



September 8, 2023

Dear Colleagues,

I have had the privilege of serving as interim executive director for the Brook Byers Institute for Sustainable Systems for the last year.

During that time, my belief in the enduring impact that the Georgia Tech sustainability community is having in the world has been reaffirmed time and again – just browse some of the latest sustainability news stories!

Our best work rests on bringing diverse perspectives together to create new knowledge. Just this week, we were delighted to host an event to welcome the many new faculty who have a research interest in sustainability to Georgia Tech - they included experts in low-carbon cement alternatives (did you know 8% of global CO2 emissions are due to concrete production?), computational sustainability, energy economics, and community climate resilience, to name a few. Their excitement in meeting like-minded researchers from other disciplines was palpable and a fantastic way to start the year!

Over the past year, the BBISS team and I have focused on taking stock of Georgia Tech’s current sustainability portfolio and partnerships, refining BBISS’ vision and mission, growing the BBISS community, and working hard to deliver on President Cabrera’s FY 2023 USG goal: Expanding BBISS to be a transformative unit focused on climate and sustainability that integrates research and education. I am grateful to all community members who were generous with their time and perspectives, and especially to our Brook Byers Professors and BBISS Faculty Fellows.

BBISS’ new vision statement says: “Our vision is to grow and mobilize Georgia Tech’s knowledge assets to create a sustainable future for all.” We are proud to be a key partner for the implementation of Georgia Tech’s Sustainability Next 2023-2030 Strategic Plan and advancing Georgia Tech’s vision of addressing the biggest local, national, and global challenges of our time. I think that we have also achieved consensus from the BBISS community on which key challenges we are best positioned to address or excited to coalesce around. A clear picture of how we can serve our community has also emerged: facilitate collaboration among Georgia Tech researchers to catalyze high impact research, invest in innovative educational initiatives to develop future leaders, and cultivate deeper relationships with community and corporate partners to translate knowledge into practice.

Over the past year, the BBISS team has successfully executed existing and new programs aligned with our vision and mission. We selected the third cohort of BBISS Graduate Research Fellows and they began their work together. The bi-weekly BBISS Seminar Series



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hosted thought-provoking presentations that help faculty and graduate students connect around common sustainability themes. We launched the BBISS Initiative Leads program and distributed \$100K to ten compelling initiatives (in collaboration with other Interdisciplinary Research Institutes). BBISS also administered the selection and distribution of the Sustainability Next Research Seed Grant program, awarding a total of \$250K to six transdisciplinary research proposals.

An exciting recent development was the institutionalization of the Center for Serve-Learn-Sustain, formerly Georgia Tech’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that began in 2016. As of July 1, this four-person team is called the Center for Sustainable Communities Research and Education (SCoRE). It will operate under the auspices of BBISS, while also cultivating relationships with the Strategic Energy Institute (SEI) and the Renewable Bioproducts Institute (RBI). The Center’s focus on equity and environmental justice will be invaluable in increasing our faculty capacity to undertake community-engaged research and education work.

These accomplishments would not have been possible without the unwavering commitment of the Georgia Tech Executive Leadership Team to sustainability and the infusion of resources through Sustainability Next, Research Next, and the Office of the Vice President for Interdisciplinary Research (VPIR). This support has allowed us to bolster the BBISS team with people who have critical skillsets. Please join me in welcoming them and the SCoRE team to BBISS:

- Jennifer Leavey – Interim Associate Director for Interdisciplinary Education (also Sustainability Next co-chair in charge of the education portfolio)
- Josiah Hester – Interim Associate Director for Community-Engaged Research
- Trisha Sisk - Director of Activities & Engagement for BBISS, RBI, and SEI
- Nicole Kennard – Community-Engaged Research Manager for BBISS, RBI, and SEI
- Kevin Caravati – BBISS-GTRI Liaison for Interdisciplinary Sustainability Research
- Emma Blandford – Program and Portfolio Manager, Sustainability Next

This growing BBISS team works to plan, implement, and, most importantly, support interdisciplinary projects and events across campus. Recently, the 2023-24 Sustainability Next Education Innovation Awards were granted, a program under the direction of Jennifer Leavey in collaboration with the Assistant Director, Faculty Development for Sustainability Education Initiatives (Center for Teaching and Learning). We supported the creation of the Climate Action Plan led by the Associate Vice President of Sustainability. Finally, the “sibling” Interdisciplinary Research Institutes, BBISS, RBI, and SEI, are working with even greater coordination. For my part, I am pleased to share that I have accepted VPIR Julia Kubanek’s invitation to continue for a second year in the Interim Executive Director role.



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When I look back at my letter to the community from last year, I see we made great progress on the first four objectives I had outlined: Grow the BBISS community; expand BBISS' research foci; strengthen BBISS' capacity to support interdisciplinary grant writing and community-engaged research; and grow sustainability and climate-related interdisciplinary academic program offerings.

While continuing to take these objectives forward, we aspire to make measurable progress on the remaining ones this year: contribute to meeting Transforming Tomorrow Georgia Tech Campaign goals through sustainability-focused fundraising, accelerate climate tech and sustainability entrepreneurship and corporate engagement, and grow the visibility of Georgia Tech sustainability thought leadership.

Thank you all again for your groundbreaking work in sustainability, and I look forward to getting to know more of you better this year.



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