

Seeing STARS for Waste Reduction and Recycling

2019 graduate joins Sustainability Institute to ensure platinum rating

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When Jonathan Gagne '19 began his undergraduate degree, he was interested in business and nature. He stumbled upon a degree in [environmental and resource economics](#) and knew this program, and UNH, was for him. He added a dual major in [ecogastronomy](#) after attending a guest lecture.

“I was always interested in food and the lecture inspired me to learn more. I became fascinated by the power of agriculture and global food systems,” Gagne says. His studies took him to Italy and when he returned the spring of his junior year, he began to think about planning for his future career. “I always worked, but never had an internship and I knew the experience would be helpful when applying for a full-time job. I was in an art history class and saw a notice on the board for UNH’s [Social Innovation Internship](#) program.”

The rest was kismet.

“I looked at the placements and was drawn to the opportunity to work with Hannaford. Hannaford was my local grocery store growing up and the position description combined all of my interests into one experience,” Gagne says. “I only applied to one internship even though we were encouraged to apply to multiple positions.”

Gagne received the internship and had an amazing experience. He worked with Hannaford Supermarkets' sustainability team to conduct a company-wide plastic audit and presented key findings to the CEO and corporate leaders. His advisor was collaborative and ensured that Gagne was supported, able to grow professionally, and build meaningful connections.

His connection with the [Center for Social Innovation & Enterprise](#) was the gift that kept on giving. In his senior year, Gagne mentored younger students interested in high-impact programs as a changemaker education coach. He was motivated to enter, and was one of eight finalists in the [2019 Social Venture Innovation Challenge](#). He built upon the knowledge and experience gained during his internship to tackle the issue of waste on college campuses, designing a plastic-free shopping experience called [SUDS](#) for students.

Gagne graduated in December, but thanks to the [new collaboration](#) with the Center for Social Innovation & Enterprise and the Sustainability Institute, he now has the opportunity to work on a short-term project to help UNH maintain its [platinum sustainability](#) status. He is working with campus partners to revamp the surplus items system which will aid in diverting excess materials from landfills.

“I’m helping to create procedures to ensure good work has a foundation on which we can build. We want surplus furniture to be cataloged and donated appropriately. This will help our STARS rating and is the right thing to do,” Gagne says. He is energized by the opportunity to learn more and give back to his alma mater. “UNH is doing so much to be sustainable. I hope that by sharing the work everyone does, this might give people inspiration to get involved.”

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