



State University of New York  
College of Environmental Science and Forestry

Department of Chemistry  
One Forestry Drive  
Syracuse, New York 13210

February 22, 2016

RE: Environmental Scholars: An Interdisciplinary Scholarship Program

Dear Mr. Lichtenstein:

It is my pleasure to write this letter on behalf of the Environmental Scholars Program as part of your AASHE STARS report. I serve as the Principal Investigator for this program and am honored to be the primary mentor to the scholarship students.

The Environmental Scholars program is a National Science Foundation scholarship program designed to provide financial support to financially needy but scientifically talented students. The most current iteration of this program began in 2013, the students arriving on campus in the Fall of 2014. This program seeks to create an atmosphere of inclusive excellence and support for underrepresented groups in STEM majors. These students comprise roughly 25% of the underrepresented students in each undergraduate year.

The innovative aspect of this grant that pertains to AASHE is the theme of Global Climate Change that is being used for the 2013-2018 program. This program begins with an outdoor orientation program in the Adirondacks where students learn to work together as a group and to establish strong connections to the others in the cohort through whitewater rafting, hiking and orienteering. For many of our scholars this is the first time they have been in the woods and one of the most striking comments we hear is "it's so dark I can't tell if my eyes are open or closed." The past two years we have included a trip to the Adirondack Wild Center to view the movie, *A Matter of Degrees*, which explores how small changes in the Earth's temperature makes big differences on climate. After the movie we spend time looking at NOAA data via their Planet Adirondack exhibit, where we can look at carbon dioxide levels and temperature changes across the globe and through decades of data. We then spend the afternoon talking about the differences between climate and weather and the impact of global climate change on the future.

Upon returning to campus, the students enroll in a seminar class in which we read science literature on climate change as well as reflections in the form of poetry, short stories and narratives to try to better understand what the impact of climate change is on a global scale. Along our journey to better understand the response of different groups to the "pure science" we have learned that economics and impact play a huge role in how climate

change is perceived. Over the last year the students have been developing their outreach project and one of the items that continues to surface is an interest in working on environmental justice issues, both in understanding the scope and scale of these issues and seeking to find economically responsible solutions.

This program has made an impact on these students, first our retention rate for this grant period is 95% which is 10% than the ESF first year retention rate and 18% better than the National Average. It is especially noteworthy that this is largely an underrepresented population of students, making the 95% figure even more impressive.

In summary, this program creates a support program for underrepresented students and is engaged fully in looking at Global Climate Change and in affordable sustainable solutions for change. Should you have any further questions, I can be most easily reached at [kdonaghy@esf.edu](mailto:kdonaghy@esf.edu).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kelley J. Donaghy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kelley" and last name "Donaghy" clearly distinguishable.

Kelley J. Donaghy, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Chemistry  
Academic Governance Executive Chair  
Director of the Environmental Scholars