



THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
GUND INSTITUTE
FOR ENVIRONMENT

2020 -> 2021

January 25, 2021

Dear Gund Community,

How different the world is as 2021 begins, compared to the beginning of 2020. A global pandemic, a national reckoning with racism and justice, and a year of political chaos. Together, these crises have upended our lives, and 2020 has been a year of frustration, anxiety, and sadness. I have been thinking about the Gund Institute community, missing seeing everyone in person, and hoping that people are doing OK.

2020 challenged the Gund Institute too. After all, our role is to convene people, and we've had to completely rethink how we do that in a socially-distant world. We are also confronting our own roles and biases in perpetuating racism and inequality, and recognizing the work still needed to build a more diverse and inclusive institute.

All this disruption, however, has not changed the importance of our mission: mobilizing scholars and leaders to understand and solve the world's critical environmental issues. In fact, the crises of 2020 only make our work more crucial than ever. The links between nature and human health, the need for resilient and just communities, the importance of a regenerative food system, the unequal impacts of climate change, and the importance of linking science and policy. All were brought into sharper relief in 2020.

I am proud of what our community accomplished amid the disruption and unease of 2020. Among many other examples, we held an online [COVID-19 panel](#) and awarded [six rapid grants](#) for research related to the pandemic. We used our new [MacMillan Scholars](#) program to engage [Carolyn Finney](#) and [Michael Dorsey](#) in discussions and trainings on justice and diversity. Gund scholars produced important and timely work on the links between COVID-19 and [food security](#), [fisheries](#), and [visits to nature](#). We committed to five immediate improvements in diversity and inclusion, and are prioritizing other ideas with a re-energized and larger DEI committee. We recruited five outstanding [students and postdocs](#) from around the world, and are catalyzing [four new UVM-wide research projects](#).

As I reflect on all this, I'm grateful for the community we have built together and what it has allowed us to achieve despite, and in response to, an historically difficult time. Gund Fellows, Students, Postdocs, and Affiliates continue to conduct creative, transdisciplinary research that impacts the world. Our small but mighty [leadership team](#) continues to keep the Gund moving, connected, and heard. We'll keep experimenting with new ways of collaborating and supporting each other as 2021 unfolds.

Although all three crises have continued into 2021, for the first time in a year the horizon is noticeably brighter. Vaccinations are beginning, new leaders are in place, and we are having the most extended and widespread discussion on racism and social justice in my lifetime. This all gives me optimism and hope.

Here at the Gund, we are heading full speed into 2021. You'll be hearing details soon in our Spring semester welcome back email, but here are a few highlights. The winner of the inaugural [Eric Zencey Prize](#) in Ecological Economics, Bathsheba Demuth, will speak about her winning [book](#). Carolyn Finney will be back within another diversity workshop, this time focused on faculty. There will be a full slate of Friday [GundxChange](#) talks, which have nearly doubled in attendance since going virtual ([watch last semester's talks here](#)). We are planning another online research exchange, like our [COVID-19 panel](#). And our 'Culture Club' will be developing new ways to gather and connect as the weather warms and the pandemic allows.

I can't wait until Farrell Hall is full and noisy again, and we can get back to collaborating in person. I'm confident that will happen in 2021. In the meantime, we'll keep being the Gund Institute. As always, let us know how we can do that better.

All the best, and happy new year.

Taylor Ricketts

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