Aiken Solarium Upgrades

Interns: Emet Koffman and Patrick Heaton

The Aiken Center solarium is the heart and soul of the Rubenstein School. The solarium brings joy to those who visit, provides an excellent place to study, and is overall a great spot to relax, take a deep breath, and refocus.

This semester Emet Koffman and Patrick Heaton, two first-year Environmental Sciences students, are working in the Greening of Rubenstein Interns class (ENSC 185) with Gary Hawley to improve upon the wonderful space in the Aiken solarium. Our goal is to make the space look more inviting and welcoming. We will be doing this in a variety of ways, including adding banners to the far corner to give the area more color and warmth. Numerous designs have been drawn up, taking into consideration the colors and themes of the Aiken Center as a whole. Earthy greens and blues will hang from the ceiling, continuing the connection between the earth and the sky that is present throughout the hallways of the Aiken Center. The banners themselves are in the process of being created and hung up. We hope the completion of this project will create a better working environment and overall better atmosphere for the solarium.

We will also be revamping the plants that are present in the beds throughout the room. We took soil samples from the plots a couple of weeks ago to see if the soil was lacking in any nutrients. Once we get the results back, we will be making improvements, so that the gardens will be functioning at their full capacity. We will also be taking out plant species that are lacking vigor and replacing them with healthier plants. This allows the space to look livelier, and it will also improve the overall health of the solarium ecosystem. We will replace some plants with more colorful ones to once again improve the atmosphere of the space.

On the more technological side, we are looking at the efficiency of the lights and the windows. The heating of the solarium is kept purposefully low because it naturally gets very warm when it is sunny. The windows along the top and the bottom of the south-facing wall are set to open if the room gets too hot, and we will be double checking them to make sure they are on the correct setting and won’t open when it is too cold out. Having the windows open when it is cold out would be wasting energy while heating the space. Being aware of this issue will allow us to save energy and keep the plants and the people from freezing.

We would love for you to stop by the solarium and check out our work! Also, there is a fantastic presentation in there currently for Black History Month that you should definitely take a look at if you have not done so already. The solarium is a truly inspiring area, and we hope you enjoy the upcoming progress for this exciting space.