

IGNITE CHANGE. GO GREEN.

Faculty Spotlight:

Chara Armon, PhD, Augustine and Cultural Seminar Program

In this interview series we will bring you inside the world of Villanova's professors and explore how their work relates to creating a sustainable future. In this issue, we hear from Dr. Chara Armon, a postdoctoral fellow in the Augustine and Cultural Seminar program.

What is your academic background?

My bachelor's degree is from Colorado College, where I did a combined major called Classics-History-Politics. While my undergraduate and graduate studies primarily focus on religious and cultural history in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, my dissertation explored the origins of devotion to St. Joseph, which was promoted by the late medieval Italian Franciscan friars. My PhD in History is from Cornell University.

How long have you been teaching at Villanova?

I arrived to Villanova 10 years ago, teaching part-time. I am now ending my fifth year of teaching full-time as a postdoctoral fellow in the Augustine and Cultural Seminar program.

In your own words, how would you define sustainability?

While I don't think we, as a human species, have a clear understanding of sustainability, the best definitions, from my point of view, focus not only on what humans need in order to survive, but also the needs of all life forms. We must not forget that sustainability is not just about survival, but the goal of thriving and flourishing long into the future. If I had to put this all together, it would sound something like: 'flourishing' or 'thriving' on planet Earth involves human lifestyles that protect and honor the needs of all life forms on the planet, and perhaps most importantly, regenerate Earth's life systems of air, water, soil, and ecosystems.

Why is sustainability important to you?

There are many reasons why sustainability is important to me, the top three being: health of the planet, health of humanity, and love for what we are losing. I believe we can live harmoniously, responsibly and healthfully on the Earth, in a way that promotes not only human health, but also ecosystem prosperity. I know what it is like to live with pristine air, water and soil, and I am pained to see that my children and future generations will not know such beauty. I hope that in my lifetime we will see a renewal and regeneration of our national and global environments.



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What is your current research focused on?

For the past several years I've worked in the fields of spirituality and ecology (also known as religion and ecology) and humanities and ecology. I published an article in 2014 on the process of teaching undergraduates about sustainability through a sustainable agriculture course, and I'm currently working on a book chapter and possible book on that same topic. I've also done some research with organic farmers about their spiritual or religious perspectives, and this spring I'm chairing a conference panel at Harvard that examines connecting points between spiritual/religious perspectives and sustainable agriculture.

Do you collaborate with others on your research?

Yes, both here at Villanova and beyond. For the past several years, I have co-taught a class with William Stehl in the Center for Peace and Justice on sustainable agriculture and social justice, called Growing into Sustainability. I am also collaborating with colleagues at Regis University of Denver on co-designing a humanities-based sustainable agriculture course we both teach and have written about (see 2014 article). Last fall, we delivered a conference paper together, and plan on transforming that into a book chapter.

Have you been able to incorporate sustainability into your course work?

Yes. I teach the year-long Environmental Learning Community version of Villanova's Augustine and Culture Seminar. We spend the year considering how the human relationship to nature appears in foundational western texts ranging from the Bible and Augustine's Confessions to medieval saints' lives, early modern political theory, and modern novels, poetry, and scientific writings. Additionally, I co-teach a class on sustainable agriculture.