

Lead Environmental Action as an NRCA Difference Maker Mentor



visit: nrca.uconn.edu | follow: @UConnNRCA
email: laura.cisneros@uconn.edu



Interested in...

- **Authentic** community engagement
- **Culturally sustaining** environmental education & mentorship of teens
- **Environmental** issues relevant to **local communities**

**Join the NRCA as a
Difference Maker Mentor!**

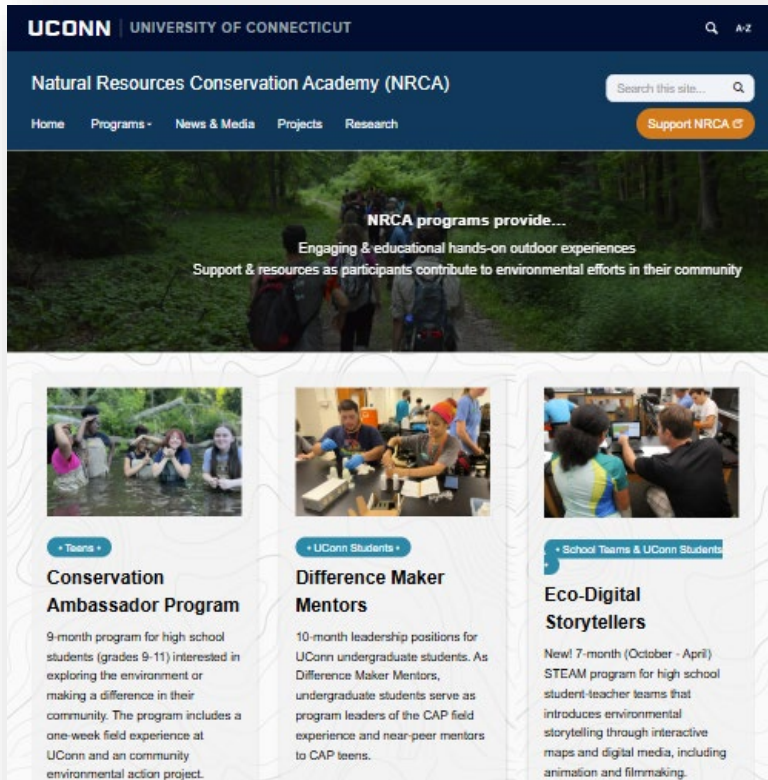


Who Can Apply?

- **UConn undergrads from diverse majors** with interests in...
 - Outdoors & working with teens
 - Equitable & inclusive practices
 - Collaboratively working on projects that benefit local communities
- **Will be a student during the 2025-2026 academic year**



Goals of NRCA Difference Maker Mentor Program



- Elevate **diverse voices** in CAP leadership
- Provide **near-peer role models**
- A pathway for CAP teens to **continue their involvement in community conservation**

Training
“Community Engagement
for Environmental Action”
(spring)

Leadership
Co-facilitate field
experience
(summer)

Mentorship
Guide teens on
community projects
(summer-winter)

Showcase
Co-present
projects with teens
(spring)

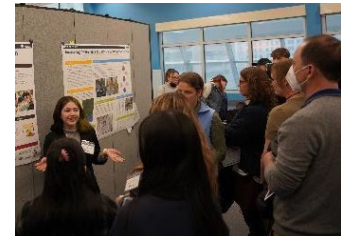
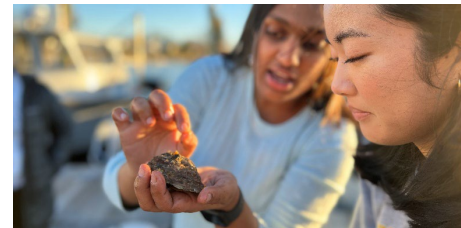
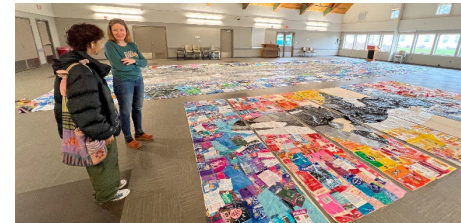
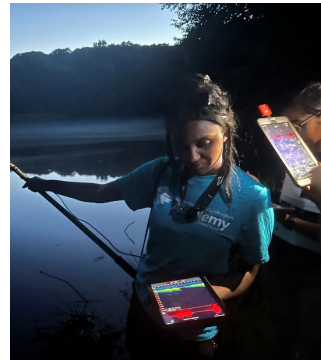
Conservation Ambassador Program (CAP)

Program Recruitment
(spring)

**Weeklong
Residential Field
Experience**
(summer)

**Community-Based
Environmental
Action Project**
(summer-winter)

Project Showcase
(spring)



Difference Maker Mentors (DMMs)



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s.uconn.edu/nre1250-syllabus

Community Engagement for Environmental Action

NRE1250 Section 001 (1 credit)

Spring Semester 2025

Wednesday, 4:40 – 5:30 pm

In-Person Jones Building 229

Instructor: Laura Cisneros, PhD
Office: W.B. Young 230
E-mail: laura_cisneros@uconn.edu
Phone: 486-4917 (office)
Office hours: By appointment

Course Description: This course provides introduction to equitable and inclusive community engagement practices that support community-based environmental efforts addressing socio-environmental issues. The course is open to students from diverse majors that have an interest in these topics:

- Introduction to socio-environmental justice issues relevant to Connecticut communities
- Principles of authentic community engagement
- Environmental education approaches that promote collective environmental action
- Critical community science
- Culturally sustaining environmental education and trauma informed mentorship approaches
- Instinctual leadership & leading for change

Post-Course Opportunity: Undergraduate students enrolled in this course will have the opportunity to apply for 10-month paid environmental education leadership positions through the Natural Resources Conservation Academy (NRCA; <https://nrca.uconn.edu/>), as NRCA Difference Maker Mentors (<https://nrca.uconn.edu/dmm/>). Four undergraduate NRCA Difference Maker Mentors (DMMs) will serve as program leaders and near-peer mentors for the NRCA Conservation Ambassador Program (<https://nrca.uconn.edu/cap/>). Under the support and guidance of NRCA faculty and a graduate student, DMMs will have the unique opportunity to co-facilitate the summer field experience (July) and mentor a subset of teen participants during their community-based environmental action project in the following months (August to April). This opportunity will provide students with experience with leadership, authentic community engagement, environmental education, and on-the-ground projects. This position involves a lot of work, e.g., building relationships, managing logistics, and ensuring success.

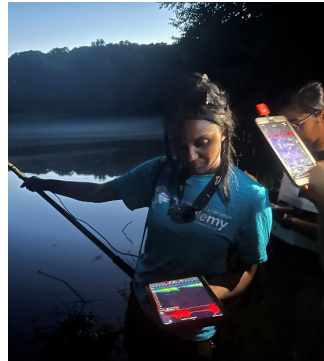
Training
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(spring)

Training Overview

- **Independent Study** (1-credit)
- **Training topics**
 - Socio-environmental justice in CT
 - Authentic community engagement
 - Environmental education for collective action
 - Critical community science
 - Culturally sustaining & trauma-informed practices
 - Instinctual leadership & change-making

CAP Field Experience

- **Co-facilitate summer field experience**
 - Supported by Dr. Cisneros and a graduate student
 - Logistics, support instructors, lead subgroup of 4-5 teens, and lead 1-2 activities
- **Field days taught by UConn professors**
- **~24 teen participants**



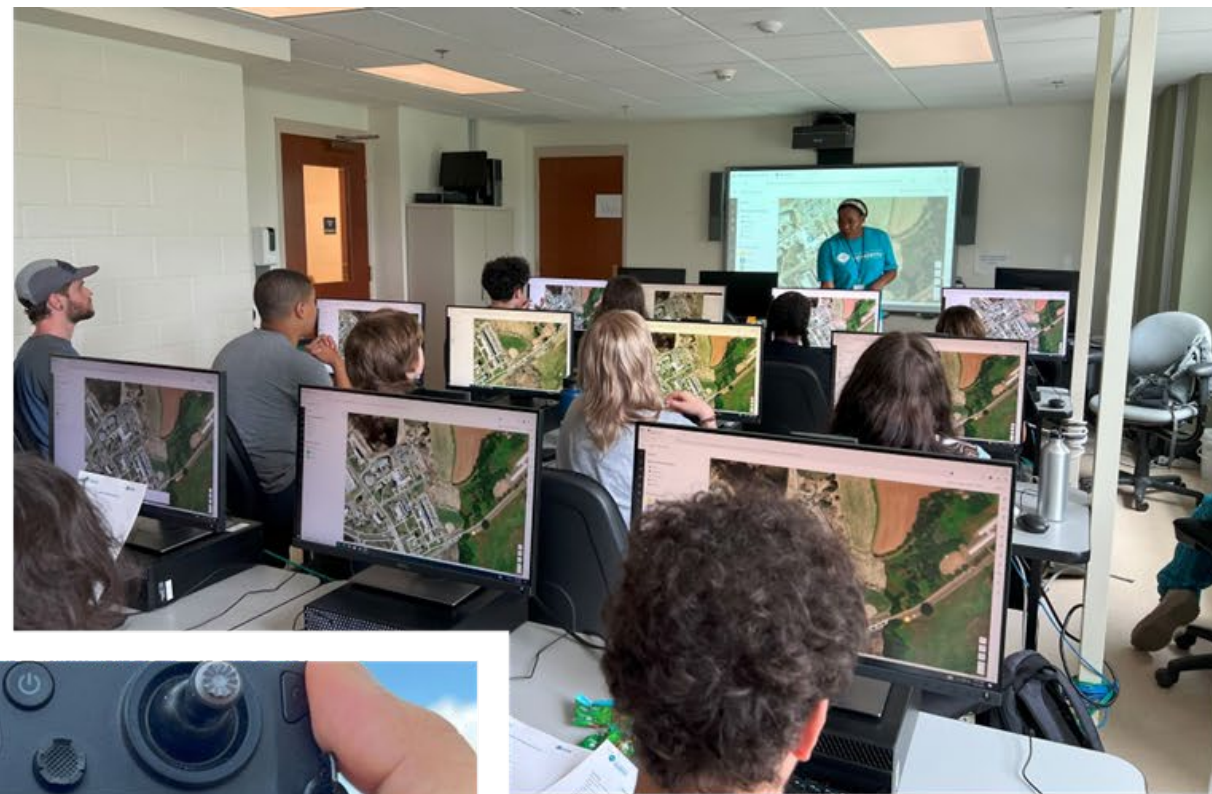
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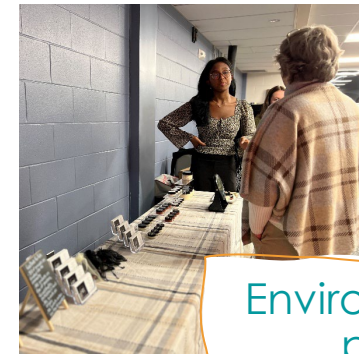






Environmental Action Projects

- **Mentors 4-5 teens** as they design and implement environmental action projects tailored to:
 - Student interests
 - Community needs
- **Co-mentor with community partner**
- **July to April**



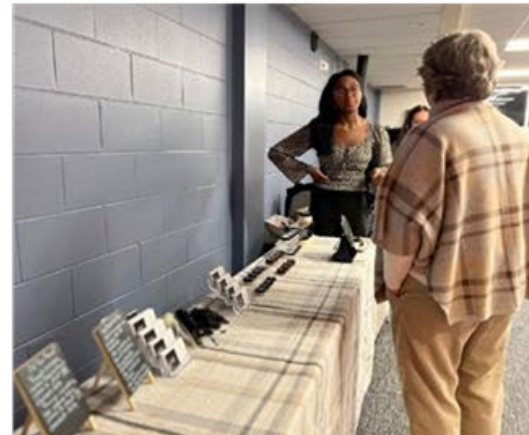
Environmental action projects are **co-designed** with community **partner** and near-peer **mentor**

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View projects:
nrca.uconn.edu/projects





Environmental Changemaker Showcase

Co-present at showcase

- Science communication
- Preparation of professional conference poster

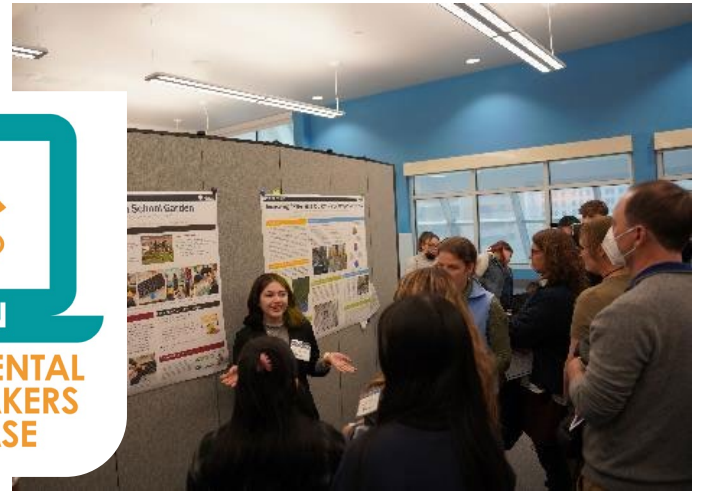


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Difference Maker Mentors Hours & Pay Rate

- 10-month position
- Each DMM receives ~\$7,650
- ~450 hour-commitment (\$17/hour)

Difference Maker Mentor Timeline		
Time Period	Approx. Hourly Commitment	Responsibilities
Jun 15-19	40	Assisting with Preparations for Field Experience
Jun 21-27	80 (over night)	Facilitating Weeklong Summer Field Experience
Jul 6-Aug 14	30	CAP Teen Mentoring and Bi-Weekly DMM Meetings (5 hours/week)
Fall Semester Aug 24-Dec 11	150	CAP Teen Mentoring and Weekly DMM Meetings (10 hours/week)
Spring Semester Jan 11-Apr 23	150	CAP Teen Mentoring and Weekly DMM Meetings (10 hours/week)

Thanks for Joining!



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