Gambles Mill Eco-Corridor Think Tank

1. Background
The Gambles Mill Eco-Corridor comprises a section of campus between the Gambles Mill Pathway (#1 on the image below) and Little Westham Creek (#2 on the image below). This unique area of campus has a rich and dynamic history, complex ecological and educational function, and a broad appeal to recreational enthusiasts. The corridor is a key connector between the University of Richmond and several shopping areas, restaurants, cafes, neighborhoods, and the James River parks and recreational areas. It is a vital component of broad-scale bicycle and pedestrian transportation circuits within the City of Richmond and Henrico County. The site has been considered in numerous student reports and in the 2011 UR Campus Master Plan. These documents cite project opportunities including: increased pedestrian access, educational signage and curriculum tie-ins, ecological restorations and habitat enhancements, stormwater management and monitoring stations, and public outreach.

Figure 1. Gambles Mill Eco-Corridor site.

The Gambles Mill Eco-Corridor project will transform this underutilized trail into an inviting nature trail, bike path, and outdoor classroom as part of a larger effort to demonstrate and improve urban stormwater management. The project has the potential to serve as an important platform for campus and community education efforts. For example, beginning this year and continuing into the 2018-19 academic year the following physical transformations are scheduled for the site: removal of invasive plants, management of stormwater, restoration of Little Westham Creek, and construction of a multi-use recreational trail. Each of these activities could be linked to curricular and co-curricular learning outcomes.

In November, students, faculty, staff, and community members participated in a design charrette to envision the textures, gathering spaces, traditions, and programmatic elements of an improved corridor. It was an exciting meeting and input from the charrette will be used to inform a master plan for the Eco-Corridor. Themes that emerged included the importance of nature, community connection, student reflection, educational signage, well-being, and sense of place. A first draft of the master plan should be available for comment this summer. Construction on the Eco-Corridor (both the stream restoration and trail work) is expected to begin this fall and will be completed by the end of spring 2019 (Table 1).
Table 1. Gambles Mill Eco-Corridor Construction Schedule.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spring 2018</th>
<th>Summer 2018</th>
<th>Fall 2018</th>
<th>Winter 2018</th>
<th>Spring 2019</th>
<th>Summer 2019</th>
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<td>Trail construction</td>
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</table>

We are at a critical phase in project implementation with opportunities to comment on final construction design and to begin the process of campus and community engagement with the redesigned space in the Fall 2019.

The purpose of this Think Tank is to continue the work begun in the design charrette to maximize the potential of the new Eco-Corridor, making it a place that both improves environmental quality AND functions as an educational space. Think Tank members are meant to represent diverse constituencies in this work, viewing the corridor through multiple disciplinary lenses.

Also, continued study of Eco-Corridor and the impacts of its restoration are a prime example of engaged scholarship with potential to inform research and influence real-world practices.

2. Classes already connected to the Eco-Corridor
   - Students in GEOG 221: Mapping Sustainability: Cartography and Geographic Information in an Environmental Context, worked with Dr. David S. Salisbury to map the past, present, and future of the Gambles Mill Corridor.
   - Students in GEOG 250: Introduction to Earth’s Systems, worked with Dr. Todd Lookingbill to quantify water quality at the six swales running from the Country Club of Virginia into Little Westham Creek. They also examined water quality in the creek itself and the geomorphology of the creek.
   - Students in GEOG 215: Geography of the James River Watershed, also taught by Dr. Lookingbill, use the watershed concept as a teaching instrument to discuss issues of natural resource management and conservation in the local community. Final projects in several years have focused on the Gambles Mill Corridor including educational signage and outreach.
   - Students in BIOL 207: Ecology taught by Dr. Jory Brinkerhoff and Dr. Jennifer Seven conducted surveys of benthic macroinvertebrates in Little Westham Creek to evaluate the presence/absence of pollution-sensitive indicator species.
   - Students in BIOL 199: Introduction to Biological Thinking by Dr. Peter Smallwood (Conservation Biology) and Dr. Carrie Wu (Invasive Species) have sampled fish and invasive plants.
   - Students in the SPCS Permaculture Design Certificate program have examined the space surrounding the new on-campus Bee Hives, the space between the Wilton Center and the Steam Plant, to create designs that would sustain the hives and connect them with the Gambles Mill Eco-Corridor.
3. **Structure of the 2018-19 Think Tank**

- 1 introductory (1.5-hr) meeting the week before classes begin. The goal of this meeting is to provide an update on the ongoing activities that have occurred in the corridor in the past year and those proposed for the coming year. The meeting will also set group expectations for the year. Bring calendars to schedule future meetings for the fall semester.

- Monthly meetings throughout the year will include visits to the site, visits from community members who are also connected to the corridor, reading discussions about the use of campus and community as a sustainability living learning lab, continued advising of contractors as they begin construction and restoration activities, and creation/evaluation/assessment of new course material based in the corridor.

- Goal for the end of the year is for all participants to have at least one activity designed for a future class that involves the corridor and/or its connecting elements (e.g., River Road shopping center, bee hives by Wilton Center). The group will also play an important advisory role in the design of the future Eco-Corridor.

- Todd Lookingbill will serve as the faculty leader of the Eco-Corridor Think Tank, and the Center for Civic Engagement (Terry Dolson) and the Office of Sustainability (Rob Andrejewski) will co-sponsor the group.

- Think Tank members will be paid $500.00 in December, 2018 and $500 in April, 2019 upon the completion of their syllabus/assignment.