

The Albion Pleiad



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Photos: Chasing Totality, Solar Eclipse Gathers Community

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On April 8, students, faculty, staff and community members gathered on Albion College's quad and the roof of Palenske Hall to view a Solar Eclipse, which last occurred in Aug. of 2017. With much of Michigan on the cusp of totality, the physics department organized viewing spaces for the campus and community.

Physics Professor and Department Chair Nicolle Zellner helped organize the eclipse viewings and helped viewers understand what they would see.

"When the disc of the sun is blocked out, you can actually see the solar corona – which is a very high energy region of the sun that is not normally visible," Zellner said. "You can only see the solar corona in areas with full totality, which will come out in big waves around the shadow of the moon over the face of the sun."

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The eclipse at almost full totality visible from the quad (Photo courtesy of Bryn Osborne).



Left: A grandma and grandson observe the eclipse after totality on Palenske's roof (Photo by Katherine Simpkins).

Right: Kalamazoo junior Kearney Miller smiles at the eclipse at its middle crescent (Photo by Bella Bakeman).



A student attempts to take a photo of the eclipse through eclipse glasses on Palenske's roof beside a telescope (Photo by Katherine Simpkins).



Groups of students stand to the right of the Honors Conservatory at the peak totality of the eclipse. Eclipse glasses were provided for free by the college (Photos by Bella Bakeman).



Professors past and present view the eclipse on Albion's quad (Photos by Bella Bakeman).



Three students look up at the beginning of the eclipse with smiles on their faces (Photo by Bella Bakeman).

Exploring Environmental Justice and Joy at Albion College



Black Environmentalism students jump outside of Olin Hall. Every semester, students participate in educational activities aimed at broadening their understanding of the Black Environmentalism movement (Photo courtesy of Nels Christensen).

Killian Altayeb
News/Sports Editor

Since its introduction to the course catalog two years ago, Albion College's Black Environmentalism course has grown in a variety of ways. Defined in the catalog as "an interdisciplinary exploration of past and present relationships between Black folks and the land," the course analyzes differences between forms of environmentalism.

According to Detroit senior DJ Murray, "Environmentalism in itself has been a movement that's dominated by predominantly white people. People of color's voices have been

minimized and pushed out."

Associate English Professor Nels Christensen said he was inspired to teach the course after learning about controversies within the environmental movement, acknowledging the juxtaposition of identifying as a white male while teaching a class centered around Black environmentalism.

"It sounds weird because it's weird for like a white person to be like, 'I'm gonna teach you about your culture of Black people,'" Christensen said. "That is super problematic in all kinds of ways."

Christensen said he aspires to provide historical insight to his students rather than

teaching them from a lecture hall.

Albion senior Madison Davis said the course is meant to be interactive and includes activities with bird flash cards, discussions about Black environmentalists and poetry readings such as Drew Lanham's "Sparrow Envy." The readings themselves are specifically chosen to include topics about the environment.

"All of the readings are from people of color – once again, trying to get those voices heard and out there," Murray said.

In addition to course readings, the class meets every Friday at the Whitehouse Nature Center (WNC). According to Albion College's website, the nature center is meant "to stimulate awareness and understanding of our natural environments."

Echoing that sentiment, sophomore Gray Willig from Winona Lake, Ind., said that the lessons held at the nature center are what make the class feel more hands-on. They added that when they go to the WNC, Christensen will show them "actual live birds" and "different kinds of plants" that they talk about in class.

In addition to readings and discussions, students were taught to identify birds in the surrounding Albion area. Christensen said he chose this kind of engagement over reading a textbook for a specific reason.

"In the end, if you can learn how to identify ten birds, you're basically learning how to pay attention to the world in a certain kind of way, and that skill can be translated into anything," Christensen said.

Alongside interactive activities, the course tackles issues such as racism and class. Murray said that, unlike other environmental-based courses, Black Environmentalism allows students to gain knowledge from different perspectives.

"As a white person, my goal a lot of the time is just to gain a better understanding and a better perspective," Davis said. "I feel like this class has helped me do that in a lot of ways."

Despite teaching the class, Christensen said he finds himself in the position of a student at times.

"I'm inspired to do right by these students in a way that feels different to me than in my other classes. I'm pushing my boundaries and talking about really serious stuff, but in a way that is joyful," Christensen said.

Continued on back.



Christensen and his students stand in the WNC. Christensen said he tailors the curriculum to suit an outdoor environment, frequently pausing along trails to deliver lessons (Photo by Jake Ellsworth).

Environmental Justice and Joy



Kunkel watches Christensen run with a tree branch in an effort to swing on it. Redneck Environmentalism, last taught in fall of 2022, takes place outside in the WNC rather than in a classroom (Photo by Katherine Simpkins).

Continued from front.

The deeper meanings found in the Black Environmentalism course are also emphasized by Christensen in ENGL 159, better known as Redneck Environmentalism.

Christensen, who regards both classes as interconnected, said that he began the course to aid students in challenging the narrative surrounding white environmentalism.

“When we hear redneck, we hear racist, right? In that class, we just address that right on,” Christensen said. “If we could basically say all these folks who are farm kids, ranch kids and hunter types are actually already environmentalists and that they could shift their kind of thinking to think about like conservation and protection of the natural world, how amazing would that be?”

Eaton Rapids junior Riley Kunkel, who took Redneck Environmentalism last year, said he found the journaling activities in the class interesting.

“At least once a week, we’d go out to the nature center and just sit there and document what we were feeling,” Kunkel said. “Then we’d just read it and by the semester we all had something super beautiful written that we were proud of because there’s that connection with nature that you often overlook.”

“I’m inspired to do right by these students in a way that feels different to me.”

In addition to reading books from authors like bell hooks, the class focuses on intersectional environmentalism. Kunkel defined the term as “the intersection between environmentalism and social issues such as race, gender and sexuality.”

Kunkel added that it helped him tie together the effects of climate change and systematic oppression.

“Part of moving forward is liberating these groups from their oppressive states that they’ve been systemically put in by white people,” Kunkel said, adding that it’s “a great class and a great learning experience. At the end of the day, I think everybody takes away a lot from one another.”



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Albion Athletics in The Field of Sustainability

Bonnie Lord
Managing Editor

Athletics – like any other industry that generates waste and uses land – impacts the environment.

In a 2022 study published in the Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, researchers measured the carbon footprint of individual pieces of equipment, sporting events and maintenance of facilities across several sports. According to the EPA’s Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator, the study’s findings of the carbon footprint of one U.S. Division I team football season is comparable to burning more than 42 million pounds of coal.

Albion College sports roughly 24 teams within its athletics department, across various facilities.

According to Director of Grounds John Hibbs, the Grounds department oversees all outdoor sports facilities at the college.

For synthetic turf fields like the lacrosse/soccer and the football fields, Hibbs said maintaining them includes redistributing rubber granules, picking up debris and re-fastening loose turf with epoxy.

“That’s one of the benefits of those, is there’s not a lot of maintenance that goes into it,” Hibbs said.

However, according to the Green Building Alliance (GBA), turf can come with several environmental risks. These include microplastic pollution via the migration of rubber pellets, the loss of plant matter which contributes to the urban heat effect, the loss of potential carbon capture by a natural field and the waste generated from replacing the field – usually committed to landfills.

“Do we have waste? Of course we do, I’d say it’s impossible to exist in this world and not have it.”

“(Turf fields) generally last anywhere from eight to 12 years, around 10 years is generally the average lifespan of a synthetic turf field,” Hibbs said.

Hibbs added that the reason turf needs to be replaced over time has to do with safety as well as aesthetics. If the rubber pellets become too compacted, for instance, the field can be unsafe to use. He said replacement is also necessary if the turf is too labor-intensive to repair, falling apart or if the colors are fading.

“It’s mainly a visual thing, but you kinda know when it’s time,” Hibbs said. “When you get to this level in your athletic career, these fields need to be maintained very highly.”

Though artificial turf does come with some environmental risks, minimal maintenance has its benefits. According to U.S. Turf San Diego, artificial turf can reduce the need for water, air-polluting equipment and chemical products like herbicides.

In addition, natural grass fields also have maintenance related environmental impacts.



The author, Alma sophomore Bonnie Lord, lets rubber pellets from the synthetic turf of the Sprinkle-Sprandel Football Stadium fall from her hand. According to the GBA, synthetic turf requires less maintenance than a natural grass field, but the pellets can pollute the outside environment if they migrate (Photo illustration by Bonnie Lord).

For the natural grass fields, Hibbs said they are mowed regularly, “sometimes multiple times a week,” especially during the playing season. This level of maintenance, Hibbs said, upholds quality and safety standards expected of a professional field.

To irrigate the fields, Hibbs said water is pumped from the Kalamazoo River. In an email sent on April 2, Hibbs added that while the system can draw more water, Grounds does not use more than 1.5 million gallons per season, the baseline which would require reporting exact amounts per month to the state.

“They are fertilized, we do weed control, so we basically do everything that is required to make it as pristine as possible,” Hibbs said.

When fertilizers are spread on fields, nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus can run off with rain into larger bodies of water. This nutrient overload can trigger overgrowth of algae, deplete ecosystems of oxygen and ultimately create dead zones.

The EPA defines nutrient pollution as “one of the most widespread and challenging environmental problems faced by our nation.”

Hibbs said Grounds is “cognizant” of these risks.

“We are very careful not to over-irrigate, we are very careful to use our fertilizers at the lowest recommended rates,” Hibbs said. “We do the absolute minimum to provide the best quality product.”

In terms of what could be improved on by those attending games, Hibbs said less littering during sporting events would be appreciated.

“That’s something we spend quite a lot of time after an event, doing the clean-up, and I know what the reality is,” Hibbs said.

Another aspect of sustainability is managing team equipment waste. Interim Athletic Director and Associate Athletic Director Eric Scott said the department looks for ways to offset the waste generated by teams.

“Do we have waste? Of course we do, I’d say it’s impossible to exist in this world

and not have it,” Scott said. “But, I do believe we’re cognizant of anything we can do.”

Scott added that there is an effort across the department to donate, gift or otherwise “find a space for our old equipment to go somewhere else instead of just dumping it in the dumpster.”

For example, Scott said old uniforms are often framed and given as senior gifts rather than thrown away when they are replaced.

Though teams can find avenues to reduce the impact of equipment turnover, Scott added that there are no effective alternatives with transportation. To get 20-40 people to a game in another school, Scott said the only real option is charter buses.

“There are no electric vehicles for us to not do that,” Scott said. “I have to believe at some point, probably in your lifetime, not mine, we’ll have some sort of electric charter option.”

At Albion College, Scott said “a more clear plan on what we’re doing sustainability wise” would better inform the community, campus and the athletics department on what steps to take.

“We may be doing things, but I don’t think the campus community knows what we’re doing,” Scott said. “That would help us, as a campus, to look at where we could improve to help that initiative”

According to Scott, the athletic department is “taskmasters, if you just tell us what to do, we’ll do it.”

Personally, Scott said he considers sustainability in several aspects of life, noting the threat of population growth, the importance of supporting local, sustainably sourced goods and holding industries accountable for their impacts.

“There are a lot of things that factor into what humans call sustainability. Do humans need to be better? Yes. Do companies need to be better at how they produce and spend? Yes,” Scott said. “It’s everybody doing their part.”

Juandering Out Loud: What to do at the End of the World



A portrait of the author, Dallas senior Juan G. Rodriguez, displays himself as a Solarpunk character wearing his cowboy hat. Rodriguez wears the hat to block out the sun while working outdoors, something he’s used to doing and what he imagines himself doing in a Solarpunk future (Illustration by Naima Davenport).

Juan G. Rodriguez
Features/Opinions Editor

I’ve grown more social these past few years of college. I’ve come out of my shell and grasped the simple truth that this part of my life won’t last forever. What comes after this semester terrifies me – everything’s only worsened by the looming election.

Nov.’s going to be a unique sort of hell without anyone nearby to air my frustrations out with; I’m desperately searching for some relief. My neck nearly snaps as I turn to face

any potential reality where I’m not left to face my nightmares alone.

My eyes eventually find rest in the future Solarpunk offers. For the first time in months, I find myself able to dream.

When I first encountered Solarpunk, I didn’t give it much thought past the pretty visuals. I was in a dark place in my life when I found it, the lead-up to the 2020 election. I didn’t have the energy to imagine a better world when all my attention was focused on enduring whatever the political system threw at me.

At present, I’ve got a better grasp on the term.

As a literary movement, Solarpunk is fundamentally defined by hope and optimism. Instead of envisioning a dystopian future a-la-Cyberpunk, where capitalism and corporations run the working class ragged, Solarpunk imagines a utopian future where humanity and nature both flourish as a result of the mutualistic relationship that’s been established.

It’s difficult to imagine a utopia when all you know is dystopia, though.

When you belong to the working class, dreaming is a luxury you can’t often afford. It’s difficult to save up for it, even if you put away your pennies in a rainy day fund; caught between two late-night shifts that run longer than eight hours, there’s barely enough time left for sleeping. If you try to live your life, spend time with friends and family, you’re only gonna manage a handful of hours if schedules happen to align.

Your time is simply not your own; it belongs to your employer if you want to put food on the table and keep a roof over your head. It’s a hostage situation, the threat of

suffering perpetually pressed to our heads no matter what we do.

We deserve better than this; our life was not meant to be spent toiling away for a job that doesn’t pay a livable wage in this economy.

“Solarpunk isn’t just a dream anymore; it’s the only future that matters to me.”

Actually, why even include the modifier? Our life was not meant to be spent toiling away, period. We shouldn’t have to pay for the luxury of living on the planet we were born on.

That’s the first thing I realized when I finally reencountered Solarpunk these past few months of 2024. It quickly became clear to me that the future I’d been thinking about for so long had a name.

Since I got to college, I finally found myself able to save up for a dream. All I’ve thought about since was how I just want to live my life, do something meaningful and spend my days with people I know and appreciate.

I don’t just intend to exist on this planet; I intend to enjoy my time on it. My days are numbered, and I intend to make the most of each of them.

Solarpunk isn’t just a dream anymore; it’s the only future that matters to me.

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