploration.

- *This visit included a site tour, employee panel, and internship presentation*
- *40 undergraduate students from CLAS and ZOO4405*
- *12 different majors represented, from biology to economics*
- *83% of students said they better understand their potential career pathways*

"The most important lesson that I learned from employers was about how I can break into different fields that are not necessarily directly related to my degree. Specifically, it's more important what you do with your degree, rather than what you study."

Rhiannon O'Donnell
Data Science '

GATORS GOING GREEN

A closer look at how UF students, clubs, alumni, and faculty all contribute to a more sustainable future, and what recommendations they have!

more info:
STUDENT CLUBS

visit orgs.studentinvolvement.ufl.edu
> Log in
> Organization
> Find an organization.

UF Society of Environmental Engineers

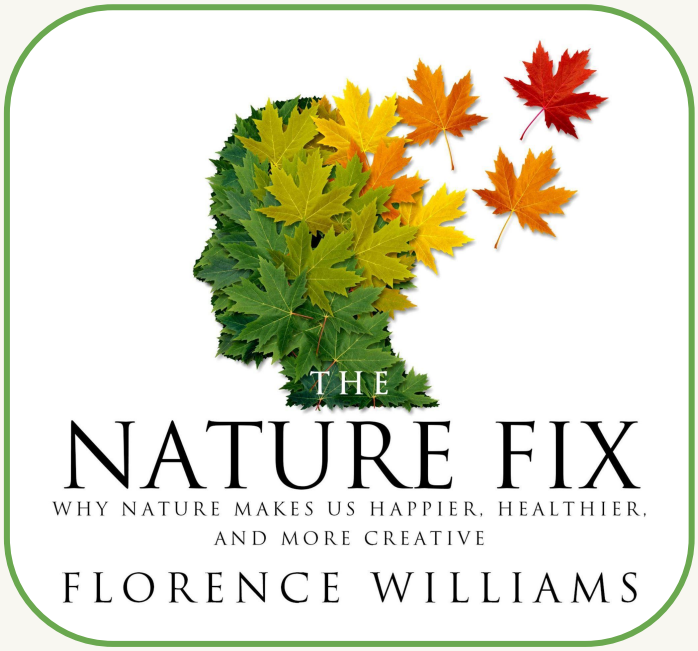
The UF Society of Environmental Engineers is a student run organization that focuses on mentorship and networking within the environmental engineering community. They host GBMs, social events. fundraisers and more!

Check them out on Instagram @uf_see

The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes us Happier, Healthier

The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes us Happier, Healthier by Florence Williams is a novel that demonstrates that our connection to nature is much more important to our cognition than we think and that even small amounts of exposure to the living world can improve our creativity and enhance our mood

This book is a great read to learn about the importance to connecting with nature!.



GATORS GOING GREEN

Professor Spotlight

Mark Brenner

Mark Brenner is a limnologist/ paleolimnologist with special interests in tropical and subtropical lakes and watersheds. My research is interdisciplinary and addresses long-term interactions among climate, environment and humans.

What courses do you teach, or what research do you focus on within the field?

I have taught several courses at UF, including Limnology, Paleolimnology, Geology of Florida, Geology Seminar, Florida Lake Management (co-taught), and two UF Summer Overseas Studies Classes in Yucatan Mexico – Tropical Ecology and Humans and the Environment of the Yucatan Peninsula. My research and teaching are closely intertwined, and I do my best to bring my research interests and experiences into the classroom. In Florida, much of my research has focused on recent, human-mediated changes in lakes. We have used short lake sediment cores to document cultural eutrophication of Florida's waterbodies, which typically occurred as the population of the state grew and both residential development and agriculture expanded into watersheds. Excessive nutrient input to lakes from fertilizer runoff and sewage/septic tanks, fueled algae and cyanobacteria growth in some waterbodies, often with negative consequences for fish and other biota. In 2006, I was part of an international team that retrieved very long sediment cores from Lake Peten-Itza, a deep waterbody in the lowlands of Guatemala. That record extends back ~400,000 years and provides insights into natural climate fluctuations in the region during the last ice age, and the response of vegetation, long before humans ever arrived. The pollen record confirmed what we had seen in a long core from a nearby lake – that the dry tropical forest that inhabits the region today only arose about 10,000 years, after the cool and dry conditions of the last ice age abated and climate became warmer and wetter.

GATORS GOING GREEN

Mark Brenner *(cont.)*

What sparked your interest in interactions among climate, environment, and humans?

As a little kid, I lived in New York City, but I loved the times I spent outside the city, in nature. When I was seven years old, we moved to the country, where my "playtime" involved exploring local forests, fields and swamps. I became an avid collector of reptiles and amphibians. I knew from an early age that I wanted to go into Biology and declared my major early in my freshman year at Grinnell College, a small liberal arts school in Iowa. Interest in environmental issues was growing. For instance, Rachel Carson had published Silent Spring in 1962, and people were appalled that the Cuyahoga River (Ohio) had caught fire on multiple occasions. In response to such environmental crises, the first Earth Day was held in spring 1970, near the end of my freshman year in college. After graduating, I worked and traveled internationally for two years, then entered graduate school at UF in 1975 (Zoology). I originally thought I would work with sea turtle expert Dr. Archie Carr, but Professor Edward Deevey reached out to me and offered a research assistantship and the opportunity to join his team working on the Historical Ecology of the Maya, in northern Guatemala. I soon learned that lake sediments are "natural archives" that preserve information about past climate and environmental conditions. Sediments accumulate in an orderly manner and stratigraphic shifts in their geochemistry, mineralogy, microfossils (e.g., pollen grains, diatoms, ostracods) and biomarkers (e.g., pigments) can be used to infer paleoclimate and paleoenvironment changes through time. We used lake sediment cores to explore long-term (ca. 1000 BC – 1000 AD) ancient Maya impacts on watersheds in the karst terrain of Peten, Guatemala. Subsequently, I turned my attention to how natural climate changes in the region may have affected ancient Maya culture. I have also applied my research approach in other geographic regions, including Mexico, the Caribbean, Venezuela, Colombia, Bolivia, China, Cambodia, the Galapagos Islands, Madagascar, and of course, Florida. The research I conduct is multidisciplinary and often involves collaborations among people from disparate disciplines. Interactions with colleagues is what makes the work so much fun.

Much of your research centers on Central and South America. What can we learn about the importance of sustainability in this region?

GATORS GOING GREEN

Mark Brenner *(cont.)*

Research in the Maya region of lowland Guatemala revealed the profound impact that ancient people had on local watersheds and lakes when they cleared land for construction and agriculture. The pollen record documented widespread deforestation, and the presence of thick, rapidly accumulated clay deposits showed that soils were quickly eroded from the hillsides when the vegetation was removed. The findings laid to rest the notion that the ancient Maya had lived in perfect harmony with the tropical environment. We also found evidence for a series of droughts in the 9th century AD, a period of cultural upheaval and depopulation for the Lowland Classic Maya. At high-altitude (3810 masl) Lake Titicaca, Bolivia, we found evidence for severe droughts at the time that Tiwanaku Culture began to unravel, ca. 1100 AD. We hypothesized that the protracted lack of rainfall rendered unworkable the raised-field agriculture that had been used to sustain the population. The raised field systems were reliant on groundwater flow through canals that surrounded the crop fields. The fresh water provided protection against freezes (much as heat stored in Florida lakes protects citrus in winter), flushed salt from the soils, and was a site where nitrogen-fixing cyanobacteria could thrive and be used to fertilize the N-poor soils. When the rains ceased and the water table fell, the fields could not be sustained. These examples from the past illustrate that human cultures have always been at the mercy of climate change and argue for us to develop resilience strategies to cope with unforeseen or predicted future climate shifts.

What's one book, podcast, or resource you recommend for students interested in this field?

I would argue that it is important to read broadly and exploit information resources of all types – books, peer-reviewed papers, news articles, TV reports, seminars, opinion pieces, etc. My discipline, Paleolimnology, draws from Biology, Geology, Chemistry, and Physics, and its practitioners address diverse questions about past climate and environment. Consequently, paleolimnologists publish in a vast array of journals, though we have our very own outlet, the Journal of Paleolimnology, which published its inaugural issue in 1988, and which I co-edited from 2007 to 2022. I accepted the invitation to become Co-Editor because I knew it would help me keep up with the latest developments in my field. I encourage students to read and listen to what they enjoy. Beyond the scientific literature, for instance in the pages of The New Yorker, students will often find fascinating articles that touch on climate, environment and sustainability.

GATORS GOING GREEN

Mark Brenner *(cont.)*

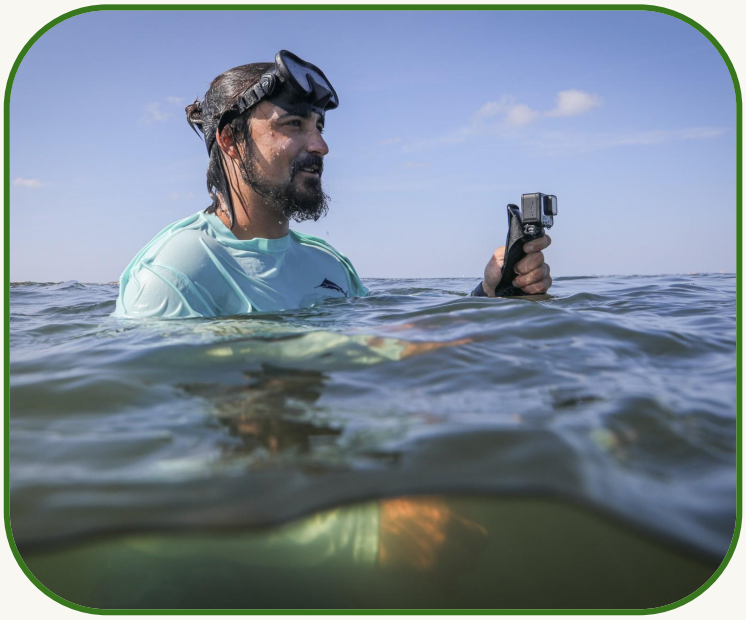
What advice do you have for sustainability studies students and alumni alike?

Stay engaged in issues that relate to climate and environmental science and become involved in efforts that end or reduce damage to the environment. Read the scientific literature with a critical eye and be skeptical of "easy fixes" for environmental problems. Realize that some ideas, like expansion of biomass-based energy production, may be appropriate in some places, but not in others. Try and anticipate possible unintended negative consequences of implementing sustainability efforts and continuously assess the outcomes of programs that are instituted. Finally, if you decide to advocate for what you consider to be a more sustainable position on an environmental question, constantly challenge your own thinking to make sure that your argument is sound.

GATORS GOING GREEN

Alumni Spotlight

Max Chesnes



Max Chesnes is a UF Sustainability Alumni who currently works as and Environment and Climate Reporter for the Tampa Bay Times. He reports on a myriad of topics including climate science, environmental justice, and water quality.

How did you start in sustainability, and what inspired you to pursue this career path?

Growing up in Florida, this weird and wild place captured my heart from a young age. My earliest memories are trudging through the Everglades, snorkeling in the Keys and kayaking beside mangrove forests. But if you've lived here long enough, you've likely witnessed the gradual ecological decline of Florida's natural ecosystems: Corals are bleaching in warming water spurred by human-caused climate change; Mangroves are being replaced with multi-story condominiums; the historic River of Grass is in need of prolonged, purposeful restoration. Florida needs help, and as I entered college, I knew I wanted to devote my life's work to the cause. That's why I pursued both sustainability studies and journalism at UF, combining my passion for storytelling with my drive to help create a more sustainable Florida. I'm glad I did: the sustainability program gave me the opportunity to learn from some of my conservation heroes, including a course on the history of sustainability taught by Jack Davis, Pulitzer-winning author of a book about the gulf, and environmental journalism taught by renowned writer Cynthia Barnett.

What is the importance of journalism and communications within the sustainability space?

I believe that there has been no more important time in history than the present moment to be telling the climate story. Digesting dense, complex science and policy can be cumbersome, and that's why I think clear environmental communication is so crucial...

GATORS GOING GREEN

Max Chesnes *(cont.)*

The current presidential administration will flood the zone with news, but it's important for environmental reporters to take a step back, slow down, and remember that real people are affected by real policy decisions. Who are those people? What is their story? How are they impacted by government decision-making? A recent example that comes to mind is the federal workforce reductions led by the so-called Department of Government Efficiency. There were a lot of reports of cuts to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and we wanted to find who, specifically, was being fired. That led us to the story of Brier Ryver, a park ranger at Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge, Florida's only refuge dedicated specifically for manatees. Ryver was fired, straining an already dwindling staff tasked with manatee rescues, outreach, volunteer coordination and more. Ryver is a real human affected by real policy, but there are also ecological consequences as fewer humans are employed to help endangered wildlife populations. Humans empathize with human stories, and I believe storytelling can be a powerful vehicle for change.

You report on climate justice, pollution, hurricanes, and more. What is one of the most impactful stories you've done as a reporter?

The highlight of my career so far has been our series last year revealing the state government's plans to develop Florida's state parks with golf courses, hotels and other sports amenities. We obtained leaked documents from a concerned employee with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection that the state wanted to build golf courses on Jonathan Dickison State Park, the largest park in Southeast Florida. The state also wanted to build 350-room hotels on fragile coastal habitat at Anastasia State Park in St. Augustine and Topsail Hill State Park in the Panhandle. Within days of us breaking the story, thousands of Floridians protested the plans at parks across Florida, and both Republicans and Democrats showed a rare moment of unity when they opposed the proposals. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis eventually back down from the plans, and lawmakers introduced proposed legislation to prevent future developments on parks. Earlier this month, the Florida House unanimously approved the bill and the measure is still working it's way through the legislature.

GATORS GOING GREEN

Max Chesnes *(cont.)*

How do you feel the general audience receives information regarding sustainability through the media?

We have regularly found that Floridians love reading about the wild places in this state, from swamps and beaches to pine forests and scrublands. While it is our duty to report and inform the public on the bad news, like declining biodiversity and habitat loss, our readers are often most responsive when they learn about calls to action and specific ways they can help. Stories of hope and highlighting all of the hard-working changemakers in this state are crucially important, because that hope inspires action. To respond to the growing interest in Florida's environmental issues, our newsroom recently launched our Environment Hub to bolster our investigative environmental journalism. We encourage anyone who wants to support our work to donate to our investigative fund.

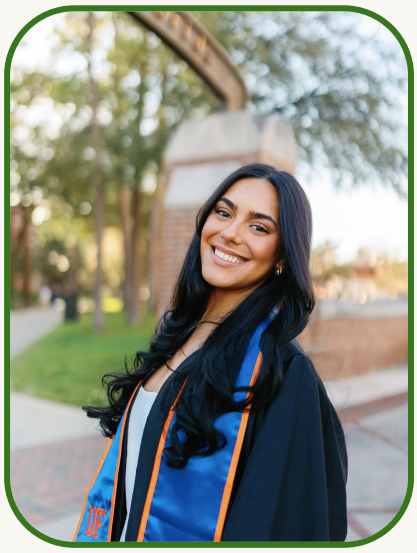
What advice do you have for sustainability studies students at UF?

The Sustainability Studies program at UF introduced me to a sweeping network of people who are dedicating their lives to improving our state and our planet. It also showed me that sustainability efforts are inherently intertwined with other fields of study, whether it's an industry like journalism, business or engineering. I encourage students to ponder what they're passionate about – what truly drives their curiosity and inspiration – and find the exact intersection point where that passion meets sustainability. Plant your flag in that place. Talk to the experts. Become immersed with the policies, people and ideas at that intersection. Strive to become the expert yourself. UF is unique in that so many global leaders are all in one place. Take advantage of that proximity and meet as many people as you can.

BEHIND THE NEWSLETTER

Cameron Delgado

EDITOR



Cameron Delgado is a recently graduated Sustainability Studies student who is earned minors in Environmental Justice and Policy, Communication Studies, and Public Relations. She also obtained a certificate in Geospatial Information Analysis and was involved in various organizations on campus. After graduation, Cameron will be backpacking around SouthEast Asia with her close friends before starting a graduate program in the Fall! She will attend Georgetown University in their Masters of Science in Environmental and Sustainability Management.

Dr. Thiele

DIRECTOR & DEPARTMENT HEAD

Dr. Leslie Thiele is the Director of Sustainability Studies and oversees the Active Learning Program (ALP) in the Center for Adaptive Innovation, Resilience, Ethics and Science (UF CAIRES). He teaches the gateway and capstone course for the Sustainability Studies Program as well as political theory courses and seminars in the Department of Political Science.

Congratulations to the 2025 Sustainability Studies graduating class!

Contact

If you have questions, suggestions, or contributions for future newsletters, please contact Cameron Delgado at camerondelgado@ufl.edu