

# Conway School



Members of the Conway School of Landscape Design's 2013 class respond during opening remarks made by school director Paul Hellmund at Saturday's graduation ceremony held at the school. Hellmund told this year's graduating class that, despite climate change and other sobering factors, there are many reasons to be hopeful. "Hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up," Hellmund said, rolling up his own shirtsleeves.



Abrah Dresdale, Conway School of Landscape Design 2010 alumn and coordinator of GCC's Farm and Food Systems Program, accepts a pineapple given to her by school director Paul Hellmund at the class of 2013 graduation held Saturday. The pineapple was a token of the David Bird International Service Fellowship awarded to Dresdale, that will allow her to travel to India to continue her work in educational programming for sustainable communities.

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CONWAY — “How can we meet the needs of human communities while improving the ecological integrity of the surrounding ecosystem?” asks Dr. Darron Collins, ethnobotanist, conservationist, and human ecologist, and president of the College of the Atlantic (COA), in Bar Harbor, Maine.

Collins will explore this question as commencement speaker at the Conway School’s 41st graduation on Saturday. On that day, the 18 members of the class of 2013 will present each other with a Master of Arts diploma from the 10-month graduate program in sustainable landscape planning and design.

“By inviting Darron Collins to speak, we not only acknowledge his remarkable work in wildlife conservation and whole systems thinking,” said Conway School President Paul Cawood Hellmund. “We also recognize the similar missions of our two educational institutions.”

Both schools were founded four decades ago by educators who believed an interdisciplinary curriculum focused on issues of environmental health and human ecology would graduate the kind of highly motivated, independent problem solvers the world needs.

A graduate of COA, Collins went on to receive a Ph.D. from Tulane University in ethnobotany before becoming director of creative assets at the World Wildlife Fund. He has also researched the Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico and has worked on leopard conservation on the Russia-North Korean border. His commencement address, “In the Weeds: Not Necessarily a Bad Thing,” will focus on the power of learning by doing.

Abrah Dresdale, a 2010 graduate and the coordinator of the Farm and Food Systems program at Greenfield Community College, will be awarded the David Bird International Service Fellowship for 2013. Dresdale will travel to India in collaboration with Living Routes, a program that provides integrative educational programs within sustainable communities. The six-week David Bird Fellowship was established to honor the first chair of the school’s board of trustees and long time friend and supporter of the school.

Conway's program in sustainable landscape planning and design prepares graduate students to be leaders in the fields of ecological restoration, conservation planning, and regenerative design.

The curriculum is structured around planning and design projects which the school provides for individuals, communities, and nonprofit organizations in western Massachusetts and beyond. Projects focus on food security, community resilience, and reducing human impact on natural resources through conscious design.

The Conway School's new Sustainable Communities Initiative, which provides project support to communities with pressing design and planning issues, focused on Brattleboro and Windham County this year. Students completed a regional study of forest ecology and economy, cultural assets mapping of Brattleboro, and a village center plan for Irene-ravaged Wilmington. Kimberly Smith, a Westminster native, was the Windham Fellow at the Conway School in 2013.

Other community-scale projects completed by student teams this year included open space and conservation planning in Concord, Lenox and Scituate; a master plan for Woolman Hill in Deerfield, a food security plan for Lowell as well as site plans for the Farm School in Athol and Open View Farm in Conway. Housing studies included a feasibility study for senior housing in Chesterfield, and a site management plan for Hildreth Hills condominiums in Westford. Site master plans for the UMass Five College Credit Union headquarters in Hadley and the Nipmuc Tribal Center in West Brookfield completed the team projects.