

Presenter: Dr. Melissa Hinten

The first awards we'll be giving out tonight are our **Student Environmental Leadership Awards**. The first award is presented to students who demonstrate exceptional leadership in **academics**.

David Holdridge

David is a senior in the Forestry: Restoration and Conservation Forestry Program, and has been named Distinguished Military Graduate through the Army ROTC, and is currently conducting undergraduate research in ecosystem restoration. This past year he developed a proposal to test the use of organic waste from the palm oil industry as a soil amendment so that this land could be used for agriculture. His proposal won him a spot as a semi-finalist in the Fulbright Scholarship program to travel to Indonesia to conduct his research.

Mary Grace Graddy

Mary Grace is majoring in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, with a minor in Social Entrepreneurship. She conducts independent research in an animal sickness behavior laboratory. Her research in other areas studies biodiversity and its susceptibility to climate change.

Julia Craven

Julia is in the College Scholars Program, focusing on a curriculum in sustainability, including engineering and many other difficult classes. She is extremely active in sustainability issues all over campus, including Plastic Free UT, composting, and SGA.

Reshma Nair Mini Ravie

Reshma is doing research on climate change, most specifically in how heat stress is affecting livestock production.

Madison Johnson

Maddy is a first year Ph.D. student in the Biosystems Engineering and Soil Science Department. Her research examines how riparian buffer protection and restoration can improve water quality and aquatic habitat in streams. She developed a watershed prioritization tool to help municipal governments and state agencies identify where to best focus resources for restoration projects or protection efforts.

Luke Cornelius

Luke created the Sustainable Business Organization as part of his academic pursuits here at UTK. He has been successful in his efforts to motivate business students to use what they have learned in the classroom and apply that knowledge to real-world problems here at UTK and in the broader community. He has worked with a variety of professors and staff members to analyze their practices in order to improve their processes and make them more sustainable.

AND THE WINNER IS: MARY GARCE GRADDY. Congratulations, Mary Grace.

Mary-Grace is ever-curious about the organisms and organic processes with which humans share the earth, seeking to learn more about how these vital components of our environment are affected by climate change, and how we may be able to preserve them. With a major in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, complemented by a minor in Social Entrepreneurship, she has interwoven her academic pursuits with hands-on research experiences that illuminate the urgent need for climate change mitigation. Her dedication to environmental sustainability is well-documented. For the past 3 years, Mary Grace has been a research assistant in a fungal systemics lab, contributing to co-authorships in two publications. In conjunction with this work, she conducts independent research in an animal sickness behavior laboratory, and she also collects and identifies bryophytes for a PhD candidate's study on parent-offspring conflict in mosses. Her research studies the intricacies of biodiversity and its susceptibility to climate change. Mary Grace has a passion for the natural world; she has emerged as a proactive advocate for sustainable practices, and has developed a desire to determine what can be done to maintain vulnerable species and habitats as temperatures rise and viable conditions decline. Recognizing the pressing issue of automobile pollutants in Knox County, she undertook a comprehensive analysis as part of her Principles of Sustainability course, culminating in a 24-page paper on enhancing public transportation services in Knoxville. Through interviews with houseless individuals, surveys given to college students, and collaboration with the UTK Parking and Transit Office, she gathered community-driven, inclusive insights to promote KAT bus ridership. Mary Grace's dedication to environmental and sustainability causes makes her an inspiration to us all.