

Muhlenberg College

## DANA FORUM 2019



**Monday, April 15, 2019**

Miller Forum, Moyer Hall

6:00 PM

**Tuesday, April 16, 2019**

Miller Forum, Moyer Hall

5:30 PM



## *About the Dana Scholars Program*

### **Mission Statement**

The Dana Program offers outstanding, intellectually versatile students an opportunity to belong to a community of scholars that fosters conversations across disciplines, rigorous academic inquiry, and promotes engaged citizenship and leadership. Each Dana scholar can major in any academic department or program. All Dana seniors engage in collaborative research projects on issues of public concern and interest.

**Director:** Dr. Mohsin Hashim

**Forum Director, 2018–2019:** Dr. Jordanna Sprayberry

**Faculty Advisory Committee:**

Dr. Keri Colabroy, Dr. Dawn Lonsinger

Dr. Matthew Moore, Dr. Cathy Ouellette

### **Student Advisory Committee:**

*Class of 2019*

Taj Singh

Blake Peebles

*Class of 2020*

Asa Miller

Christopher Dasaro

*Class of 2021*

Alice Banta

Renee Heller

*Class of 2022*

Betty Ben Dor

Kevan Shah



## *Dana Forum*

The Dana Forum is designed as a senior year capstone experience (0.5 credit each semester) to promote engaged citizenship and leadership to enrich the intellectual climate on campus. Each year the Forum oversees the development and execution of collaborative research projects as Dana seniors pursue rigorous academic inquiry on issues of public concern and interest tied to the Center for Ethics' annual theme. In the Fall semester, under the supervision of the Director of the Dana Forum, students engage with academic questions related to the annual theme chosen by the Center for Ethics and form working groups to research a topic of their choice. The collaborative research component of the Dana Forum is completed during the Spring semester of the Dana Scholar's senior year under the mentorship of a faculty member chosen by each group. The specific nature of each team's project depends on the students' background, interests, and goals. Because of the goals of the Dana program, projects that also serve the community are strongly encouraged.

**Dr. Jordanna Sprayberry, Forum Director, 2018–2019**



## *Center for Ethics 2018-2019 Program*

The 2018—2019 program is entitled *The Ethics of the Anthropocene: Crisis Earth*.

The Muhlenberg College Center for Ethics seeks to develop our capacities for ethical reflection, moral leadership, and responsible action by engaging community members in scholarly dialogue, intellectual analysis, and self-examination about contested ethical issues.

The earth is experiencing an era of rapid environmental change. The impact of human activity is the dominant influence on the planet's environment and can be found in the soil, water, air and rocks. Scientists have dubbed this new geological era the Anthropocene and are scrambling to understand how these changes affect ecosystems.

Some businesses, communities, societies and political systems are responding to this change while others are not. Are these responses, or lack thereof, ethical? Who are the winners and losers as humans face down environmental catastrophe in the era of the Anthropocene? How can we face these environmental challenges ethically? When and why do we fail? This year's Center for Ethics event series will explore the ethical implications of addressing the environmental damage that humankind has produced.

**Dr. Brian Mello, Director, Center for Ethics**

**Program Directors:** Dr. Kimberly Heiman and Dr. Kammie Takahashi



## *Schedule of Events*

### **Monday, April 15**

- 6:00—6:15 p.m.      Hors d'oeuvres Served
- 6:15—6:25 p.m.      Welcome and Opening Remarks  
Dr. Brian Mello, Director,  
Center for Ethics
- 6:35—7:00 p.m.      *Healthcare Disparities in the  
Anthropocene*  
Prianka Hashim, Dana Kneisley, Patrick  
Sockler, Annu Suresh
- 7:05—7:30 p.m.      *Your Brain on Climate Change*  
Francine Koitz, Richard Morash, Blake  
Peebles
- 7: 35 p.m.            Closing Remarks  
Dr. Jordanna Sprayberry
- 7:45 p.m.            Post-Presentation Conversations



## Schedule of Events

### Tuesday, April 16

- 5:30—5:45 p.m.      Hors d'oeuvres Served
- 5:45—5:55p.m.      Welcome and Opening Remarks  
Dr. Kammie Takahashi, Co-Director,  
Center for Ethics Program
- 6:05—6:30 p.m.      *Scaffolding Communities: Excavating Climate  
Change Complacency*  
Pierce Lockett, Nicholas Reit, Taj Singh,  
Kelly Travitz
- 6:35—7:00 p.m.      *Perceptions of Climate Change in Religious  
Communities of Allentown*  
Michaela Feinberg, Jamie Greenberg,  
Cateryna Kochan, Pooja Menon, Yue Xie
- 7:05—7:30 p.m.      *Environmental Action at Muhlenberg*  
Victoria Castillo, James DeMatteo, Emma  
Lewis, Eric Steinbach, Baadal Vachhani
- 7:35 p.m.              Closing Remarks  
Dr. Mohsin Hashim, Director, Dana  
Scholars Program
- 7:45—8:00 p.m.      Post-Presentation Conversations



## *Event Schedule*

**April 15**  
**6:30 p.m.**

### **Healthcare Disparities in the Anthropocene**

**Presenters**

Prianka Hashim  
Dana Kneisley  
Patrick Sockler  
Annu Suresh

**Mentor**

Dr. Chris Borick

Healthcare disparity between different socioeconomic groups is a well-evidenced issue in the United States in terms of disease incidence, mortality, and treatment. As we enter the Anthropocene, an epoch associated with a drastically changing climate, it is important to consider impacts on this existing healthcare disparity. In this project, we are collating and completing a thorough literature review on four diseases: asthma, cardiovascular disease, diarrheal disease, and malnutrition. Our project looks at how these diseases have been impacted by climate change from the perspective of populations below and above the poverty line, both at the level of personal health and the nation's healthcare system. This will allow us to determine which demographics will become more vulnerable to these specific diseases in the Anthropocene. Understanding the intersectional nature of this problem will provide a more accurate framework for developing policies to target such healthcare disparities.



## Event Schedule

**April 15**  
**7:00 p.m.**

### **Your Brain on Climate Change**

**Presenters**  
Francine Koitz  
Richard Morash  
Blake Peebles

**Mentor**  
Dr. Matthew  
DeWitt

Environmental escapism is a coping mechanism in which people are able to go into natural green spaces for the purpose of leaving behind the stress of daily life. However, we live in a world where access to natural green spaces is becoming ever more restricted. Separately, access to technology is becoming increasingly abundant. The question arises: can simulated nature on a screen induce the same stress relief benefits as real green spaces? This project tests individual's emotional and physical reactions to both real and simulated natural spaces to determine whether virtual natural experiences provide similar benefits; is it possible to supplement the benefits of natural spaces with simulated ones? We will measure stress hormone production and subjective vitality as a means of quantifying stress relief across three experimental conditions: interacting with a real green space, interacting with a built environment in virtual reality, and interacting with a green space in virtual reality (VR). With this data we hope to find that some of the beneficial effects of natural spaces can be simulated via technology. It is increasingly difficult and expensive, to access true green natural spaces, but almost everyone in America has access to personal technology such as a smartphone. Thus, we will test the VR conditions using a smartphone game and a smartphone based headset, which is more affordable than traditional VR headsets. If these effects can be simulated, this could be a good supplement to environmental escapism, and could be more accessible for a large amount of people. This experiment will also raise ethical questions such as: if the ability to simulate nature with technology is feasible, does that give an excuse to further neglect real green spaces? What will be the future role of the consumer in trying to protect green spaces while relying on simulated green spaces for benefits? What ethical responsibilities will the technology producer have in protecting real green spaces?





## *Event Schedule*

**April 16  
6:00 p.m.**

### **Scaffolding Communities: Excavating Climate Change Complacency**

**Presenters**

Pierce Lockett  
Nicholas Reit  
Taj Singh  
Kelly Travitz

**Mentor**

Prof. Karen Tuerk

Earlier this year, Muhlenberg College was awarded a STARS Gold rating from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). This honor demonstrates the commitments made by campus leaders in promoting sustainable practices. Yet, questions still remain about if these honors truly reflect a more eco-friendly campus and a shift to a more engaged campus mindset. This project seeks to connect the campus community to broader communities of collective action. As the college continues to improve its sustainable practices, this project addresses several topics regarding the college's present and future commitments to sustainability and its mitigation strategies. The project proposes a brief theoretical discussion of how engagement and community are conceived within the campus community, and what forms these concepts might take. The project then seeks to outline the previous and current sustainability initiatives offered by the college and those led by students. We explore the rationale that drives current campus initiatives and collective engagement. Additionally, we investigate the historical precedents for pro-environmental efforts on other campuses comparable to Muhlenberg. Incorporating interventions examined in the literature, we hope to discover possible ways of maintaining sustainable projects and habits beyond the traditional 4-year trajectory of students at the college. In doing so, this project will re-contextualize campus sustainability initiatives beyond simple net positives or net negatives. Rather, we hope to propose a more nuanced framework that requires collective, community-based effort to commit more seriously to issues of environmental justice.



## Event Schedule

**April 16  
6:35 p.m.**

### **Perceptions of Climate Change in Religious Communities of Allentown**

**Presenters**

Michaela Feinberg  
Jamie Greenberg  
Cateryna Kochan  
Pooja Menon  
Yue Xie

**Mentor**

Dr. Crystal Adams

Religious communities throughout the United States have distinct and variegated views on climate change. So much so, that Yale's *Forum on Religion and Ecology* has developed a database of religions and their statements on climate change, including at least 14 world religions. These views vary from support to criticism, to even denial of the change that has been deemed the "Anthropocene." As religion can influence any and every aspect of people's lives, it is no surprise that such clear and differing views in these communities can seriously impact the ways in which people consume information. Because of the prevalence of these groups, we will investigate the varied perceptions of climate change among different religious communities and how one's own religion may affect their views. We will interview and survey 15-20 participants from local places of worship in Allentown, PA. We plan to conduct interviews, investigating each person's relationship with religion, their views on climate change, and the degree to which these may overlap. We will do this within Christian, Jewish, and Muslim religious communities in the Lehigh Valley. Each participant will be given a survey to gain demographic information at the end of the experience. We will analyze our findings in conversation with statistics from the National Surveys on Energy and Environment (NSEE). This research will enable us to craft a more nuanced picture of how local religious communities navigate issues of climate change, and how this fits into the national and international perspectives. This picture may enlighten community leaders on ways to function at the local level, accessing populations like ours more effectively.



## Event Schedule

**April 16**  
**7:00 p.m.**

### **Environmental Action at Muhlenberg**

**Presenters**

Victoria Castillo  
James DeMatteo  
Emma Lewis  
Eric Steinbach  
Baadal Vachhani

**Mentor**

Dr. Michele Deegan

This year's Center for Ethics theme: *The Ethics of the Anthropocene: Crisis Earth* highlights the rapidly changing global environment due to the result of humankind's negative interactions with it. Through the DANA Senior Forum, our group's aim is to engage the entire Muhlenberg campus community in doing its part to help combat and prevent against the continued decline of the global environment. It is our aim to propose recommendations to the campus community that would increase sustainable practices, facilitate future green policy implementation as well as increase the effectiveness of existing policy, and finally, also raise the wealth of knowledge surrounding local community efforts in terms of sustainability. All this stems from the results and subsequent analysis of a campus wide survey (Students, Faculty, Staff) that was dispersed in the spring of 2019 centered on determining what the current knowledge, needs, and recommendations people on campus have when it comes to green policy and local sustainability practices.



## *DANA Scholars*

### *Class of 2019*

Victoria Castillo  
James DeMatteo  
Michaela Feinberg  
Jamie Greenberg  
Prianka Hashim  
Michelle Haykin  
Dana Kneisley  
Cateryna Kochan  
Francine Koitz  
Emma Lewis  
Pierce Lockett  
Pooja Menon  
Richard Morash  
Blake Peebles  
Nicholas Reit  
Taj Singh  
Patrick Sockler  
Eric Steinbach  
Annu Suresh  
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