

Wellesley College Botanic Gardens



2024 APGA IDEA Report

By WCBG staff and student team

Introduction: Joining the APGA IDEA cohort

The Wellesley College Botanic Gardens (WCBG) team joined the APGA IDEA cohort in May 2023, in the midst of ongoing work toward centering IDEA (inclusion, diversity, equity, accessibility) values in all aspects of garden operations, and aligning with a 2021 strategic plan from our parent institution (Wellesley College). We had general goals and lots of ideas from both staff and students, and a need to coalesce as a team around concrete actions, specific language for our vision and goals, and feasible priorities.

The APGA IDEA cohort program provided an exceptionally helpful structured learning opportunity and resources for our team to increase our understanding of core goals and concepts (such as “what does decolonization mean?”, “what does justice-centered mean?”), and to build networks and learn from experiences of other public gardens pursuing similar goals. The focused one-year program enabled us to keep momentum on IDEA work amidst many challenges (e.g. pandemic recovery, major capital projects and construction, staffing changes, etc.), including setting aside committed time to continue learning, reflecting on our process and progress, and developing a concrete next step: a community survey and focus groups, co-led by students and staff, with a goal of creating an updated mission and goals to launch at our 2025 Centennial.

This report is organized into two main sections:

- **Section 1: Pre-work & Helpful Resources:** Reflections on processes leading up to our cohort project, including questions and resources we found helpful to explore
- **Section 2: Cohort project:** Our WCBG Mission survey and focus group outcomes

Section 1
Pre-work &
Helpful Resources

Pre-work: Defining diversity

What does “diversity” mean to us? WCBG staff and students began engaging with what it means for us to be a public garden in the U.S., through a lens of intersectional justice. An important initial focus was racial diversity and antiracism in the gardens.

The WCBG staff shared a statement in Fall 2020 ([WCBG Friends newsletter](#), page 5), expressing specific desires to help address racial injustice in the fields of botany, ecology and horticulture, and to begin to address the harms of colonial history and white/Euro-centrism in botanical gardens. At that time, all of WCBG’s permanent staff were white, and the collective statement reflected a desire to confront racial bias and injustice, beginning with a focus on self-education, without deterring WCBG’s (predominantly older and white) existing public audience and Friends/donors.

By contrast, Wellesley College students working with WCBG (as interns, work-study students, fellows, or leaders of campus affinity groups) were majority young students of color, with strong interest and enthusiasm around engaging with topics of antiracism, environmental justice and intersectionality. To work toward centering students’ perspectives, and co-creating efforts toward better inclusion with students, staff began asking questions around these topics, including updating interview questions for students who applied to work with WCBG, e.g.: “What does inclusion mean to you, when thinking about working with gardens/plants?”, “How might antiracism or decolonization relate to your work at WCBG?” or “What is most meaningful to you about a (botanic) garden on campus - what are you most excited to learn or do here?”

When examining issues of racial diversity, equity, and inclusion in public gardens, our team found some of the following approaches and resources helpful (**links are in bold**):

- Sharing personal experiences: e.g. experiencing the lack of racial diversity at ecology or garden-related conferences, in classes, neighborhoods, and at botanic gardens; experiencing microaggressions, not being treated as belonging or having credibility, experiencing harmful or off-putting language, and having views, values, or aesthetics outside of Eurocentric cultural and historical frameworks dismissed or devalued.
- **Dorceta Taylor** (speaker and workshop) on racial inequity in environmental non-profits
- **Carolyn Finney's talk** with NYBG sparked conversations about systemic and structural barriers to a sense of belonging in the outdoors, including the history and impacts of colonial and racist policies in outdoor recreation and national parks, and the rise of “white environmentalism” in contrast to Indigenous environmental justice
- Addressing harmful botanical names, and choosing to use common names that are least likely to cause harm (e.g. saying “round-leaved bittersweet” rather than “Oriental bittersweet”; using the accepted “spongy moth” rather than the offensive “gypsy moth”; replacing the name of the popular Tradescantia houseplant “Wandering Jew” with “wandering dude”), and learning about the process of naming and advocating for changing Latin names with harmful terms (examples **here** and **here** and **here**)
- Learning about the rise of “**invasive**” species biology and policy frameworks, in the historical context of xenophobia that resulted in militaristic, problematic language and management approaches. (Look for Dr. Banu Subramaniam’s work on this topic.)

WCBG students, WCBG staff, and other environmentally-focused staff and faculty collaborators co-led pilot programs, course collaborations, and events to engage with ways that WCBG can intersect with environmental justice work, for example:

- Launching a team of “Antiracism Ambassadors” across campus environmental groups, with a goal of creating an educational affinity space for students of color interested in environmental justice. This effort included the Paulson Ecology of Place Initiative, Frost Center for the Environment, Environmental Studies, Office of Sustainability, and Office of Intercultural Education. Students renamed this group the **Students for Intersectional Environmental Justice** and engaged with resources such as **All We Can Save circles** and the **Dreamspace Workbook for Public Gardens**, e.g. examining WCBG’s location and audience, pages 28-32 “Let’s Take a Walk”
- A WCBG student-led (staff-advised) biweekly Zoom discussion group open to the campus community, “**WCBG Grassroots: Sowing Anti-racist seeds for a more Equitable Outdoors**”
- A reading group co-created with Paulson staff, called “**Creating Sense of Place: Antiracism, Nature, and the Environment**, cross-listed by Environmental Studies and Peace & Justice Studies
- Paid participation in the campus’ “21 Days Against Racism” program launched by the Office of Intercultural Education, and additional similar initiatives by other campus groups throughout the year
- Collaborative exhibits, class sessions with faculty, and invited speakers, examining colonial history and contemporary impacts, including with speakers and faculty such as:
Dr. **Kathleen Gutierrez** , **Mardi Fuller** , **Ashanti Shih** (who developed WCBG’s ongoing “**Botany and Empire**” exhibit in the Global Flora conservatory), **Xan Chacko**, **Banu Subramaniam**, **Melissa Nelson**, **Tracy Qiu**, **Kristen Wyman**

Photos below: student-led programs that promoted inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility, as well as photos of WCBG’s student team and campus collaborators.

WELLESLEY COLLEGE BOTANIC GARDENS PRESENTS:

EVOLUTION OF LOVE

2024 ANNUAL LIGHTSHOW



COMING SOON



Student-led fun, programming and art!

JOIN THE BOTANISTAS AND JAPAN CLUB FOR:

Hanami

A Flower Viewing Picnic

Join us in viewing the beautiful spring flowers in the Arboretum and learning about the cultural significance of Hanami! We will provide snacks, including sushi, Dagashi, and more!

Friday, 4/28
3-4pm
The Arboretum
(meet at Paramerium Pond)

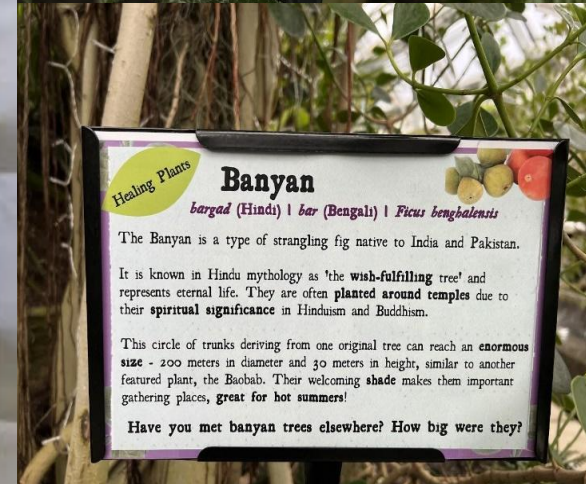


Nature does not hurry
yet everything is accomplished.

The Botanistas invite you to
Explore the Traditions of Islamic Paradise Gardens
with Chaghalah Imam (Jama'at)

Saturday
May 11, 2024
10 AM - 12 PM
100 WELLESLEY





Student-created signage and exhibits, including a focus on plant names, multicultural perspectives, and examining colonial harms in botany



Botanic Gardens student team - welcome gathering



Bittersweet weeding & crafting during summer internship



Student-led native plant tour collaboration with Native American Heritage Month



Bittersweet weaving with Paulson collaborators



"Green Gatherings" hands-on events, open to all of campus - collaboration with Paulson Initiative and Frost Center



Pre-work: All-staff retreat

Prior to the start of the cohort program, all WCBG staff (5 staff + 1 fellow, at the time) participated in a brainstorming retreat to share ideas for the future of WCBG, and to coalesce around an updated set of core values and action steps related to IDEA. The staff generated 86 potential goals/actions/values (*next slides*) and grouped these into recurring themes: **education** and **active engagement** (e.g. hands-on, interactive, experiential, intentional learning opportunities), **community building** (specifically “**inclusion, sense of belonging, and accessibility**”), **decolonization**, **climate resilience**, and **sustainability**.

Community Building,

Inclusion, Sense of Belonging, Accessibility

Education

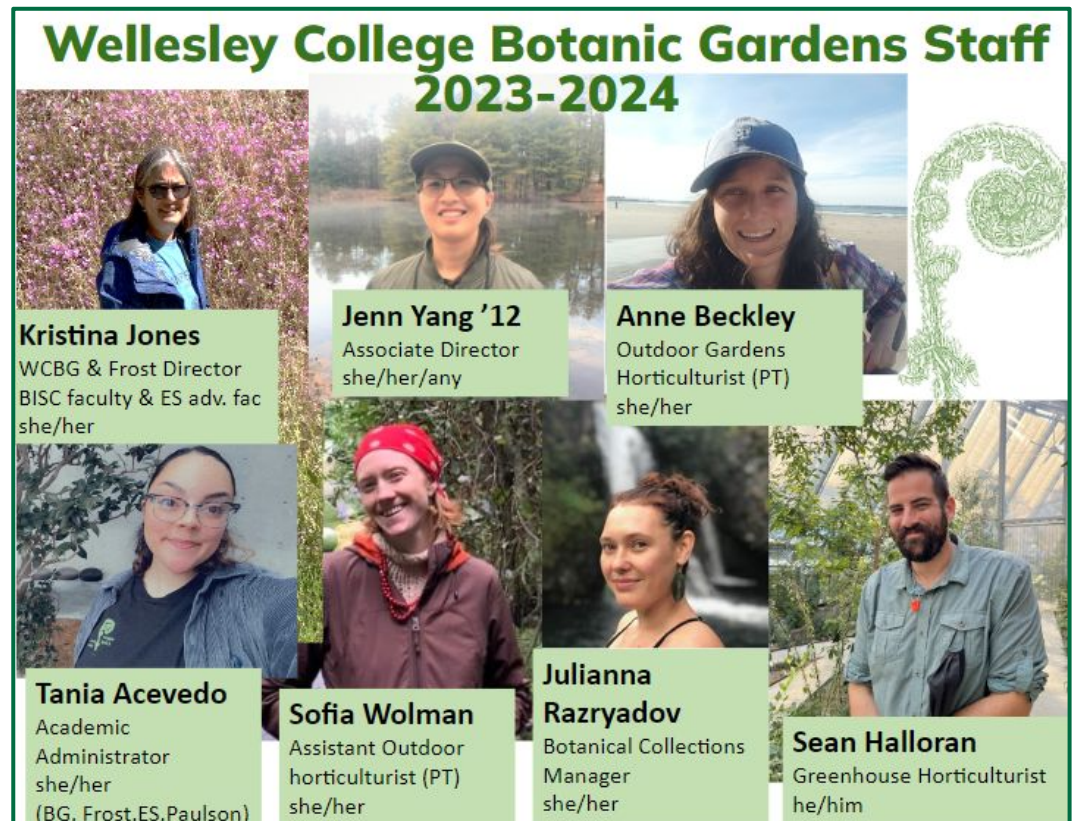
Active Engagement

De-colonization

Climate Resilience

Sustainability

Wellesley College Botanic Gardens Staff 2023-2024



Kristina Jones
WCBG & Frost Director
BISC faculty & ES adv. fac
she/her

Jenn Yang '12
Associate Director
she/her/any

Anne Beckley
Outdoor Gardens
Horticulturist (PT)
she/her

Tania Acevedo
Academic
Administrator
she/her
(BG, Frost, ES, Paulson)

Sofia Wolman
Assistant Outdoor
horticulturist (PT)
she/her

Julianna Razryadov
Botanical Collections
Manager
she/her

Sean Halloran
Greenhouse Horticulturist
he/him

Example ideas brainstormed by staff members during a retreat, grouped by core theme.

Education & Active Engagement

Education	Collections criteria: educational usefulness for teaching & research - what can faculty/students get in BG that they can't get elsewhere?
Education	Reach out to fac/staff across campus to learn their interests and needs, invite to BG, invest in partnerships
Education	Grow diverse plants and provide opportunities to learn directly from them, e.g. impacts of climate, topography on phenology
Education	Professional development on mentoring and training students as part of BG learning community that works hard
Education	Embrace and budget for opportunities for staff to learn and to teach each other
Education	Develop excellent educational materials & interpretation (signage, media, tours, training)
Education	Space(s) where students can learn field work/research tools and methods, plant ID
Education	Make processes transparent (natural and horticultural) - showing rather than hiding how systems work (including human interventions)
Education	Entice people to slow down and pay attention, outdoor lab/study space with communication/interaction from users (e.g. birds spotted)
Education	Classes/workshops for our community (on campus and beyond) - learning through doing
Education	Teaching students through practice and exposure to new things
Education	Consider how to provide more in-depth, individualized opportunities for students (staff capacity? partnerships with faculty?)
Active Engagement	Encourage exploration and interaction
Active Engagement	create interactive exhibits/gardens (i.e. contribute observations, encourage closer inspection passively); employ intentional design and thoughtful interpretation that prioritizes sensory and culturally meaningful plants; create whimsy
Active Engagement	Intentional education - classes, research, workshops - that are focused on hands on activity
Active Engagement	work closely with student orgs (Botanistas, Regen, ENACT)
Active Engagement	create exhibits that can be physically accessed by all people (ages, abilities, language, expertise)
Active Engagement	Answer visitor questions and collect feedback (survey?)

Community Building, Inclusion, Belonging, Accessibility & Decolonization

CIB/Accessibility ▼	Serve campus community, alums, WCCC children
CIB/Accessibility ▼	Define who our "public" is
CIB/Accessibility ▼	Value safety for all visitors
CIB/Accessibility ▼	Co-create programs and events with students, cultural/student orgs, and fac/staff
CIB/Accessibility ▼	Ensure all /most spaces are welcoming and inviting (not unkempt or scary)
CIB/Accessibility ▼	Ensure major paths are fully accessible to all
CIB/Accessibility ▼	Provide plenty of sitting places
CIB/Accessibility ▼	Provide spaces specifically for interaction (make signage that indicates such)
CIB/Accessibility ▼	Make accessibility a top priority
CIB/Accessibility ▼	Prioritize engaging with diverse groups when looking towards the future and setting goals
CIB/Accessibility ▼	Engage with IDEA regularly as a team t help cultivate a better work culture for staff and students
CIB/Accessibility ▼	Make IDEA a part of: hiring process, programming, paid oportunites for students, professional development, and communication
CIB/Accessibility ▼	Budget for IDEA projects

De-colonization ▼	Plant names - go beyond Latin
De-colonization ▼	Landscapes that are culturally appropriate, especially local, Indigenous
De-colonization ▼	Purposeful plantings beyond an English/European aesthetic
De-colonization ▼	Reaching out to diverse faculty and staff, learning how they would like to engage with our resources
De-colonization ▼	Future focus (Gardens of anticipated futures), less honoring of our past
De-colonization ▼	Gate openers, not gate keepers
De-colonization ▼	Family collections not relevant
De-colonization ▼	Solicit feedback from the community on what they would like to see in the ODG but also being realistic about our limitations
De-colonization ▼	Engage w/ Indigenous people in landscape/beyond
De-colonization ▼	Encourage student projects/collabs like Nafisa's
De-colonization ▼	Botanical language & interpretation - harmful language, etc.
De-colonization ▼	First building relationships w/ Indigenous groups - building connections & understanding first, e.g. with NAISA , understanding what decolonization means for us
De-colonization ▼	Supporting/advocating for efforts campus-wide (as a start) e.g hiring Indigenous faculty
De-colonization ▼	Understanding (learning about) and acknowledging history of this place and garden, being thoughtful about language / interpretation
De-colonization ▼	Focus on ecology/relationships/Indigenous science vs. 'Western' science/taxonomy
De-colonization ▼	Plant choice
De-colonization ▼	Being reflective/conscientious about representation (e.g. within our staff) and how we make decisions, and what perspectives are missing / need to be actively sought
De-colonization ▼	Do not select collections as 'one of these, one of those'
De-colonization ▼	Encourage different types of use; here's a hard one - how do we <u>partner</u> to provide opportunity for different types of use
De-colonization ▼	Taking time to learn about racism and the lasting effects of colonization
De-colonization ▼	Making/providing resources available to staff
De-colonization ▼	Making plants/nature accessible to everyone
De-colonization ▼	Attending lectures and having thoughtful discussions about DEIJ

Sustainability & Climate Resilience

Sustainability ▼	Focus on people and set reasonable limits for staff expectations, meetings, goals, # of students, programs, etc.
Sustainability ▼	Prioritize the future in terms of plantings, collections policy.
Sustainability ▼	Make a decision about next steps with the silver thread.
Sustainability ▼	Set a policy
Sustainability ▼	All events in VC/GF/ODG zero waste by end of 2023.
Sustainability ▼	Display capture data related to energy use, rainwater capture, etc. in GF/TRGH
Sustainability ▼	Push broader Wellesley Community on several key sustainability initiatives: lawn reduction, fossil fuel reduction, plastic reduction,
Sustainability ▼	Make decisions about current collections plants that are mature, dying, or problematic.
Sustainability ▼	Focus on other animals (not just humans) when considering plantings.
Sustainability ▼	Implement internal purchasing policy with minimizing waste.
Sustainability ▼	Implement a robust composting program.
Sustainability ▼	Engage with Office of Sust, Green Fund, ES, Frost. Organizations as a strong partner.
Sustainability ▼	Zero waste policy - reusable, non-disposable utensils, etc.
Sustainability ▼	Implement sustainable horticulture practices - IPM, how staff (student/otherwise), organic practices, etc.
Sustainability ▼	Focus on working with natural processes.
Sustainability ▼	Buy equipment that will last and can be repaired.
Sustainability ▼	Implement a policy around using our own compost back on our beds as a leaf mulch.
Sustainability ▼	Prioritize rainwater capture systems and working on getting them functional.
Sustainability ▼	Reuse supplies/materials whenever we can.
Sustainability ▼	Policy around treatments we use on our plants.
Climate Resilience ▼	Continue to replace old equipment with electric alternatives
Climate Resilience ▼	Choose a couple priorities to focus education around climate change in the garden (water management, phenology, pollinators, etc). Bring these things to light and make available for study.
Climate Resilience ▼	Work with grounds to understand climate impacts specific to our region and develop an informed plan, e.g. water management, invasive species
Climate Resilience ▼	Ensure we are creating ecological hubs rather than traps
Climate Resilience ▼	Secure admin's support so that major infrastructure shifts do not compound erratic climatic conditions. Better communication and support.
Climate Resilience ▼	New plantings must not be resource intensive, and able to handle flood, drought and higher temps. Look south for inspiration.
Climate Resilience ▼	Consider impact and susceptibility of the Silver Thread to climate resilience. Does it contribute to problems re sustainability or does it recycle water within the system, increasing resilience by redistribution? How can we make it more resilient to future instances of water shutdown?
Climate Resilience ▼	Plant with eye towards more self-sustaining systems. A 'shepharding' type of gardening rather than very intensive horticulture.
Climate Resilience ▼	Where can we improve flood and drought resilience? Capturing and using rainwater.
Climate Resilience ▼	Focus collections on rare, threatened and endangered species, and/or native species
Climate Resilience ▼	Citizen science efforts, e.g. caterpillar counts, phenology mismatches
Climate Resilience ▼	Decide how to proceed with plants that are no longer well adapted as climate changes - increase care, or let fail?

Section 2

IDEA Cohort project

“Reimagine WCBG for the next 100 years”

For the APGA IDEA project, WCBG staff and students engaged the campus community in a **mission survey** and **focus groups** in spring 2024 to develop a compelling updated mission and goals for the next era of the Botanic Gardens.

We developed a timeline that would result in a launch of the mission and goals update during WCBG’s 2025 centennial. WCBG staff and students co-led the survey design and launch in March, and held a focus group follow-up event in April, with steps including:

(1) co-creating survey questions and demographic questions, building from core themes in the initial staff brainstorm

(2) co-creating a list of groups and individuals to contact, and a prize/raffle incentive to encourage participation

(3) creating ads and presenting the launch of the survey at a “Green Gathering” open campus event

(4) reviewing all survey responses, summarizing, and visualizing key takeaways and core themes

(5) developing and leading a “planning picnic” with student-facilitated focus group discussions on each core theme, with representatives from across campus

REIMAGINING THE BOTANIC GARDENS: THE NEXT 100 YEARS

Join us to learn about the WCBG’s current mission and help reshape the next! We would love to hear from you!

GREEN GATHERING
06 MARCH 2024
3:30-4:30PM
SCI HUB SIT STEPS





Wellesley College Botanic Gardens - Mission Survey



Wellesley College Botanic Gardens is updating our mission and core values, in anticipation of celebrating 100 years in 2025. Thank you for taking the time to help shape the future of the Botanic Gardens!

Please take 5-10 min to complete this survey by *Tues, March 26, 2024*. This survey is anonymous and all questions are optional. Please complete both sections.

[Fill out this contact form](#) (optional) to share how you're connecting with plants, and for a chance to win a prize!

1. What do you appreciate most about the Botanic Gardens — how does it serve you, or communities that matter to you?

Long answer text

2. Among these core values, what feels most important for the Botanic Gardens to prioritize in the coming years? Pick up to 3 from this list, or write in "Other".

- Education
- Interdisciplinary Engagement
- Community Building & Sense of Place
- Climate Resilience
- Sustainability
- Accessibility
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion
- Environmental Justice
- Antiracism & Decolonization
- Wellness

Audience (7 questions)

This section is to help us understand who is represented in our survey. Thank you for helping us support an inclusive process.

1. Please select all of your affiliations.

- Wellesley College student
- Wellesley College faculty/staff
- Wellesley College alum
- Wellesley College emeritae/former faculty/staff
- Other Wellesley College affiliate (family member, prospective student)
- WCBG Friend, volunteer or donor
- Visitor / Not affiliated with Wellesley College
- Other...

2. What departments/major(s) do you represent?

- Sciences / STEM
- Social Sciences
- Arts & Humanities
- Other / Undecided

3. Please select your age bracket.

- Under 25 years
- 25 - 39 years
- 40 - 59 years
- 60+ years

Results: Mission Survey

Example feedback by theme (emphasis/underlines added)

Decolonization & Dissecting Our Colonial History

Comments expressed a desire for ventures into BG histories or decolonizing practices:

- “Definitely decolonization, or at least the recognition of colonial practices surrounding botanical gardens and how collections such as these have come into being.”
- “Highlight its own colonial history, where plants come from etc...”
- “I think training students and teaching about the colonial and decolonial histories that Wellesley’s Botanic gardens hold (Ashanti Shih’s Botany and Empire-esque) could be a valuable step towards decolonial botany practices.”
- “Meaningfully engaging with the fact that Wellesley College is on stolen indigenous lands. Connecting with plants in a spiritual, educational, practical way that empowers and gives tools and inspiration to visitors for the present and future.”

Environmental Justice

Comments expressed a desire for teaching about EJ or EJ topics beyond decolonization:

- “To mentor and foster generations of environmentally conscious, thoughtful, plant-appreciating leaders, who feel empowered to shape the environmental field in a way to supports environmental justice, is culturally inclusive, and respects and uplifts all.”
- “A space for students to learn more about botany in relation to different aspects of the world we live in, such as social issues or climate change”

Community Building:

- “Work towards including more disciplines into the mix of events. the lorraine grady collaboration worked really well for this! promote access to communities of color who might not otherwise visit, i think a big problem is that not a lot of people know that WCBG spaces are free and open to public tours, so there is a disconnect between public schools per say and the WCBG.”

Accessibility: Comments expressed a desire for increased open hours, signage, communications, and accomodations:

- “Increasing REGULAR student contact with the Botanic Gardens.”
- “Please be open more! I would love to have regular access to the space to study.”
- “Accessibility, and info for observers”

Results: Mission Survey

An Academic Resource

FORMAL: Comments expressed a desire for scientific knowledge/workshops formally related to biology/ecology etc.

- “Botanical education for Wellesley students and the greater Wellesley community”
- “To encourage engagement with biological sciences, ecology, environmental science, and botany among all marginalized people and especially among BIPOC and other URM in ecology – making sure that people feel welcomed and know that they have equal ownership of outdoors spaces and biological sciences and deserve to be there and to learn and do research in these fields”

INFORMAL/HANDS ON: Comment expressed a desire for hands on engagement with plants OR fun learning events about plants

- “Increasing opportunities for hands-on engagement with plants for the campus community & maybe expanding projects on colonialism and environmental racism like with the Botany & Empire class projects in the past.”
- “Draw more students by holding interdisciplinary events and collaborations. They don’t have to be environment related either, just doing a fun craft in a great space”

Serene Space vs Science Space

Serenity: Comments expressed a desire for increased focus on wellness, connection with plants, or calmness:

- “Support wellness of students, faculty, staff, and visitors (including alumnae); Educate community about climate resilience”
- The Botanic Gardens should focus on the wellness of students on campus through greater connection to the outdoors and more opportunities that support mental health.
- “a place to wander and relax in nature in peace”

Results: Mission Survey

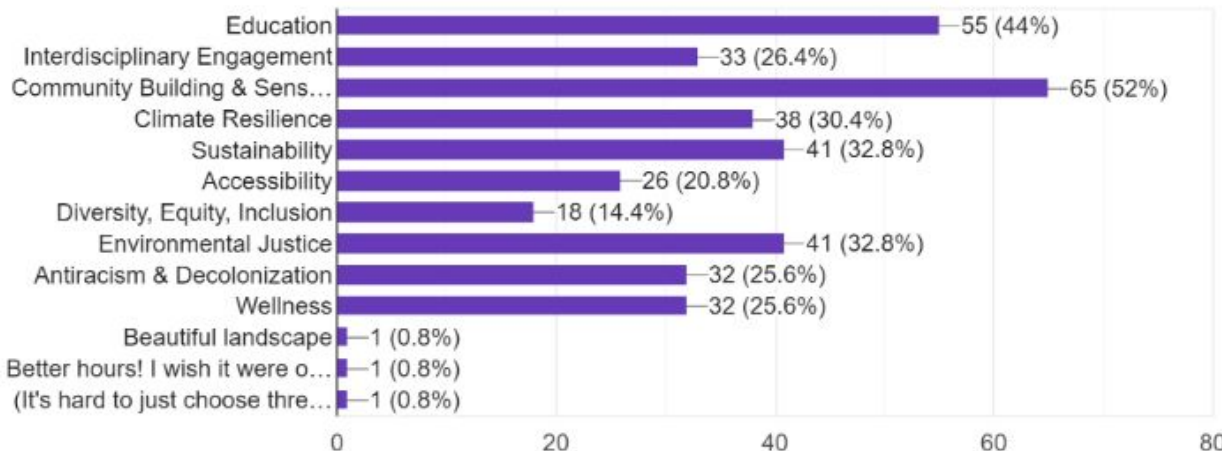
The mission survey was highly successful, resulting in 125 thoughtful and detailed responses from a diverse, representative group of students, faculty, staff, and alums.

Core values:

Core values that the campus community voted for WCBG to center in the upcoming era included: Environmental Justice, Antiracism and Decolonization, & IDEA (119 votes), Community Building & Wellness (98 votes), Education & Interdisciplinary Engagement (88), and Sustainability & Climate Resilience (79). Written responses suggested goals for WCBG that shared recurring themes, including enhancing **educational value**, **building community**, and **increasing accessibility**.

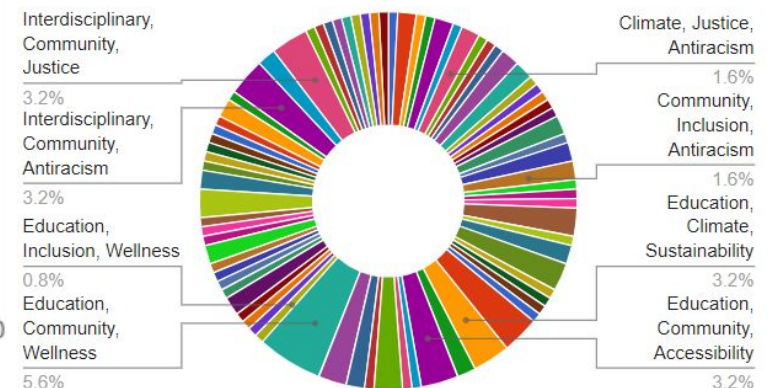
2. Among these core values, what feels most important for the Botanic Gardens to prioritize in the coming years? Pick up to 3 from this list, or write in "Other".

125 responses



- Educational Value (34)
- Building Community (20)
- Increasing Accessibility (13)
- Decolonizing the Gardens (10)
- Promoting Environmental Justice (9)
- Supporting Serenity & Wellness (9)
- Advocating for Sustainability (4)

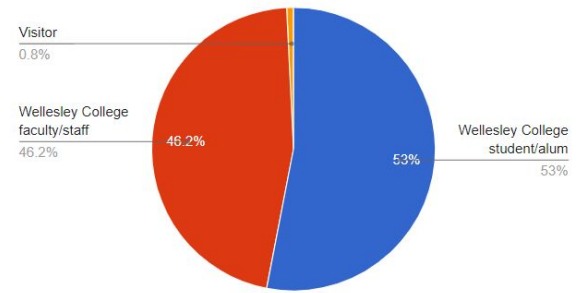
Core Values (individuals)



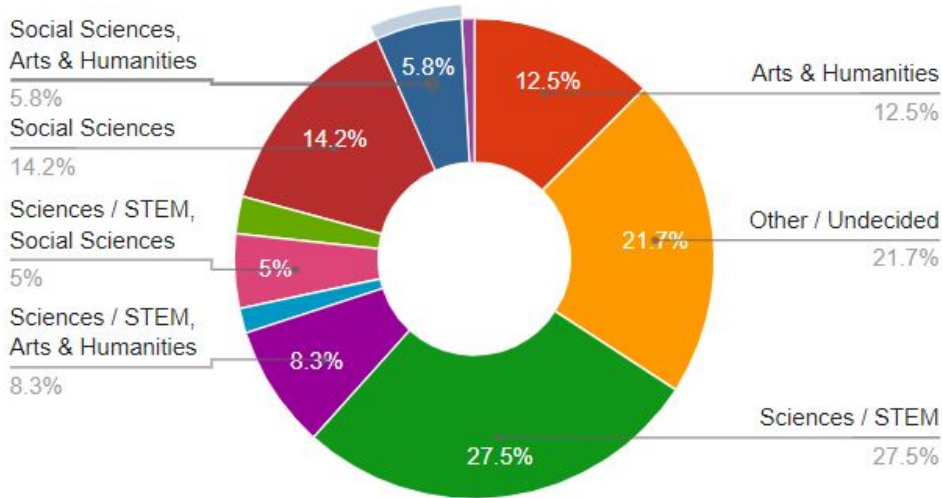
Results: Mission Survey

125 responses during the two week March 2024 survey period included a broad representation of students, faculty, and alums, and a diversity of identities and disciplines.

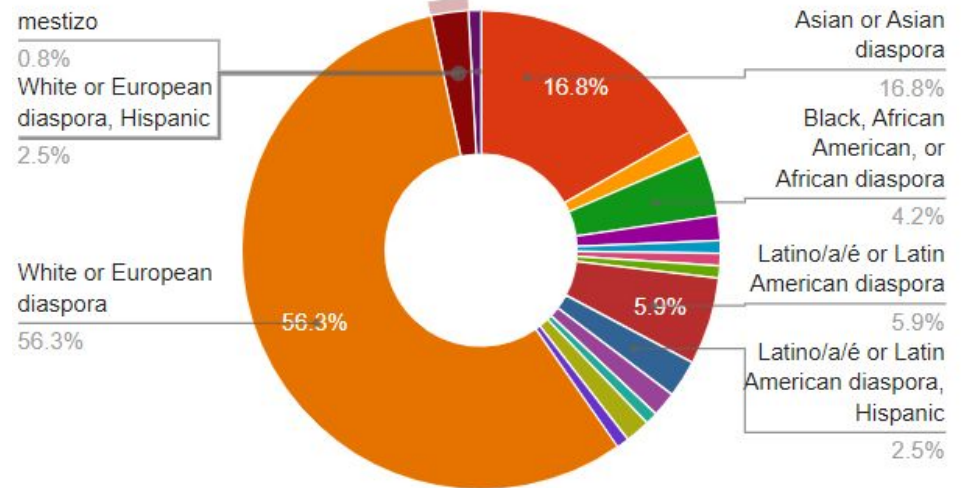
Affiliation (binary)



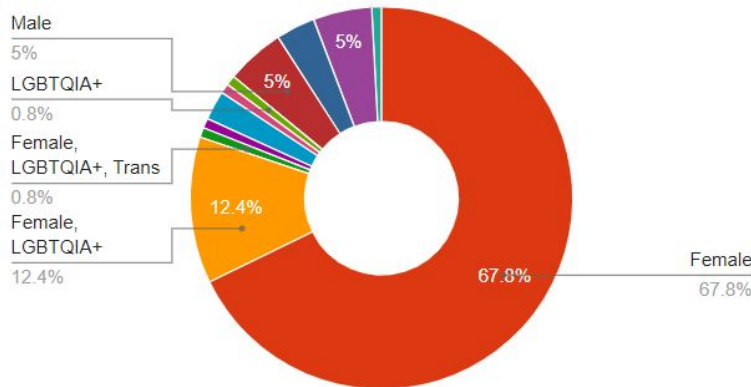
Disciplines



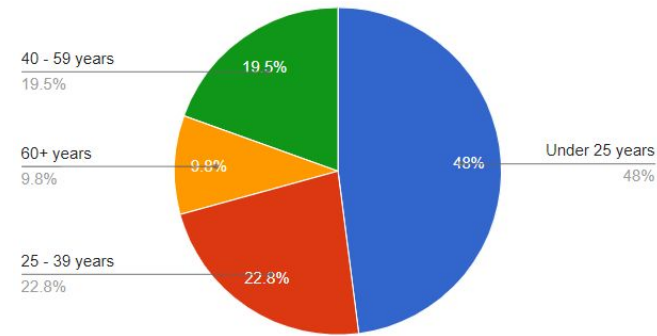
How would you describe your race, ethnicity, or national origin?



Gender identities



Age



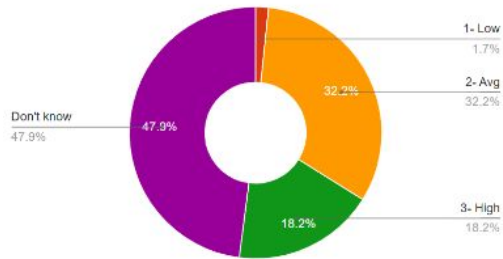
What place(s) do you call home? (e.g. state or country)



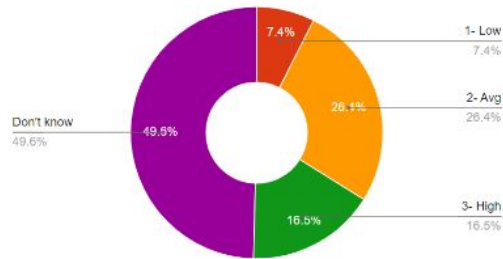
Results: Mission Survey

- **Education, community building, and wellness** were perceived as WCBG’s current strengths, as well as serving **students** and **STEM/Sciences**. Many categories received “**unknown**” - respondents don’t know how well WCBG serves different values/groups.
- Comments shared were overwhelmingly positive - themes that emerged of what the community appreciates & perceives as important goals (in order of most mentioned): **educational value, building community, increasing accessibility, decolonizing the gardens, promoting environmental justice, supporting serenity & wellness, advocating for sustainability.**

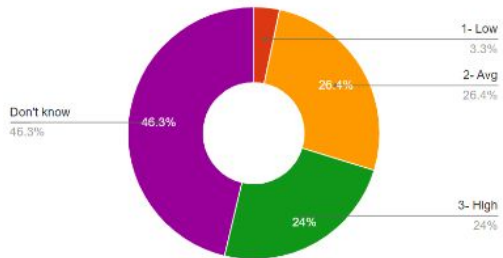
Environmental Justice - how well do we currently do?



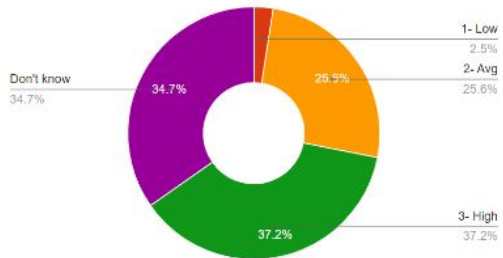
Antiracism & Decolonization - how well do we currently do?



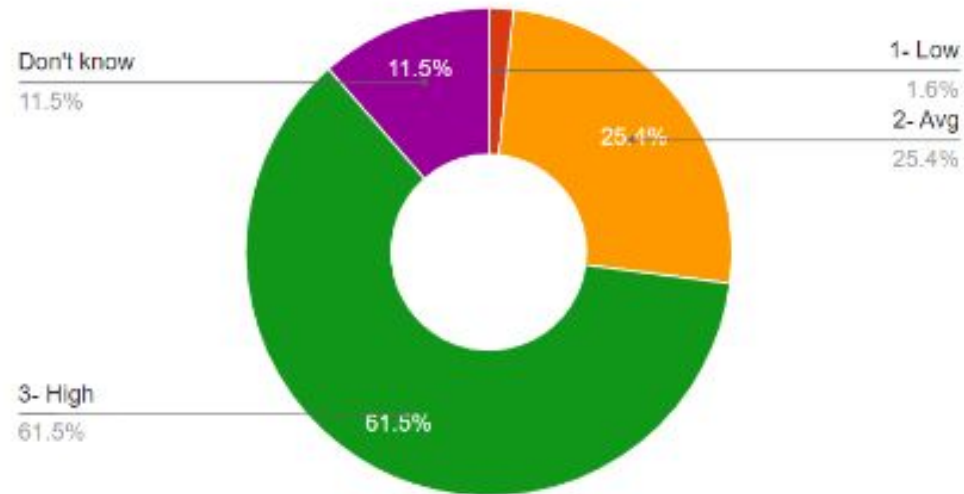
Climate Resilience - how well do we currently do?



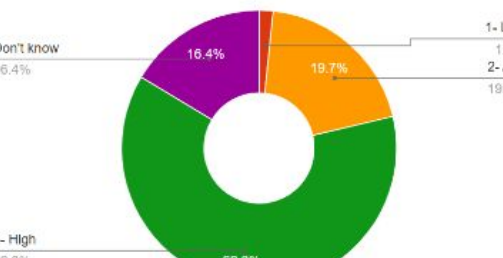
Sustainability - how well do we currently do?



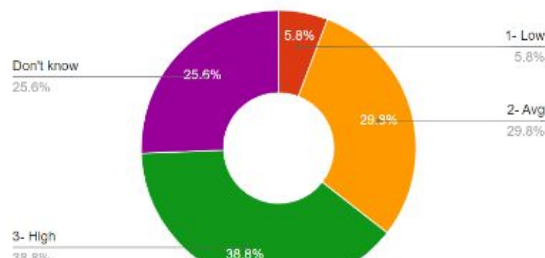
Community & Sense of Place - how well do we currently do?



Education - how well do we currently do?



Interdisciplinary Engagement - how well do we currently do?



Results: Focus Group

WCBG student ambassadors developed the idea of a fun “planning picnic” format with food in the outdoor garden classroom for a focus group, to further develop a draft mission, core values, and goals. Participation was capped at ~40 with priority given to representatives from diverse groups and departments across campus. A key highlight was having highly engaged pairs of student ambassadors lead each small discussion group through a structured discussion of draft mission ideas, implementation ideas and goals for each core theme from the survey. Participants and survey respondents were invited to continue contributing feedback via a digital document after the picnic.



Reimagining the Wellesley College Botanic Gardens mission

Planning Picnic

Community & Belonging
Environmental Justice
Education
Sustainability

Join us for a focus group with lunch & tea provided! Chat about our mission survey results, and share ideas for WCBG's future plans!

Wed. April 17
12:30-1:30pm
Edible Ecosystem
Rain location: WCBG Visitor Center

RSVP by Monday April 15!



Max 40 participants

ADR: accessibility@wellesley.edu
?? wcbg@wellesley.edu
exp. 4/15/2024



Summary: Project Outcomes

The community survey and focus group was an essential step that yielded a lot of helpful feedback, some of which staff were able to act upon immediately (e.g. increasing the hours of campus access to the greenhouses), and many ideas which require more time to review and consider. There are clear core values and a strong sense of a desire for change from the campus community. Next steps prior to the 2025 centennial including further developing the new mission statement, and co-creating an implementation plan with concrete goals for each core value. WCBG staff and student ambassadors will launch working groups in Fall 2024 to accomplish these next steps!

From a newsletter statement, to pilot programs, to a co-created envisioning and feedback process with our community - with more to come!

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Let Our Gardens Grow: Reckoning with Antiracism and Decolonization

What does antiracism and decolonization mean to you, and how might it relate to your role at WCBG? We posed

this question to students interviewing for positions as we began our round of Fall hiring, and they shared a rich breadth of ideas, experiences, and questions of their own: What does it mean to decolonize a garden? How does racism connect with plants?

Especially since George Floyd's death and the ongoing reckoning on race and racism, we all have been called to reexamine our place and history, as individuals and organizations, in perpetuating the legacies of institutional racism in America and the pervasive centering of white voices and culture. WCBG is no exception. Like many botanic gardens, all of our permanent staff members are white, contributing to a harmful myth that gardening, connection with plants and land, and botany are created by, and for, a certain crowd: older, white, wealthy. Not only is this myth inaccurate, it can discourage students of more diverse backgrounds and be a detriment to the world of horticulture, education, and connection to nature and land in America, which has benefited from generations of leadership, wisdom, and contributions of Black and Indigenous people, and People of Color. We speak often of the value of a diversity of plants, communities, and landscapes, yet too often overlook the parallel importance of a diversity of people in our organizations.

We have begun to regularly discuss these issues amongst staff and students, as they relate to WCBG specifically and to public gardens at large, and to take action to better address current inequities. Our staff and students are participating in Wellesley's "21 Days Against Racism" program led by the Office of Intercultural Education, as well as a new collaborative Environmental Antiracism Working Group with the Frost Center for the Environment and the Paulson Ecology of Place Initiative. We are also participating in a nationwide re-evaluation of plant names and the signage about them, to address the clear legacy of colonization in plant names. We are rethinking the goals of Global Flora and the outdoor gardens as they relate to a number of issues, including our communications through signage and public programming, increasing accessibility to communities outside of Wellesley College and the town of



A Black Lives Matter sign sprouted one day in the yard of the Botanic Gardens' fairy house.

"The time is always right to do what is right."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Four days before his assassination in March 1968, over 50 years ago.

Wellesley who may not typically be served by public gardens, and how we can acknowledge and honor the Native American history of the land our gardens occupy. We welcome and appreciate ideas and feedback of any kind as we embark on this process, and will continue to listen, learn, and grow.

Public gardens such as WCBG play a key role in the narrative of America's racist and colonial history, which has shaped land ownership, land usage, plant collecting and displays, and botanical nomenclature. They are part of the culture of assimilation with their emphasis on European gardens and their treatment of plants as objects in a museum, ignoring the real and current cultural connections that people have with them. The overwhelmingly white staff and visitors, rules about not touching plants, and use of "othering" language implies that diverse people, personal stories, plant relationships, or different ways of being aren't valued.

This means that even as a small public garden, we have a great potential for positive change and impact. As Wellesley College's botanic garden, by actively engaging in antiracism and supporting the plant passions and interests of all of our students, we are in a position to help change the face of botanical and environmental leadership.

Jointly written by Botanic Gardens staff

Resources:

- Dreamspace Project Workbook for Public Gardens by Alyssa Machado, <https://www.publicgardens.org/resources/digging-institutional-change-creating-environments-where-diversity-equity-and-inclusion>
- Wellesley Racial Justice Initiative (<https://wrji.org/>), for Wellesley alumnae, by alumnae
- Black Botanists Week, Follow on Instagram: <https://blackbotanistsweek.weebly.com/>

Reimagining the Botanic Gardens: the Next 100 Years



Green Gatherings
March 6, 2024

Angela Douglass
Fabiola Ramirez
Jenn Yang



1. What do you appreciate most about the Botanic Gardens — how does it serve you, or communities that matter to you?

114 responses

I value the impact the Botanic Gardens has as a first introduction to the incredible world of plants for many students, the hands-on learning experiences the staff provide, and the touchpoints and spaces for community, global and cultural connection, fun, laughter, and becoming grounded with plants and the earth, that the garden supports.

Thank you!

Our team (Jenn Yang, Julianna Razryadov, and Kristina Jones) would like to extend a huge thank you to the APGA IDEA cohort team, especially Mae Lin Plummer, all of our instructors, and our cohort network, for sharing support, resources, and inspiration.

We would also like to thank all of our students, staff, collaborators and community members at Wellesley College Botanic Gardens.

For questions or further information about our cohort project, please contact our team at wcbg@wellesley.edu

