



Be well. Feel well. Do well.

Innovate Wellness Challenge 2024

A



Top Idea: The Green Garden

1. EMPATHIZE



Audience:

- Our audience is the undergraduate student population of UConn.
 - Specifically those:
 - lacking access to fresh produce
 - lacking access to green space
 - seeking areas to converse and support their social health
 - wishing to engage with the arts
 - wanting to give back to the community and environment
- Our idea allows the involvement of other groups, as well (faculty, graduate students, community members, volunteers)

Observation, Consultation & Feedback:

- Undergraduate students** - <https://youtu.be/OaIH6EESq8U>
- Students often feel that solutions to address climate change are preformative and inauthentic when they lack community engagement and consideration. After performing 20 'street interviews' with the undergraduate student population at UCONN, students have voiced that there should be an increased amount of resources for mental health and climate change, more opportunities for climate action, increased greenery, and more social spaces that are outdoors. As undergraduates discussed their mental health and the environment of Uconn's campus, social spaces and meaningful interactions with the natural world revealed themselves as a vital part of student performance and the college experience.
- Faculty & Student Mentors**
- Working with the student mentors and faculty at the Innovate Wellness workshops enabled our understanding of on-campus resources and the initiatives already in place to promote mental and environmental wellness, such as NatureRx, and future bike paths on campus. Through this dialogue and research, we honed in on unresolved issues: social isolation and the impracticality of outdoor time for full-time students.



Name: Tamara Parks
Major: Undecided; ACES Exploratory Program
Bio: Tamara is a first-year student interested in environmental justice and software engineering. After taking a gap year between her high school and undergraduate career, wellness and mental health in work environments have become especially important areas for Tamara. This year's Innovate Wellness Challenge allows students the opportunity to act on the importance of caring not only for their personal health but also for the health of the natural spaces they occupy. Tamara was inspired by this opportunity, and after taking an Urban and Community studies class last semester the idea for more accessible green spaces has proved to be essential in cultivating an environment that holistically supports the host (earth) and its guests (people).

2. DEFINE



Insights, Problem, Action Steps:

- Our interviews with students, small-scale surveys, and Innovate Wellness Workshops have made it clear that there are many overlapping issues faced by undergraduate students, namely: lack of community, few accessible green spaces, and not being able to give back. Many efforts aiming to address these issues surrounding the health of students and the environment fall short in their permanency and longevity.
- The most pressing issue in working to establish a solution that addresses the health of students and Uconn's environment is making lasting change that positively affects the fabric of our community. Lessening feelings of UConn conducting performative action means engaging in work that can be carried through generations of students.
- Our process would begin with us working alongside student farmers and faculty members participating in the Innovate Wellness Challenge to formulate a design for building garden beds appropriate for the Botanical Conservatory.

Actionable Problem Statement:

To combat environmental and social isolation (worsened by college-related stress) we wish to establish a community garden that houses student artwork, fresh produce, native plants, and conversational benches, enabling student participation in small-scale environmental stewardship, green-space accessibility, and a greater sense of well-being.



Name: Sugita Mahendarkar
Major: Physiology and Neurobiology
Bio: Sugita is a first-year student hoping to pursue a pre-optometry path. She is currently involved on campus through her biology lab mentor position, HuskyReads, SHAPE, and AMP. In high school, Sugita founded a climate change club and since then she has been looking for ways to pursue this passion. Having worked to establish pollination preservation gardens across her home watershed for the past four years, she is eager to continue this theme of fighting climate change through community empowerment and local efforts.

3. IDEATE



Idea Generation:

- The Project:**
- An accessible, non-performative, and bold community garden and conversational space.
- Main components:**
- The community garden would be the focal point of our project and would contain fresh produce accessible to anyone on campus. We would also refurbish the native plant garden present on the Conservatory's grounds to establish pollinator presence necessary for produce cultivation.
 - The second key part of our project would be the facilitation of conversation through conversational benches modeled after the popular "Chatty Bench" projects of Britain and Northern Ireland.
- Additions upon establishment:**
- To accompany conversation and vegetation, student artwork would decorate the space providing a welcoming and jovial atmosphere. We would host multiple community events where students would create murals, decorate signage for plant life, and create both utilitarian and decorative art pieces.
- How do we make sure students utilize this space?**
- To guarantee student participation in our space, we plan on creating a free student event where we would provide materials to students and allow them to design decorations for the proposed garden.
 - We would also display fresh produce and advertise our garden at Late Nights and involvement fairs.
 - Upon the establishment of our garden, students visiting our space would be encouraged to water plants, weed, and enjoy produce.
- The process:**
- We would begin with the establishment of garden beds for produce, moving on to weed and revitalize already existing gardens surrounding the Conservatory. While these plans are being developed, we would reach out to the EcoHouse LC, the Public Health LC, and various student groups to recruit volunteers.
 - Next, we would begin promoting our space through art events and volunteering opportunities. During this time we would also locate and place conversational benches around our garden.
 - During this process, we would make sure to seek out feedback from all involved students and staff to efficiently create a lively, thriving community space.