SHAPING THE FUTURE

Sam Fox School Strategic Plan

Leadership in Sustainable Practices

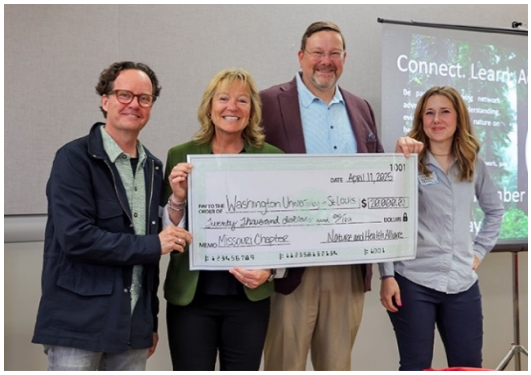
The Sam Fox School will make critical, design-centric contributions toward collaborative research that addresses our global climate crisis. We will shape the future of the built environment through resilient design solutions, a commitment to environmental justice locally and globally, dissemination of creative work that promotes awareness and action around climate and environment, and the education of sustainable design leaders.

Progress 2024-2025

Resilience as Resistance

This fall, the Sam Fox School's Sustainable Design and Environmental Justice (SDEJ) initiative launched a new series exploring the theme *Resilience as Resistance*. Led by Linda C. Samuels, Director of Sustainable Design and Environmental Justice, the effort was developed in response to the devastating May 16 tornado in St. Louis, which raised urgent questions about how communities prepare for, recover from, and confront the inequities that disasters often expose. This work kicked off with the October 30 panel event, *Foundations of Resilience: WashU Grads Designing for Climate and Justice*, which featured alumni panelists who are now emerging leaders in the community and whose work bridges sustainable design and justice-driven practice. The series will continue throughout the academic year, culminating in a major symposium on March 19-20, 2026. In preparation, Samuels is convening an interdisciplinary cohort of WashU faculty—from architecture and urban design to anthropology, art, and public health—to examine what resilience means across fields. Rooted in lessons from the May tornado and the community's ongoing recovery, this work positions design as both a form of resistance and a means of building more just, connected, and resilient communities.

Nature and Health Alliance Launched



Amy Eyler, Professor at the Brown School, and Derek Hoeferlin, Professor and Chair of Landscape Architecture, are co-leading the Nature and Health Alliance at WashU, a collaboration that brings together faculty, community organizations in St. Louis, and national partners to explore how exposure to nature can enhance physical and mental well-being. The initiative was originally funded through a $50,000 WashU Here & Next IGNITE grant but has already received national recognition. During the April 11th kickoff, the initiative was presented with an additional $20,000 from REI and the National Nature and Health Alliance. The Alliance is actively helping to forge partnerships across campus for collaborative pilot projects highlighting the connection between nature and health.

Seeds: Containers of a World to Come

The Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum hosted the exhibition *Seeds: Containers of a World to Come,* which brought into dialogue work by ten contemporary artists whose reseach-based practices are defined by sustained inquiry into plant-human-land relations. The exhibition hosted more than 7,000 visitors and was curated by Meredith Malone, curator at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, and Svea Braeunert, research associate at the School of Design at the University of Applied Sciences, Potsdam, Germany.

Workshop on Urban Mining and Circular Economy in Construction

Transitioning to a circular economy is urgent and vital to achieving significant decarbonization, enhancing national economic resilience, and fostering national prosperity. This transformation will replace traditional linear construction practices—take, make, consume, and dispose—with a sustainable, closed-loop system that minimizes waste, maximizes resource efficiency, and reintegrates materials into the supply chain. By promoting reuse, remanufacturing, and recycling, the circular approach enables locally available, high-value materials to be reclaimed through urban mining, driving sustainable innovation in the construction sector. This two-day workshop, to be held December 17-18, 2025 at WashU, will convene a multidisciplinary group of stakeholders, including scientists, engineers, construction experts, policymakers, and social scientists, to identify barriers to urban mining and circular construction. Participants will collaboratively develop a roadmap for achieving a sustainable circular economy, while fostering innovation and knowledge-sharing. This work is led by Professor Hongxi Yin and supported through a workshop grant from the National Science Foundation.

Trusted Tap: Empowering Households to Monitor Water Quality

Water utilities regularly monitor drinking water supplies. But once water enters the individual plumbing of households, there are no checks on what's coming out of the tap. For those homes served by water utilities and the 23 million American households using private well water, there is very little guidance about how or why they should care about what flows from the faucet. And those who have concerns about lead or other potential contaminants in their household plumbing do not have many affordable options to address those concerns. Backed by the National Science Foundation through a three-year, $5 million grant, Trusted Tap brings together engineers, designers, public health experts, and entrepreneurs to create a scalable, community-centered solution to empower people with a method to monitor their own tap water. Penina Acayo Laker, Associate Professor, is leading communication strategies for water science and risks to develop accessible tools for households.

Future Directions & Opportunities

Sam Fox School faculty were successful with WashU internal pilot funding programs during the 2024-25 academic year. Assistant Professor Seth Denizen received support from the McDonnell Global Incubator Seed Grant Program to extend his work on the symbiotic wastewater and agriculture system in Mexico City and the nearby Mezquital Valley. Lecturer Bomin Kim received two pilot grants. With support from Here & Next, Kim is collaborating with faculty from the School of Medicine to investigate neighborhood factors affecting people living with dementia. The Center for Race, Ethnicity, and Equity (CRE^2) provided pilot funds to explore the impacts of the growing logistics infrastructure economy on wellbeing and climate.