

# Student Engagement

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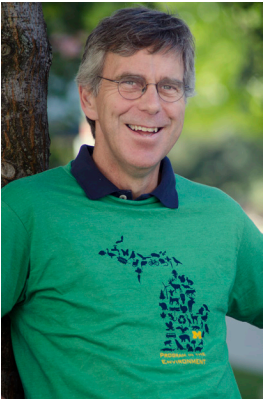
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PitE student Joe Jozlin at Camp Davis

[lsa.umich.edu/pite](http://lsa.umich.edu/pite)

## Dear Members of the PitE Community,



In May, the University of Michigan hosted a three-day conference on the question of whether academics should engage in public and political discourse. While the particulars of

this conversation varied widely, the many speakers, including four university presidents, were unanimous in arguing for academic engagement in regard to such issues as climate change and environmental degradation. Of course, as its alumni and current students know, engagement, broadly conceived, is and has been from the outset a key feature of the Program in the Environment. All PitE majors must complete some form of practical experience, such as field courses, internships, or study abroad. These practical or field experiences often result in projects with public ramifications, such as working on the restoration of a particular ecosystem or interning with a government agency. For example, interning with the Energy Information Administration (EIA) in Washington D.C., Michael Nevitt wrote an article that was published in “Today in Energy”, which was picked up by several news outlets and read by lawmakers. This summer,

Benjamin Siegel is interning as a UNICEF’s environmental coordinator, helping the organization plan and implement environmental projects for children in low infrastructure environments, and Michael Henry is conducting a research project focusing on sustainable economic development for Inuit communities in Alaska.

In addition, many PitE students find avenues for public engagement by participating in such extra- or co-curricular programs as the Campus Farm, Graham Scholars, Planet Blue Ambassadors, the Permaculture Design Team, and Hillel’s environmental student organization, YaHerikum. Working individually or with such organizations, PitE students undertake a diverse range of environmental projects. For instance, during this year’s spring break, a group of PitE students working with GRID Alternatives, a non-profit organization, installed solar panels on low-income housing. Having raised \$5,000 (including a con-

tribution from PitE) to support the GRID program, these students traveled to the San Pasqual Indian Reservation near San Diego, received training, and mounted 41 solar panels on three houses. The electricity generated by these panels will cover 70-80% of each family’s electric bill.

Simply put, engagement comes naturally to PitE students, who are drawn to this program by a keen desire to put what they learn into practice. This combination of intellectual curiosity and practical ambition distinguishes PitE students and the Program in the Environment. ■

Gregg Crane

Professor and Director,  
Program in the Environment

*Photo credit: Julia Goodhart (second from left) helps install solar panels during the Solar Spring Break U- M trip in March 2015.*

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## Student Feature: Practical Experience



*Photo of course at UMBS, courtesy of Jayna Sames*

### **Rebecca Brewster, PitE Major, Class of 2016 and Sydney Watkins, PitE Major, Class of 2016**

Rebecca and Sydney are doing conservation biology research with Johannes Foufopoulos in Greece this summer focusing on reptile populations found on Greek islands.

### **Nicholas Jansen, PitE Major, Class of 2016**

Nicholas is a PitE major, specializing in water. After graduation, Nicholas hopes to work on Great Lakes issues that focus on invasive species. This summer, he is participating in an independent study course with Professor Mike Wiley doing aquatics (wetlands) research in New Zealand. Nicholas is also an active member of the student group, "Students for Clean Energy (SfCE)" and organized rallies on campus to raise awareness about climate change.

### **Wyatt Klipa, PitE Major, Class of 2017**

Wyatt won the Arctic Internship Fellowship through the Labrador Institute. Here is a description of his experience: "Healthy Waters Labrador is currently hoping to restore the Birch Island creek and wetland ecosystems in Labrador Canada to near pristine conditions with the eventual hope of turning them into a park where visitors can learn about local ecosystems and wildlife as well as the indigenous peoples of the area. As an intern in the preliminary stages of this project, I will be completing a local wildlife index and participating in a wetland monitoring program."

### **Julia Goodhart, PitE Major, Class of 2016**

Solar Spring Break U-M, including a group of PitE students, traveled to the San Pasqual Indian Reservation near San Diego, received training, and mounted 41 solar panels on three houses. Having raised \$5,000 (including a contribution from PitE) to support the GRID program, Julia describes her experiences as "a beautiful, transformative experience with GRID Alternatives, and with countless, sometimes thankless, people involved in making this trip so great. This community is now over 10% solar-powered."



## Featured Events

Jimmy Chin, Speaker Series, Photo  
courtesy of Dave Brenner

*These events were made possible by the Goldring Family Foundation and generous donors who contributed to the PitE Strategic Fund over this past year.*



### King Corn

**“There’s Corn in Our Hair? A Multimedia presentation by Ian Cheney and Curt Ellis”**

Filmmakers Ian Cheney and Curt Ellis were the 2014 Goldring Family Foundation Visiting Lecturers. In their presentation, Ian and Curt spoke about the reason for creating their award-winning documentary, “King Corn,” and how creating this film led to creating other documentaries and establishing *Food Corps*, a “nation-wide team of AmeriCorps leaders who connect kids to real food and help them grow up healthy.”

*This event is sponsored by the Program in the Environment, the Goldring Family Foundation, and the Penny Stamps Speaker Series, with support from the School of Natural Resources & Environment, the College of Literature, Science & the Arts, and Planet Blue Ambassadors Program.*



### Jimmy Chin

**“Both Sides of the Lens”**

Jimmy Chin’s passion for exploration and photography has taken him on break-through expeditions around the world. Jimmy has worked with some of the best adventurers, climbers, snowboarders and skiers in the world on their most challenging expeditions and shoots. Climbing, skiing and often enduring death-defying situations alongside some of the best in the industry, Jimmy shoulders the camera equipment and documents the epic stories, bridging the critical gap between athlete and storyteller.

*This event was part of the SNRE Dean’s Speaker Series and co-sponsored by PitE, Bivouac, and Planet Rock.  
Photo courtesy of Dave Brenner*



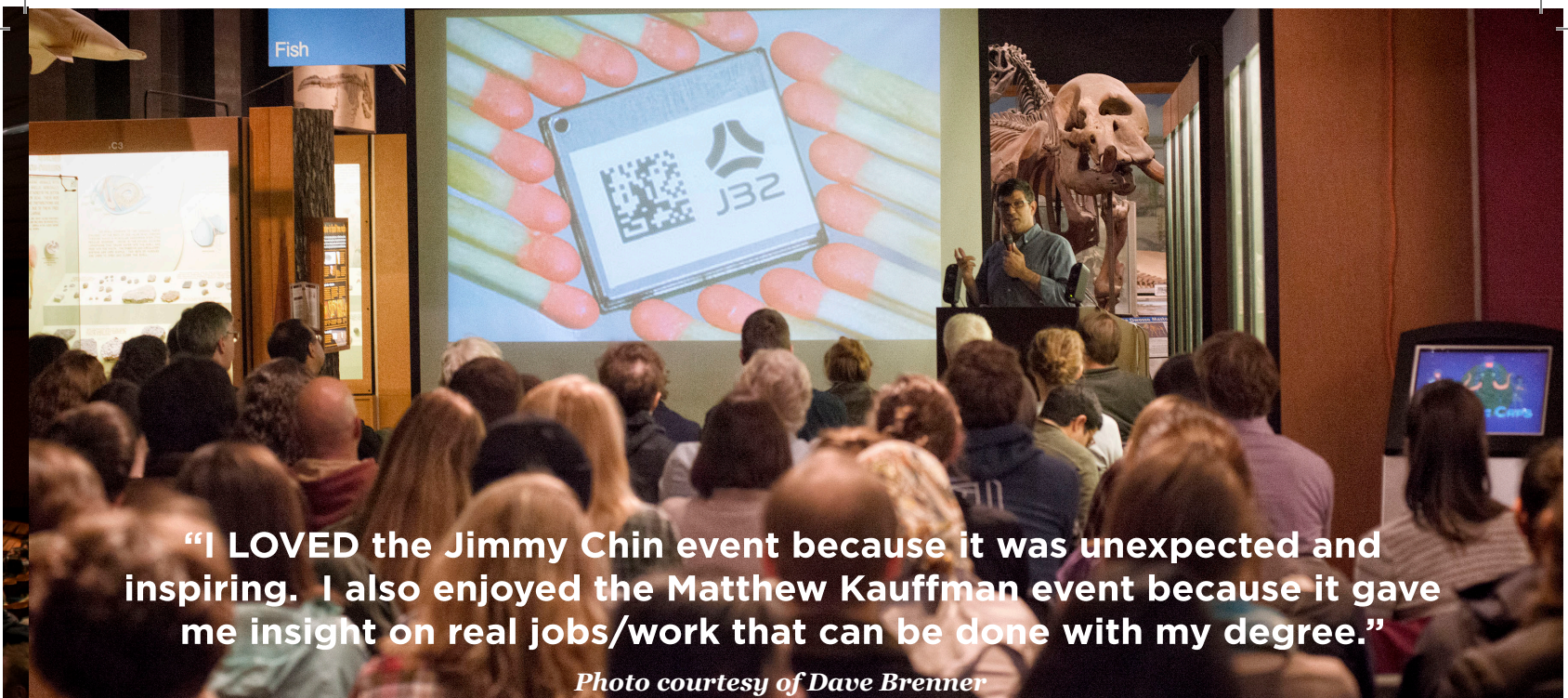
### Alon Tal

**“All the Trees of the Forest: The Extraordinary Story of Israel’s Woodlands”**

Drawing on insider anecdotes and the rich history of Israel’s countryside, Dr. Tal’s presentation described the trial and error process which transformed drylands and degraded soils into flourishing parks, rangelands, and renewed ecosystems in a degraded countryside and how it could be relevant in the dozens of dryland countries suffering from deforestation and desertification.

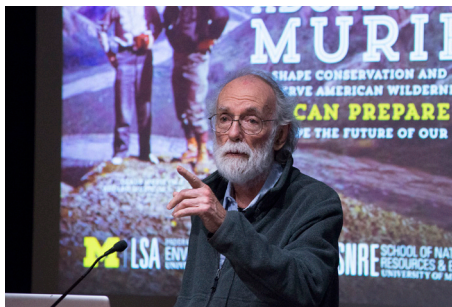
*This event was hosted by PitE and co-sponsored by SNRE, the The Jean & Samuel Frankel Center for Judaic Studies, the Michigan Library, and HaYerukim (Hillel’s Environmental Group).*

**“The creators of King Corn were incredible, dynamic, and engaging speakers. They had a variety of presentation methods and invited lots of audience interaction with Food Corps. I’m especially interested in food, so that is one reason I really enjoyed it.”**



**“I LOVED the Jimmy Chin event because it was unexpected and inspiring. I also enjoyed the Matthew Kauffman event because it gave me insight on real jobs/work that can be done with my degree.”**

*Photo courtesy of Dave Brenner*



*Photo courtesy of Dave Brenner*

### **Dan Janzen**

#### **“Conservation of Tropical Wildlands Through Biodiversity Development”**

In his talk, Dr. Janzen spoke about his efforts to DNA barcode all species of the world for their identification by facilitating the Consortium for the Barcode of Life (CBOL) and International Barcode of Life (iBOL). Janzen also spoke how he and his team are also facilitating Costa Rica’s willingness to permanently conserve the 4% of the world’s biodiversity that lives on 25% of Costa Rican national terrain and sea, and do it as a global example of sustainable non-damaging use of tropical wildlands biodiversity. Dr. Jansen is a tropical ecologist and biodiversity conservationist with 59 years of field experience and 466 scientific papers and books on the interactions of tropical animals and plants . He is a world-level authority on the taxonomy and biology of tropical caterpillars, and is a member of the U.S. and the Costa Rican National Academy of Sciences.

*Dr. Dan Janzen was the inaugural Olaus Murie Lecturer, and was the first speaker of the Michigan Conservation Speaker Series.*



*Photo courtesy of Matt Kauffman*

### **Matt Kauffman**

#### **“Ungulate Migrations of Wyoming: Ecology and Conservation amid Changing Landscapes”**

In his talk, Dr. Kauffman described some of the most pressing challenges to the conservation of ungulate (hoofed mammal) migration routes in Wyoming and the West, and the new conservation tools that are bringing people, agencies, and NGOs together to make these journeys easier for migrating big game. Dr. Kauffman’s lecture was the John & Frank Craighead Lecture which was the second installment of the Michigan Conservation Series.

*This lecture was co-sponsored by PitE, SNRE, and Museum of Natural History.*

## **Michigan Conservation Speaker Series**

In 2014, Program in the Environment (PitE) and the School of Natural Resources & Environment (SNRE), with support from the College of Literature, Science & the Arts (LSA) created the Michigan Conservation Speaker Series which features notable biologists and ecologists who represent the cutting edge of ecological conservation today. Each lecture

is named for a U-M alumnus who has made major contributions to the field of conservation. This lecture series looks simultaneously at the past, present, and future of conservation, and it will give students a window not only to work that has been done in the past, but also work that is currently being done. ■



## PitE Awards and Achievements

2015 honors students and awardees were recognized at this year's graduation reception. Photo courtesy of Jaime Langdon.

### 2015 PitE Honors Graduates

These students completed and presented an honors thesis at the April 22nd PitE Honors Symposium, and graduated with honors.

**Chloe White:** *Effects of Climate Change on Carnivory in Sundews*

**Paola Mendez:** *The Evolution of Focus: HOPE, Detroit, Michigan*

**Eric Vanderhoef:** *Assessing the Economic Viability of Residential Wind Energy*

**Kerri Metz:** *Analyzing the Absence of Renewable Portfolio Standards*

**Jhena Vigrass:** *Motivating Waste Reduction Behavior*

**Zoë Allen-Wickler:** *Impact of Place Attachment on Environmental Concern*

**Perry Maddox:** *Cultural Ecology of Appalachian Music*

**PitE's Outstanding Student Awards** are awarded to four graduating PitE seniors who have demonstrated both high academic achievement and dedicated service to PitE. This year's recipients are

**Rebekah Anne Kreckman, PitE major (B.A.)**

**Chloe Elizabeth White, PitE major (B.A.)**

**Sarah Halperin, PitE minor (B.S.)**

**Meredith Witt, PitE minor (B.A.)**

**PitE's Outstanding GSI Award** recognizes the role our graduate student instructors play in providing undergraduates with exceptional learning experiences. This year's recipients are **Brieland Jones and Jessica Wall**.

**PitE's Outstanding Instructor Award** recognizes instructors for their commitment to undergraduate teaching and learning, and demonstrable impact through innovation, creativity, and excellence in the classroom and beyond. This year's recipient is **Dr. Sara Soderstrom**.

**PitE's Outstanding Service Award** recognizes a graduating PitE senior who has dedicated significant service to PitE and the greater U-M community. This year's recipient is **Rebecca Liebschutz**.

### 2015 Graduation Speaker

**Rebekah (Bekah) Kreckman** is graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Environment and specializing in behavior change and environmental communication. She also holds a minor in Plant Biology and a certificate in Sustainability from the Graham Sustainability Institute. Following graduation, she will seek opportunities in organizational development consulting and strategic planning. Bekah is originally from Gladwin, Michigan.

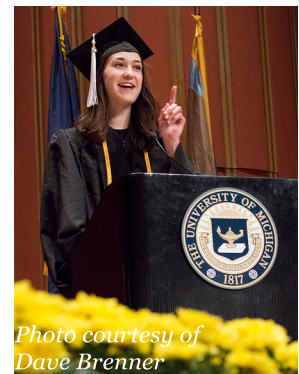


Photo courtesy of Dave Brenner

“Former U-M President Mary Sue Coleman always talked about diversity, but I never truly appreciated it until I examined PitE. Environment students are interested in corporate sustainability, local food systems, conservation psychology, environmental law, nature poetry, ecosystem services, and artful environmental communication. Our diversity strengthens us. It enables us to tackle environmental challenges from all angles. We will not passively sit by, merely watching as the Earth becomes less and less habitable or more cruelly unjust. We chose to be part of a program that promotes action. ■” -Bekah Kreckman, SNRE Commencement Ceremony, May 2, 2015

## Sara Soderstrom, 2015 PitE Outstanding Instructor



“Environmental problems are difficult – there is a lot of ambiguity, complexity, and tension. There’s often not a clear “right” answer. I think it’s really important to help students recognize this and figure out a variety of ways they can build

the critical thinking and analytical skills that will help them navigate their future careers. I also find that addressing environmental challenges often requires teamwork and interdisciplinary approaches. Therefore, I am committed to promoting dialogue, active learning, and team-based problem-solving in the classroom. I believe this helps students recognize and get experience working with others who have different perspectives, skills, and expertise than they do.

I love that most of my classes have students from all different disciplines on campus – social sciences, natural sciences, humanities, engineering, business, policy. This is great because it reflects the interdisciplinary focus of envi-

ronmental studies. But it also means that students often have very different experiences before coming to class. One of my biggest challenges is developing classes, projects, and assignments that integrate all of these experiences, and develop each student’s knowledge and skills, without being repetitive on the one hand or too difficult on the other hand.

I am working on a number of different research projects that I find really exciting. One project explores how sustainable food businesses are launching in Detroit and aiding in city revitalization efforts. Another studies how involvement in community gardens, or in the case of students, the Campus Farm, influences people’s commitment to the environment. A third

project focuses on large businesses, looking at how companies address environmental issues and why, if at all, that changes over time. I love being in PitE because I’ve been able to work with a number of fantastic PitE student researchers to help with these projects. I’m also able to connect what I study in these research projects with what I teach in class. ■”

**“My goal as a professor is to help students consider the different ways they can address environmental issues and help them build the skills and expertise to do that effectively.”**

## Featured Course: Blue is the New Green: Michigan’s Sustainable Economy

By John Austin

*To inspire and engage students in the exciting work of building sustainable communities, enterprises and world, Lecturer John Austin developed the capstone course, Environ 302: Blue is the New Green: Michigan’s Sustainable Economy.*

The course discusses the theory, and illustrates the practice, of how our natural water, land, and food assets – and sustainable practices and enterprises in energy, water, food and transportation systems – grow jobs and supports new economic and community development. This course reviews the history and economic evolution of Michigan and the Great Lakes region and the promise of the coming “green and blue” economy to transform the “Rust Belt” and the factory/industrial models pioneered here, to leadership in the sustainable economy of the future, solving local and global food, water, energy, and mobility challenges. Michigan and Great Lakes firms, communities, leaders, and

**“The course helped me get interested in water issues, and Professor Austin helped me connect with people on next steps after graduation, and how ultimately to do this work back in Michigan.”**

institutions are the case studies and applied learning texts; featuring thought leaders and practitioners to illustrate and educate on key concepts, strategies, and how to engage in this work in Michigan and beyond.

This course was piloted in Winter 2015 for the many undergraduates interested in exploring these social impact fields— from more equitable and sustainable food systems, to clean energy, clean water, and more sustainable and equitable transportation systems. It garnered strong positive feedback from students, who came from several schools across the university. The course helps them understand the economic impact of this work, and learn how to prepare for and connect to work in these fields—whether through business, non-profits, public policy advocacy and leadership, or further education and research. This course helps students better imagine and advance their careers including new ideas of roles they could play right here in Michigan. ■



Photo courtesy Cybelle Codish



## Abrams Environmental Action Challenge

PitE hosts the Abrams Environmental Action Challenge, which is a competition that encourages undergraduates to create an action plan to influence groups of people to promote environmental health and sustainable practices.

The idea for competition came about when Wendy Abrams gave a presentation on campus about environmental advocacy, as part of the PitE Visiting Speaker Series. Inspired by the optimism of the students, Wendy and her husband Jim partnered with PitE to host this competition.

*Pictured: Elizabeth O'Connell, (PitE'14) Abrams Environmental Action Challenge winner in 2014. Libby partnered with U-M Outdoor Adventures to create a bike trailer rental program to enable students living off-campus to safely transport groceries home without using a car.*



## Save the Date: PitE Upcoming Events

*These events are free and open to the public*



### Visiting Speaker: Mayor George Heartwell, Mayor of Grand Rapids

*Thursday, October 1: University of Michigan Rackham Amphitheatre*



### KNOW TOMORROW

*Friday, October 2: The University of Michigan event will be held on Palmer Field. KNOW TOMORROW a positive, upbeat, student-led campaign culminating in a national day of action on October 2, 2015 on college campuses throughout the country. Visit [knowtomorrow.org](http://knowtomorrow.org) for details.*



### Goldring Family Foundation Distinguished Speaker: Josh Fox

*Wednesday, November 11*

Josh Fox is the director and narrator of *Gasland*, which won six major awards at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival, as well as its sequel, *Gasland 2*. Fox's first narrative feature film, *Memorial Day*, was released in 2008. As the founder and artistic director of International WOW Company, Fox has established himself as a significant force in New York theatre. His recent work for the stage includes *Surrender*, an interactive war epic which was nominated for a 2009 Drama Desk Award and AUTO DA FE. The performance premiered in New York and toured to Japan in 2011.