

Department	Faculty Member	Research Description	UN SDGs
Accounting	Catherine Chiang	Catherine Chiang is working on two projects related to sustainability, in collaboration with a student and another faculty member. One is an experiment to determine the extent to which greenhouse gas emission numbers affect investment decisions. The other is a research study linking the climate risk to accounting for loans. She teaches in both undergraduate and graduate business programs.	9, 13
Accounting	Hani Tadros	<p>Attempting to understand why firms disclose environmental information, prior literature lands conflicting results. Proponents of legitimacy theory argue that environmental reporting is elusive and deceptive while advocates of economic theory believe that this type of disclosure – driven by investors need for information – is informative and value relevant. Using panel data analysis of firms’ environmental disclosures over a 14-year period, Hani Tadros examines whether an association exists between these disclosures and firms’ environmental performance. He tries to understand the determinants of firms’ environmental reporting to better understand the motivation of firms to disclose such information. Relevant recent publications: Tadros, H., &amp; Souissi, M. (2021). Determinants of Environmental Disclosures of US-Electric Utility Firms: between Compliance and Voluntary Reporting. <i>Journal of Accounting, Ethics &amp; Public Policy</i>, 22(4), 541-570. Tadros, H., Magnan, M. &amp; Boulianne, E. (2020). Is corporate disclosure of environmental performance indicators reliable or biased information? A look at the underlying drivers. <i>Journal of Financial Reporting and Accounting</i>, 18(4), 661-686.</p>	12, 13, 16

Elon University Sustainability Research Faculty 24-25-SDGs-STARS Report

Department	Faculty Member	Research Description	UN SDGs
Accounting	Ifeoma Udeh	Ifeoma Udeh is working on a collaborative research project that examines how environmentally sensitive industries over several years adapted their sustainability initiatives and practices, as well as their environmental disclosure and environmental performance in response to changes in political leadership in the USA.	7, 13
Art, Environmental Studies	Samantha DiRosa	Samantha DiRosa’s research investigates the intersections between art, activism, sustainability, environmental justice, and eco-spiritual practices. In 2008, serving as a Sustainability Faculty Scholar, she worked to integrate dialogues on sustainability into the Studio Art foundations curriculum. This led to further pedagogical research, supported by a two-year fellowship from Elon’s Center for Advancement of Teaching and Learning, to create more visible bridges between Art and Environmental Science, while broadening interdisciplinary dialogues on sustainability and the environment. Her latest research endeavors include the development of practices to help mitigate eco-anxiety and eco-grief. Additionally, her artwork, which has been shown extensively nationally and internationally, explores our disconnection from the natural world, environmental degradation, and our atomic legacy.	3, 13
Biology	David Vandermast	David Vandermast’s sustainability research focuses on carbon sequestration in trees. He has worked with Duke University’s Carbon Offset Initiative and includes Elon undergrads in these projects. Dr. Vandermast also has students working on other aspects of carbon storage and sequestration in trees in the Elon University Forest and in Panama.	4, 13, 15

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Biology	Jessica Merricks	<p>Jessica Merricks’ research interests include science education, environmental justice, environmental health education and behavioral ecology. Two science education research projects are improving equity and access to STEM degrees and evaluating the impact of reflective writing portfolios on transformative learning in non-STEM majors. She mentored a Class of 2025 Lumen Scholar that partnered with a grassroots environmental advocacy group (Clean Haw River) to explore PFAS (an industrial contaminant) exposure and education in the Black community in Pittsboro, NC.</p>	3, 4, 6, 10

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Biology	Linda Niedziela	<p>Linda Niedziela’s area of research that involves undergraduate students focuses on the toxicology of environmental contaminants. She and a research student have engaged in a project that looked at the reproductive and developmental effects of two phthalates, forever chemicals. They used zebrafish as a model to compare a recently regulated phthalate and a new alternative chemical that is supposed to be its safer replacement. Their research found that there were no developmental effects, but there were statistically significant reproductive effects and alterations to hormones in males. Furthermore, they found no evidence to support the alternative being safer. Both the known toxicant and new alternative had similar detrimental effects.</p> <p>Another study in Dr. Niedziela’s lab focuses on ADHD medications and whether they could either be replaced or reduced with an exercise regimen. This study is in the beginning stages. Her research lab has spent a number of years investigating extracts of a native plant on neurological endpoints and investigating it as a possible safer alternative to dementia treatments. The plant has been found to increase a neurotransmitter that declines in dementia patients. They also showed that it was able to increase the memory of aged zebrafish. They are currently investigating whether it has side effects that could be harmful.</p>	3, 6, 14, 15

Elon University Sustainability Research Faculty 24-25-SDGs-STARs Report

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Biology, Environmental Studies	Brant Touchette	<p>Brant Touchette's research centers on wetland vegetation and the role climate change plays on wetland plants. This includes the impacts of elevated CO2 levels and sea-level rise on coastal marshes and the consequences of decreased precipitation on freshwater wetlands. Research also includes restoration of rare ecosystems such as coastal maritime swamps and lotic wetlands used by endangered species. He is also involved in conservation- and sustainable- agriculture through the development of new technologies that minimize agriculturally-base pollutants. He is on the editorial board for the peer review journal Aquatic Biology.</p>	3, 6, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15
Biology, Environmental Studies	Mike Kingston	<p>Mike Kingston's research focuses on community ecology and the effects of climate change, introduced species, and predation on the colonization of subtidal hard substrates by invertebrate marine animals. Dr. Kingston supervised a 2024 SURE project with a student who documented the spread of invasive species, the lightbulb tunicate, in coastal areas from the South Carolina border to the Albemarle sound. This student completed a larger study examining the global spread of this invasive species under the direction of Dr. Amanda Chunco. This invasive species was first documented in North Carolina in 2014. Dr. Kingston's fall 2024 sabbatical research project examined the effect of larval settlement, predation, and invasive species on development of the shallow water community by submersing and monitoring ceramic plates that were submersed each month from May - September 2024 off the Duke University Marine Lab dock.</p>	13, 14

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Chemistry	Anthony Rizzuto	<p>Dr. Rizzuto’s research lab focuses on the role of chemical species in various atmospheric and environmental processes. These projects include: 1. The study of microscopic atmospheric water droplets and how their chemical composition impacts cloud formation and evaporation rates. This information plays an important role in furthering our understanding of oceanic and atmospheric chemistry, which in turn can be used to develop more accurate climate models. 2. The study of carbonic acid (the centerpiece of the global carbon cycle) as it pertains to ocean acidification, nanoparticle sequestration and carbonation, and increased atmospheric carbon dioxide levels. 3. The study of aerosolized nitrous acid (HONO) decomposition and its impacts on NOx chemistry and the global nitrogen cycle. HONO is a precursor to a number of radical species that significantly impact atmospheric chemistry, in particular ozone depletion. Understanding the kinetics associated with HONO reactions will inform on how best to protect our ozone layer.</p>	13, 14, 15
Chemistry	Justin Clar	<p>Dr. Clar’s research projects are focused on the development of novel nanoparticle based solutions for water treatment. The goal is for these systems to be reusable, scalable and sustainable.</p>	6, 7, 9

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Cinema & Television Arts	Douglas Kass	Douglas Kass' scholarship goals focus on socially conscious filmmaking that participates in the world globally in order to foster greater awareness of human issues, and ultimately affect social change. From 2018-2020 he made public service announcements for the United Nations AIDS outreach organization, UNAIDS. These projects addressed global issues of health disparity and created awareness of the ongoing AIDS epidemic. More recently, Kass completed <i>Baghdad Graphic</i> , a documentary about the human costs of the U.S. invasion of Iraq.	3, 10, 17
Communication Design	Brian Walsh	Brian Walsh's current research involves an examination of the funeral industry in relation to environmental factors including natural resource exploitation and soil, water, and air contamination. The project is housed at mortalagency.com.	6, 12, 13, 15
Computer Science	Elizabeth von Briesen	Elizabeth von Briesen and a previous research student built an agent-based simulation exploring the dynamics of community gardening. In the model, there is an organizer agent who moves through the community "teaching" people how to garden, and individuals who decide to garden or not. People are more likely to garden if they interact with the organizer, have neighbors who are gardening, or have lower levels of hardship preventing them from gardening. This model can be used to explore hypothetical scenarios in which there may be more than one organizer, organizers who use different strategies for working within the community, and a reduction of overall hardship in the community. They hope this model will be useful to those studying food insecurity, particularly organizations strategizing to help others have self-sustainable gardening practices.	2, 15

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Computer Science	Ryan Mattfeld	<p>Ryan Mattfeld’s sustainability focused research projects cover a variety of topics. 1) Autonomous detection of diseases affecting winter wheat using Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), including Fusarium Head Blight (FHB) 2) A device for assisting people with visual impairments by detecting objects and providing haptic feedback for object avoidance. This works towards reduced inequalities by improving the ability for individuals with visual impairments to interact with the world with greater independence. 3) Improved step detection algorithms for pedometers toward improving health and well-being through increased motivation for exercise. Accurate pedometers are essential for setting and achieving goals toward increased exercise. If the device is perceived to be unreliable, users frequently abandon it and return to a less active lifestyle. 4) He is investigating the effects of different grading systems (like contract grading, specifications grading, and others) on student motivation and engagement. Different grading systems can also promote greater equity and improved learning. This research works toward providing and developing a quality education.</p>	3, 4, 10, 13
Economics	Brooks Depro	<p>Brooks Depro is an environmental economist and examines the relationship between housing choices, environmental health risks, and environmental justice. His work in this area has been published in the Journal of the Association of Environmental and Resource Economists, Land Economics, and the edited volume of The Political Economy of Environmental Justice. His principles of economics classes cover environmental topics, and he also teaches advanced courses, such as Environmental Economics, Markets and Environmental Justice, and the Moral Limits of Markets. He teaches in both undergraduate and graduate business programs.</p>	10, 13, 14, 15, 16

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Economics	Steve DeLoach	Steve DeLoach has published papers and mentored numerous student theses dealing with various aspects of sustainability. He has published several papers examining the impact of financial inclusion on the lives and livelihoods of households in developing countries. Since 2016, he has worked with several students to estimate the effects of participation in village savings and loan programs on South Sudanese refugees living in settlements in northern Uganda.	1, 8, 10
Education & Wellness	Evan Small	Evan Small's research is focused on community and belonging, which has direct ties to sustainability. He also mentors student research that focuses on conservation ethics, public policy surrounding green spaces, marketing efforts to increase access to the outdoors for historically marginalized communities, and other sustainability-related topics. He teaches in both undergraduate and graduate education programs.	3, 4, 11, 13, 15, 16
Education & Wellness	Katie Baker	Dr. Katie Baker's research focuses on mathematics teaching and learning that centers student thinking and students' contributions. Her work considers if and how learners get access to high-quality mathematics education and what this access affords. Mathematical access especially aligns to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 of Quality Education, but impacts many of the other goals through the problem-solving and critical thinking skills it affords learners. In order to consider and reflect upon various ways to learn mathematics, she collaborates with Dr. Scott Morrison around teaching and learning mathematics outside and supports undergraduates researchers in their pursuits of expanding the creativity and richness of mathematics instruction that also fosters a connectedness to nature.	3, 4

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Education & Wellness	Scott Morrison	<p>Scott Morrison’s research generally focuses on environmental, place-based, and nature-based education. In 2022, he published an article on using walks around a city block during the school day to support the early literacy development of first graders, and an article on core routines that structure math lessons outside for elementary and middle grades classes. In 2023, he published an article on facilitating nature-based learning for autistic students, and an article on gender socialization in nature-based education. In 2024, he published an article on the perspectives and experiences of adolescent environmentalists in North Carolina. In 2025, he published an article on the perceptions of practitioners with experience taking autistic students outside, and an article on the perceptions of teachers who take students on walks during the school day. He teaches in both undergraduate and graduate education programs.</p>	3, 4, 10
Engineering	Bethany Brinkman	<p>Bethany Brinkman’s sustainability research investigates permeable paver systems for reducing stormwater pollution and runoff from Elon's walkways as well as organic carbon concentration and composition from various land uses. Benefits of permeable pavement include helping reestablish a natural hydrologic balance and reducing runoff and concentrations of certain pollutants. Organic carbon is naturally occurring, but can impact water quality, water treatment chemicals, and taste and odor. Other areas of research include low-cost concrete filters, women’s resilience in engineering education and erosion prevention for a tidal dam mill.</p>	3, 6

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Engineering	Jonathan Su	Jonathan Su is developing a lens-free holographic imaging system for use in water quality measurement. He and his students are currently using it to try to create an automated system which can detect cyanobacteria in local water systems. These cyanobacteria can release toxic cyanotoxins that can pose a danger to humans and animals. His other work also focuses on fluid mechanics, mass transport, and drug delivery systems.	3, 6
Engineering	Will Puer	Will Puer researches stormwater in rural, suburban, and urban landscapes, developing novel management infrastructure to reduce impacts of pollution from excess nutrients in runoff. Three projects are as follows. Project 1: Christmount Erosion Control. Dr. Puer mentored students who designed a retaining wall, French drain, and rain garden to protect a stream bank from runoff and erosion in an area significantly impacted by Hurricane Helene (SDGs 6, 9, 11, 13). Project 2: Nitrate Removal with LDHs. Dr. Puer's team is developing special layered double hydroxides (LDHs) that will adsorb nitrate and phosphate in stormwater runoff (SDGs 6, 9, 11, 13). Project 3: Filter Development for Glyphosate and Estrogen. Dr. Puer is mentoring students planning a study to design filters with material targeting glyphosate in agricultural runoff and estrogen in domestic wastewater (SDGs 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14).	6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14

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English	Catherine Bowlin	<p>Catherine Bowlin is currently working on an article that will be published in a forthcoming edited collection about teaching American literature, published by Palgrave Macmillan, entitled, "Environmental and Pedagogical Justice: Teaching American Environmental Literature." This chapter examines the dual imperatives of environmental and pedagogical justice within the context of teaching American environmental literature. She argues that the pursuit of justice in the literature classroom should extend beyond content; it must also address inequitable teaching practices, such as traditional grading systems that often reinforce existing disparities. The article includes some climate justice education research and focuses on environmental justice. Bowlin also presented a version of this chapter at the Association of the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) conference in July 2025.</p>	4, 10, 13
Environmental Studies	Amanda Chunco	<p>Amanda Chunco's lab studies patterns of species invasions over time, with a goal of improving the monitoring and control of species invasions. Dr. Chunco's work focuses on the impact of human activity (particularly climate change and land-use) on the distribution and abundance of wildlife. She works primarily with mammals and amphibians, but the general methodology she uses is applicable to the conservation of biodiversity as a whole. She also mentors undergraduate student researchers. For example, one student research project is studying invasive species and how a specific species of invasive tunicate has spread along the coast of NC because of human activity.</p>	13, 14, 15

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Environmental Studies	Kelsey Bitting	<p>In partnership with students, Kelsey Bitting’s research investigates carbon sequestration in soil (on campus and in the Elon Forest). She is also collaborating with students and other faculty on research about nature connectedness in undergraduate students.</p>	3, 13
Finance	Adam Aiken	<p>The idea of “exit and voice” has made its way from sociology to form a crucial part of the framework used to study shareholders, managers, and corporate governance. Sustainable, or ESG-related investing, has largely followed an “exit” strategy, as some fund managers choose to avoid certain stocks or industries. More recently, ESG investing has evolved from simple exclusionary strategies, such as avoiding all oil and gas firms, to screens that involve more complex measures that attempt to quantify the ESG nature of firms and include firms with positive characteristics in a portfolio. If asset managers care about ESG and sustainability, who is producing the information needed to make ESG decisions? Adam Aiken and his co-authors believe that the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) program is a natural place to look for the relationship between training and ESG issues. They are trained to focus on long-term issues. Are portfolio managers with CFAs more likely to focus on sustainability and ESG issues when managing their fund? Aiken and his co-authors study their use of “voice” directly and note how each fund votes on environmental and social issues as raised through shareholder proposals. He teaches in both undergraduate and graduate business programs.</p>	8, 12, 13, 17

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Finance	Drew Peabody	<p>One of Drew Peabody’s research streams evaluates corporate social responsibility (CSR) through the lens of corporate finance, with an emphasis on business leaders’ decisions to engage in sustainable activities and how those decisions affect firms. Dr. Peabody is currently investigating how managers balance longer-term sustainability initiatives against short-term corporate priorities and how engaging in sustainable initiatives sends positive signals to various firm stakeholders such as customers, investors and employees.</p>	8, 12, 13
Finance	Raj Gupta	<p>Raj Gupta is developing a pipeline of ethics and sustainability research linked to his areas of expertise in finance and business administration. His ongoing and recent work include empirical studies of financial performance and value creation looking at the competitive advantage of sustainable companies, both domestic and global. His past work includes studying linkages between the green corporations or sustainability indices and other broadly-based financial indices. He teaches in both undergraduate and graduate business programs.</p>	8, 12

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History & Geography	Honglin Xiao	<p>Honglin Xiao’s research is dedicated to comprehensively understanding the interplay between societies, economies, governments, and the environment. This includes conducting separate but related studies in China and the Piedmont region. His focus is on deciphering the key factors driving land-use changes, developing advanced diagnostic models for monitoring these changes, and devising integrated strategies for sustainable land use and environmental rehabilitation in the future. Central to his work is the study of land use and land cover changes, which are crucial for understanding global environmental shifts, ecosystem deterioration, and the loss of biodiversity.</p>	13, 15
Law	Caroleen Dineen	<p>Caroleen Dineen's recent research has focused on legislative approaches to addressing nutrient pollution’s impact on harmful algal bloom (HAB) proliferation. HABs can poison aquatic life, cause lethal oxygen depletion in the aquatic ecosystem, and create an aquatic “dead zone” incapable of sustaining plant or animal life. HABs also may create serious health issues and negatively impact recreational and commercial aquatic uses. Nutrient pollution results from a variety of sources, including fertilizer application, animal waste, stormwater runoff, and sewage treatment facilities. The research explores various nutrient pollution legislative initiatives and analyzes their feasibility and efficacy. Recent publication: "Stemming the 'Red Tide': Legislative Approaches to Addressing the Contribution of Agricultural Nutrient Pollution to the Development and Consequences of Harmful Algal Blooms," Vermont Journal of Environmental Law, Spring 2023, 24(3): 196-265.</p>	3, 6, 12, 14

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Law	Sara Ochs	Sara Ochs' scholarship focuses in the field of international criminal law and transitional justice, which directly supports UN SDG #16.	10, 16
Management & Entrepreneurship	Brittany Mercado	Brittany Mercado has several research projects that explore employee performance, including employee green behaviors. In addition, she has shifted her work on employee performance, most specifically cyberloafing, to a more sustainable perspective. Instead of viewing the impact of these counterproductive employee behaviors on organizations, she is examining the toll various work behaviors take on employees themselves, with the goal of developing interventions to boost employee well-being and reduce negative psychological symptoms. She teaches in both undergraduate and graduate business programs.	3, 8
Management & Entrepreneurship	Christy Benson	Christy Benson teaches business law and ethics. Her research focuses on international trade and sustainable development. Her recent work includes an empirical study of financial performance and value creation, looking at the competitive advantage of sustainable companies. She is also looking at the impact of the EU's mandatory sustainability/ESG reporting requirements in comparison to voluntary reporting by US companies in the absence of such formal rules. She practiced law for 10 years with major law firms in Washington, DC, specializing in international trade and transactions. She served in the Rules Division of the WTO Secretariat in Geneva in 2000, has advised numerous foreign government ministries in FTA negotiations and assisted a wide range of multinational clients on trade matters.	8, 12, 16

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Management & Entrepreneurship	Elena Kennedy	<p>Elena Kennedy’s research focuses on socially and locally oriented entrepreneurship and ways in which entrepreneurial ecosystems support meaningful and equitable work. Current work is examining the different ways entrepreneurial communities support one another during crisis and the access to resources for a range of entrepreneurs. She recently produced a teaching case study on a cooperatively owned brewery. Other recent publications include: Dowin Kennedy, E. 2025. Leveraging marquee businesses and community events in entrepreneurial community development. <i>Journal of Business Venturing Insights</i>. 23.; Dowin Kennedy, E. 2021. Creating community: The process of entrepreneurial community building for civic wealth creation. <i>Entrepreneurship &amp; Regional Development</i>. 33(9-10): 86-836.; Beaton, E. &amp; Dowin Kennedy, E. 2021. Responding to Failure: The Promise of Social Enterprises as Market Menders. <i>Public Management Review</i>. 23:5: 641-664. She teaches in both undergraduate and graduate business programs.</p>	8, 11, 12
Marketing & International Business	Chris Nelson	<p>Chris Nelson’s research examines how corporate inauthenticity in diversity based social responsibility efforts can damage the trust of key stakeholders both inside and outside of the firm and what the organization can do to repair trust. He is working with co-authors on a paper submission on this topic.</p>	10, 12
Marketing & International Business	Xin Liu	<p>Xin Liu’s research centers on sustainable/green supply chains. She has established a mathematical model to help companies balance their profitability and sustainable effort levels.</p>	8, 12

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Mathematics & Statistics	Mark Weaver	Mark Weaver does collaborative, health-related research that is related to the sustainability goal of good health and well-being. He is currently working on studies related to pain management in the emergency department (with a goal to prevent the transition from acute to chronic musculoskeletal pain among older adults in the emergency department), to identifying behavioral targets for the prevention of metabolic syndrome risk development in the transition to high school students living at home to the first year of college, and to estimate the effectiveness of misoprostol-only medical abortion regimens.	3
Mathematics & Statistics	Nicholas Bussberg	Nicholas Bussberg's research is in environmental statistics. He has active projects looking at better understanding deep-sea coral biodiversity, global processes (e.g., temperature), and tree-ring measurement (to reconstruct climate). He has also mentored students working on criminal justice projects related to understanding disparities in the justice system.	10, 13, 14, 15
Psychology	Maureen Vandermaas-Peeler	Working with undergraduate researchers, Dr. Maureen Vandermaas-Peeler studies the development of young children's inquiry and discovery through joint participation with peers and adults in authentic, engaging activities in outdoor environments. Findings contribute to the growing momentum in programs and schools to make spending time in natural outdoor settings a priority for young children to foster developing skills and knowledge and to help ensure a future generation of environmental stewards.	3, 4, 15

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Religious Studies	Geoffrey Claussen	Geoffrey Claussen’s research explores ways that Jewish traditions, histories, and identities can lead to diverse ethical claims regarding the environment and the treatment of nonhuman animals. His research has been published in his book Jewish Ethics: The Basics (Routledge, 2025).	15
Religious Studies	Rebecca Todd Peters	Rebecca Todd Peters’ research on abortion and reproductive justice is focused on addressing the disproportionate impact of restrictive abortion policies on poor women, young women, and women of color with particular attention to intersecting forms of oppression and structural violence based on gender and economic status. Her scholarship on economic and environmental ethics is focused on exploring the development of a solidarity economy and shifting collective worldviews/ethical underpinnings of alternative economic structures that focus on the common good and the well-being of the entire human and natural world.	3, 5, 10
Sociology & Anthropology	Rissa Trachman	Rissa Trachman has conducted archaeological research in Belize for over 20 years. Her research is conducted on a 250,000 acre conservation and management area and necessarily involves perspectives of environmental impact both of ancient Maya inhabitants and the modern impact of archaeology on its surroundings. The ancient Maya interaction with the environment was substantial and underestimated. Her field research project in Belize, the Dos Hombres Archaeological Project explores these interactions and their subsequent social impacts as reflected in her recent publications.	11, 12, 13, 15

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Sport Management	Young Do Kim	<p>Young Do Kim’s research focuses on the effectiveness of sport organizations’ pro-environmental (PE) initiatives. His work examines how consumers’ perceptions of these initiatives influence their psychological and behavioral responses. The findings aim to provide sport marketers with strategic insights and practical solutions to strengthen their PE efforts. In addition, understanding consumers’ psychological responses can help sport organizations reinforce their commitment to and investment in climate change solutions.</p>	7, 8, 9, 11, 12
Strategic Communications	Barbara Gaither	<p>Barbara Gaither researches marketplace advocacy, a form of advertising and public relations used by corporations and industries to generate acceptance for industry-related issues, particularly those involving environmental and/or health risks. Gaither explores the implications of this form of advocacy for industry, environmental efforts and public policy. Gaither also researches public response to corporate social responsibility.</p>	3, 12, 13, 16