Sustainable Urban Agriculture Certificate Instructor Biographies – Spring 2015

Dr. Sabine O’Hara is Dean and Director of Landgrant Programs for the College of Agriculture, Urban Sustainability & Environmental Sciences (CAUSES) at the University of the District of Columbia (UDC). As Dean of CAUSES, she is responsible for academic, research and community outreach programs in the tradition of the land-grant university, and is leading UDC’s efforts to building a cutting edge model for Urban Agriculture that improves the quality of life and economic opportunity for urban populations. O’Hara is a respected author, researcher and higher education executive and is well known for her expertise in sustainable economic development, global education and executive leadership. She has experience in virtually every aspect of university administration including curriculum development, strategic planning, program accreditation, international partnerships, and research collaborations. Dr. O’Hara is a strong advocate of higher education who believes that education cannot merely provide answers to our questions; it must also question our answers. Dr. O’Hara was the founder of Global Ecology LLC, the 10th President of Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia, and held faculty and administrative positions at Concordia College in Moorhead, MN, at Green Mountain College in Poultney, VT, at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, NY, and as Executive Director of the Council for International Exchange of Scholars (CIES) a preeminent international exchange organization that administers the Fulbright Scholar Program. A native of Germany, O’Hara earned a doctorate in environmental economics and a master’s degree in agricultural economics from the University of Göttingen, Germany. She serves on the board of directors of several national and international organizations, including as president elect of the International Society for Ecological Economics, as International Advisory Board member of King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah, and as reviewer and editorial board member of several academic journals.

Mchezaji “Che” Axum, Director, Urban Agriculture and Gardening Education, is an environmental agronomist with over 25 years of experience in the field of agriculture. Axum leads a team of researchers at the Muirkirk Research Farm in Beltsville, MD and oversees UDC’s Master Gardening, Specialty and Ethnic Crops and Urban Forestry programs. He is a graduate of the University of Maryland College of Agronomy, now named to the College of Natural Resource Management, worked for the United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, Plant Sciences Institute (USDA-ARS-PSI) for 20 years, taught middle school science, and has worked as a successful farmer and sustainable farming consultant. Che serves on the board of the Harry Hughes Center for Agroecology and is a member of the American Agronomy Society/ ASA, the Crop Science Society of America (CSSA), and the Soil Science Society of America (SSSA).
Ralph Belton, RA, CSI, NOMA, ASEE serves as Chair of the Department of Urban Architecture and Community Planning. An Associate Professor with over 34 years of experience, Belton is leading the department’s accreditation efforts while overseeing department renovations. Belton is Principal of Belton and Associates, Consulting Architects and since 1983 is licensed to practice in the state of Maryland. Past projects include the Whitelaw Hotel historic preservation rehabilitation; military facility laboratory design; churches and Board of Zoning appeals in the District of Columbia; Architectural advisor/consultant to the Embassy of Grenada and a consultant with the Architectural Research Institute. Has served on the Mayor’s Commission for Caribbean Affairs and is a founding member of Friends of Grenada (FoG), a 501-c-3 organization. Currently President of Community Empowerment Network (CEN) a 501-c-3 organization whose goal is self-empowerment of the Haitian people. Academic credentials include a conference presentation “The Role of Current Events and Flexible Course Syllabi: A Case Study.” Belton conducted student study tours to Europe and Japan and personal study/tour of Romania – Wooden Gothic Churches of Romania.

Sylvia Ramirez Benatti brings more than twenty years experience in the nonprofit sector as a trainer/consultant and university professor in nonprofit management. She is the co-author of Creating a Mentoring Program: Mentoring Partnerships across the Generations (ASTD Press 2014). Dr. Benatti is certified as a Standards of Excellence consultant and in Quality Matters Online Teaching. She has produced and hosted the Nonprofit Edge, a weekly interview show on the University’s cable station. As the Director of Training for the Support Center of Washington, DC she planned, scheduled, published, and managed a full time public training program with an average of 60 workshops per quarter. She holds a doctorate degree in Organizational Leadership in Nonprofits from Nova Southeastern University, and a master’s degree in Training & Professional Development from Mount Vernon College, an affiliate school of the George Washington University.
Kathy Denise Dixon, AIA, NOMA, LEED AP BD+C Associate Professor, is a licensed architect with over 20 years of experience. A graduate of Howard University’s School of Architecture, Ms. Dixon continued her secondary education at UCLA, matriculating with a Master’s degree in Urban Planning, with a focus on Housing and Community Development. During her career, Kathy has worked on a number of educational facilities in the Washington D.C. Metropolitan area. She spent several years working on national contracts with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) including Potomac TRACON and several Air Traffic Control (ARTCC) facilities. Prior to moving to government and institutional projects, she worked four years with McDonald’s Corporation developing new restaurants, site planning, designing commercial kitchens, and creating child oriented play areas. Most recently, she has designed civic facilities and faith-based institutions including fire stations, churches, family life centers, and schools.

Danielle Stradford is a recent graduate student at Trinity Washington University studying to receive her Master’s in Organizational Management with a concentration in Organizational Development. She received her B.A. in Psychology from Towson University in 2010. Besides providing brand strategy/marketing consulting to small to medium sized businesses and brands, in addition to working as the Director of Creative Development with a startup company out of Georgetown University, Danielle is preparing to passionately pursue her path to Entrepreneurship. Danielle is an expert on team building, and entrepreneurship related to empowering and developing successful student startups. Danielle has learned the importance and insane value that comes along with building and growing teams. Over the span of the last two years, Danielle helped Trinity Washington University launch the Entrepreneurship and Marketing Club, Co-Founded the Student Leadership Team for the Business and Graduate Studies Department and accepted the role as Student Ambassador. As an intern turned Operations Project Manager at “Obsessed Magazine” in DC, Danielle helped the company grow it’s internship program and has helped to positively transform the company’s culture.
Lorraine Weller Clarke, Ph.D. is a Project Specialist in Urban Agriculture in the Center for Urban Agriculture in the College of Agriculture, Urban Sustainability and Environmental Sciences (CAUSES) at the University of the District of Columbia (UDC). She received her Ph.D. in Plant Biology from the University of California, Riverside. As a project specialist in urban agriculture, she is working with both the extension, promoting public education, citizen science, and food sources, and on the academic side, seeking out grants and pursuing research on food production, biodiversity, and heavy metal proliferation in D.C. Prior to joining CAUSES, Lorraine worked as a graduate research assistant at the University of California, Riverside for 6 years. Her research focuses on biodiversity in urban gardens, ecosystem services (benefits people receive from the environment) that are produced in community and home gardens, and how socioeconomics, culture, and garden age influence the kinds of crops and horticulture planted by participants. She has also done extensive work on heavy metals in urban gardens and their sources, as well as urban tree biogeography. Lorraine also holds a BA in Environmental Science from Fresno Pacific University. In 2012, she received an East Asian and Pacific Summer Institute (EAPSI) fellowship from the National Science Foundation for work on Beijing home gardens and a Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant (DDIG) to investigate heavy metal proliferation in Los Angeles community gardens. In 2013, she also received a Dissertation Year Fellowship from University of California, Riverside for her continued work with impoverished, underrepresented groups in Los Angeles.
Guest Speakers:

Rudy Arredondo represents the interests of small Latino farmers and ranchers in Washington, DC dealing with policy, legislation and regulatory issues. He focuses on issues related to land, minority agriculture, economic development, small business and entrepreneurship, specifically as they relate to Latino farmers and ranchers in the United States. He edits and publishes the National Hispanic Political Reporter, and is a past member of the Hispanic Lobbyist Association. He has worked for the DNC, the UFW, and the National Association of Hispanic Publishers. Mr. Arredondo is a recipient of the United Nations Association (DC Chapter) Human Rights Award, the Founders Leadership Award of the Hispanic Democratic Club of Montgomery County, the Maryland Governor’s Citation for Health, the Maryland House of Delegates Citation for Health Issues Leadership and the Maryland Senate Citation for Health Leadership.

Nazirahk Amen is a 1998 graduate of Bastyr University and has practiced in the DC metro area for over 15 years. He worked as the East Coast rep for homeopathic software company, Kent Homeopathic Associates. He has done post graduate training with many teachers. His favorites and most influential teachers are Jayesh Shah, Massimo Mangialavori, and Divya Chhabra. Nazirahk is also a farmer and urban agriculturalist who promotes the field of Agrohomeopathy and teaches others about homeopathy while learning to treat plants with homeopathy.

Lauren has been working on food access and education in the District since 2009, when she co-founded DC Greens. Lauren currently serves on the Mayor’s Commission on Healthy Schools and Youth as well as the Department of Health’s Obesity sub-committee, and received the Exemplary Civic Activism Award from the D.C. Federation of Citizens’ Associations in 2011. Lauren was named a Toyota Mother of Invention at Tina Brown’s 2014 Women in the World Summit. Before moving to Washington, DC and founding DC Greens, Lauren worked at Sesame Workshop in the International Education, Research and Outreach department. In her three years at Sesame Workshop, she oversaw the creation of new co-productions in Brazil and Northern Ireland, coordinating outreach efforts, crafting curricula and supervising formative and summative research with local partners. Lauren has a B.A. from Princeton University, and an M.Phil. in Anthropology from NYU with a focus on Culture and Media.