

Connecticut College Arboretum

Public Education Policy

The Connecticut College Arboretum Mission Statement specifies seven topics or areas of activity: Teaching, Research, Conservation, Plant Collections, Cultural Resource Stewardship, Public Education and Recreation. Policies provide history, context, management guidance and goals for Arboretum staff, College community and others. The portion of the mission related to public education is:

“To provide programs and publications about conservation, horticulture, gardening, botany and natural history that enhance people’s understanding of the natural world and foster an understanding of the Arboretum’s mission.”

An active, year-round public education program began in 1989, the first year the Arboretum Director position became a full time administrative staff position at Connecticut College. Prior to that year the Director was a faculty member in the botany department who was given one course remission per year to administer the Arboretum, and the small staff was occupied primarily with landscape and greenhouse maintenance. In the early years there were occasional conferences, lectures and regular guided tours of collections and natural areas, but the most significant public education and outreach tool was the Arboretum Bulletin series.

Historically, the Thames Science Center (later called the Science Center of Eastern Connecticut and finally the DNA Epicenter), an independent, non-profit organization, was based in 33 Gallows Lane in the Arboretum, thanks mainly to the efforts of past Arboretum Director Richard Goodwin. The original iteration of the science center provided community educational programs on the natural history of the Arboretum and the greater region. This role was lost overtime as the name, leadership and focus changed, the organization was dissolved and the building reverted to Connecticut College. This was a major loss for the Arboretum, and it led to a greater role in public education for Arboretum staff and volunteers.

This Public Education Policy describes the audiences, communication channels and goals of programs and publications offered by the Arboretum. It ensures that the public education programs are supportive, meaningful and relevant to the Arboretum mission. This policy is restricted to public education because other policies address support of college teaching and research.

AUDIENCES

The Arboretum is owned by Connecticut College and operated for the benefit of the College and the community. A primary audience of the Arboretum is College students, faculty and staff.

Additional audience constituents include landscape architects and designers, professional landscapers, gardeners, environmental professionals, foresters, wetlands scientists, artists, photographers, teachers and educators, and the local community.

To expand our reach to a broader and more diverse audience, the Arboretum seeks partnerships with like-minded professional and community organizations that have complementary programs and resources to achieve mutually beneficial goals. Past and future partner organizations include: New Directions in the American Landscape, Ecological Landscape Alliance, National Organic Farming Association, American Society of Landscape Architects, Society for Ecological Restoration, Connecticut Tree Wardens, Connecticut Tree Protective Association, Connecticut Forest & Park Association, Connecticut Master Gardeners, Connecticut Land Trust Alliance, Connecticut DEEP, Wild Ones and others.

Community organizations include: garden clubs, senior centers, museums, libraries, nature centers and other local non-profit organizations.

COMMUNICATION

The Arboretum utilizes multiple channels of communication to reach the intended audiences.

The communication program includes the following:

- a. Send monthly updates and seasonal program information listing courses, times, instructors, meeting locations, fees and descriptions to Arboretum members and the college community.
- b. Regularly update the College website, Facebook, Instagram, online community events calendars and other social media sources to communicate current educational programs, events, plant highlights, information and resources.
- c. Install informational flyers describing educational programs in kiosks at entryways to the Native Plant Collection and Caroline Black Garden and bulletin boards on campus. Send to local libraries, museums and downtown New London establishments.
- d. Collaborate with College faculty and staff to develop Arboretum based content for website, print media and other communication outlets.
- e. Utilize the Arboretum Bulletin series as a way to communicate about research done in the Arboretum, and other appropriate topics related to the mission, to non-professional audiences.
- f. Update and add to informational brochures and map catalog.
- g. Summarize Arboretum activities and accomplishments in attractively designed annual reports.
- h. Explore options to reduce paper based communications with digital forms.

GOALS

1. Make use of the Arboretum plant collections and natural areas and the information that has been generated about them as a cornerstone of the education program.
 - a. Develop programs from content in Arboretum databases, maps, records and human experience regarding plants, animals, ecology and landscape management.
 - b. Create engaging tours, classes, workshops and talks that propagate interest in and understanding of the natural world.
 - c. Expand the number of specialized collection programs and tours. Use knowledgeable Arboretum staff, College faculty and volunteer docents to lead collection tours.
 - d. Promote conservation of regionally native plants and plant communities. Promote the landscape use of native plants.
 - e. Increase the number of “display” labels on plant specimens (with common name and other information).
 - f. Consider creating a Native Plants or Naturalist or Ecological Landscaping certificate program (adult education).
 - g. Develop an outdoor interpretive signage program that offers more than plant names in both collections and natural areas.

2. Engage Connecticut College students with the Arboretum mission and resources in multiple ways.
 - a. Increase outreach to faculty to encourage them to make greater use of the Arboretum in their teaching and research.
 - b. Support a small student committee to advise Arboretum staff on methods of communication and types of programs for students and to help identify classes that might benefit from an Arboretum component.
 - c. Create paid, class credit or volunteer internships for students to learn about collection curation, environmental education, land management, etc.
 - d. Create programs targeted at College students such as walks, workshops, field trips, volunteer opportunities, etc. that encourage student involvement with the Arboretum.
 - e. Help Connecticut College students be more effective teachers of young people through training and mentoring in ArboProject. ArboProject is a program that trains Connecticut College students to lead environmental education tours in the Native Plant Collection.
 - f. Enlist Connecticut College students to modify existing college course labs that utilized the Arboretum to be appropriate curriculum for students in lower grades.

3. Enrich the content of Arboretum educational materials publically available on the College website and other electronic media sources.

- a. Make all Arboretum printed materials such as bulletins, annual reports, brochures and research papers available on the internet.
- b. Build upon publicly accessible database of historic photographs and plant images. Provide specific and descriptive data including metadata tags so that the information is publically findable.
- c. Maintain and improve the web-based interactive plant collections map application that allows anyone to locate collection specimens.
- d. Keep up to date with new electronic media tools to provide more information to Arboretum visitors both in person and virtually.