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Sabbatical Report, Spring 2026

My Spring 2026 sabbatical supported the advancement of several interconnected projects that bring ecopsychological insights and practices to a broad range of audiences, from college campuses to international activist networks.

My first project entailed writing, speaking, and consultation on the growing “rights of nature” movement, focusing on the work that is currently unfolding in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. I have an ongoing relationship to Ireland through my study abroad course (Psych 322: Myth, Dream and Symbol in Ireland), which I have taught four times since 2019. Given my growing knowledge of and interest in Irish mythic and cultural heritage, I have become involved in documenting cultural aspects of the rights of nature movement in Ireland and initiating a dialogue between this movement and the field of ecopsychology.

My work in this area began in 2025 in collaboration with Dr. Tina Fields of the Naropa Institute, when we presented a paper, “Regenerating Relationship with the More-than-Human World in Ireland: Ecopsychology, Spirituality, and Nature’s Rights,” at the March 2025 conference on the Global Rights of Nature movement sponsored by the More-Than-Human Life (MOTH) Program at the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, NYU School of Law. A short version of this paper was published in 2026 in the [MOTH Ideas Hub](#).

During my sabbatical, I was able to expand on this work in several ways. Dr. Fields and I completed a journal article based on the conference presentation, which is currently in press in a journal of ecological philosophy. In addition, Dr. Peter Doran of Queens University School of Law, one of the leading figures in the Irish rights of nature movement, invited Dr. Fields and I to write an essay linking the rights of nature movement to the decolonial writings of Amitav Ghosh in an upcoming edited volume on Ghosh’s work. That essay is currently in press, to be published in October of 2026. With the support of a travel grant from the College of Humanities, Social Sciences, and the Arts, I was able to travel to Ireland to give several presentations, one of which, “Rights of Nature as a Liberatory Practice: A Contribution from Ecopsychology,” was hosted by Dr. Doran at Queens University Belfast. In addition, I worked with activists from the San Francisco-based indigenous rights of nature organization, “Movement Rights,” helping them to organize a series of meetings with Dr. Doran and other leaders in the Irish rights of nature movement in Belfast, Dublin, and Galway. They took place in June 2026, and were the first step in exploring a larger indigenous delegation to Ireland, potentially to be scheduled in summer 2027. Details, references, and links can be found below.

1. Fields, T. R. and Gomes, M. E. (in press). “Regenerating relationship with the more-than-human world in Ireland: Ecopsychology, spirituality, and nature’s rights.” *The Trumpeter Journal of Ecosophy*.
2. Gomes, M. E. and Fields, T. R. (in press). “A note on the rise of the all-island Rights of Nature movement,” Mary Gomes and Tina Fields. In *Towards a Republic of the Earth: Responses to Amitav Ghosh’s Seamus Deane-Field Day Lecture*. Peter Doran, (ed).

3. Presentation at Queens University Belfast: "Rights of Nature as a Liberatory Practice: A Contribution from Ecopsychology," May 11, 2026.

4. Consultation and organizing for advance delegation of indigenous rights of nature activists from Movement Rights to meet with leaders of the rights of nature movement in Ireland in Belfast, Dublin, and Galway, in order to explore collaborations and a possible larger indigenous delegation in the future, June 26-28, 2026.

<https://movementrights.org/will-ireland-be-the-next-to-recognize-rights-of-nature/>

Taken as a whole, these projects solidified important collaborations and positioned my work as a significant contribution to this international ecological initiative.

My second project focused on application of ecopsychology principles to campus sustainability efforts at SSU and elsewhere, specifically focusing on the importance of creating a tangible connection with nature to support human well-being as well as to motivate and inform a commitment to sustainability. These projects stem from my work as Faculty Sustainability Chair at Sonoma State.

During my sabbatical, I was an active participant in the [Copeland Creek Trail Project](#), which enhanced the trail along the Copeland Creek for greater campus and community engagement. I collaborated with SSU's Center for Environmental Inquiry (CEI) and the Kinesiology Department's T-Mobile Grant to create educational signage for twelve sites along Copeland Creek. I headed up the [Mindfulness and Well-Being](#) section, creating research reviews, audio meditation recordings and related practices for specific mental health benefits to be delivered through QR codes on posts at twelve sites. I created the materials for eight of the sites, with the remaining four created by CAPS Mental Health Ambassadors and Dr. Sarah Murphy of the Student Health Center. The posts with QR codes are now established, and can be accessed by campus and community members walking along the trail.

I was also able to reach beyond the campus to share information on campus nature connection more widely. I developed a presentation, "The Nature We Love is the Nature We Protect," based on the keynote address I gave at the annual Campus Nature Rx Symposium in 2024, which led to two more speaking engagements in Ireland. The first of these, at University College, Cork, was sponsored by the UC Cork Pathways to Nature research team on April 30, planting the seeds of ongoing collaborations with international colleagues who are doing work parallel to my projects at SSU. The second presentation, at the Irish Heritage School on May 6, further strengthened an ongoing collaboration with Dr. Steven Mandal, who is a long-standing collaborator on my international travel class.

Finally, I was able to use this time to further develop connections with two organizations that are proving central to the trajectory of my work, which is increasingly focused on bringing ideas into public forums. I traveled to London to attend "More-Than-Human Life Conference," sponsored by the [More-Than-Human Life Program](#), NYU Law School, at London School of Economics and Political Science, May 14-16. The international conference further connected me with an organization that has become a central intellectual home for my work. I also served as an Alumni

ambassador for the [OpEd Project](#), which aims to support underrepresented voices in bringing transformative ideas to the public, assisting at their January 28-29 “Writing to Change the World” workshop. As a result of my work with this group, I was invited by [CalMatters](#), an online news service focused on California politics, to write an op-ed on Proposition 4, which would allow public financing of political campaigns. My essay is scheduled to be published in early October.

Given the challenges of the current times, it is of pressing importance to bring fresh perspectives to bear on the relationship between humans and the earth. My overarching goal for this sabbatical was to build on my previous teaching, scholarship, and campus leadership in order to step into more of a “public intellectual” role. This sabbatical moved my work forward in substantial ways toward this goal and planted seeds for numerous future projects.