

Antioch University Receives \$1.5 Million Gift for Mission-Driven Environmental Studies and Sustainability Education

Gift expands Environmental Studies scholarships and launches new conservation fund supporting hands-on, justice-centered learning at Glover's Ledge



KEENE , NH, UNITED STATES, February

4, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Antioch University](https://www.antioch.edu) today announced a transformative \$1.5 million gift from a longtime supporter—an investment that simultaneously expands student access to Antioch's master's and doctoral programs in Environmental Studies and signals increased philanthropic support for the University's hands-on, mission-driven teaching, learning, and research.

“

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Tom Wessels, Antioch Faculty Emeritus

The gift includes:

\$1 million to expand the Tom Wessels Environmental Scholarship, providing critical support to academically accomplished graduate and doctoral students pursuing environmental studies grounded in justice, systems thinking, and applied research.

\$500,000 to establish the Peter Palmiotto Conservation

Fund, ensuring long-term stewardship and student-centered learning at Glover's Ledge, with annual returns split evenly between student support and care of the land itself.

“This gift arrives at a meaningful moment for Antioch,” said Lori Varlotta, PhD, President of Antioch University. “As we enter a new chapter of leadership and institutional advancement, one of our priorities is mobilizing donors and foundations who believe in education that advances environmental responsibility, social justice, and democracy-in-action. This investment affirms Antioch's educational model and the collaborative stewardship that builds donor trust and benefits students.”

The donor, an Antioch student and friend of the Environmental Studies program, shared the

motivation behind the gift: “Learning from the wisdom of Tom Wessels’ writings and talks, and his sage advice to take a graduate class with Peter Palmiotto, I was inspired by my fellow graduate students’ passion, quality of work, and commitment to the environment. I give both to honor these professors and to help more students experience and learn from the exceptional Environmental Studies faculty at Antioch.”

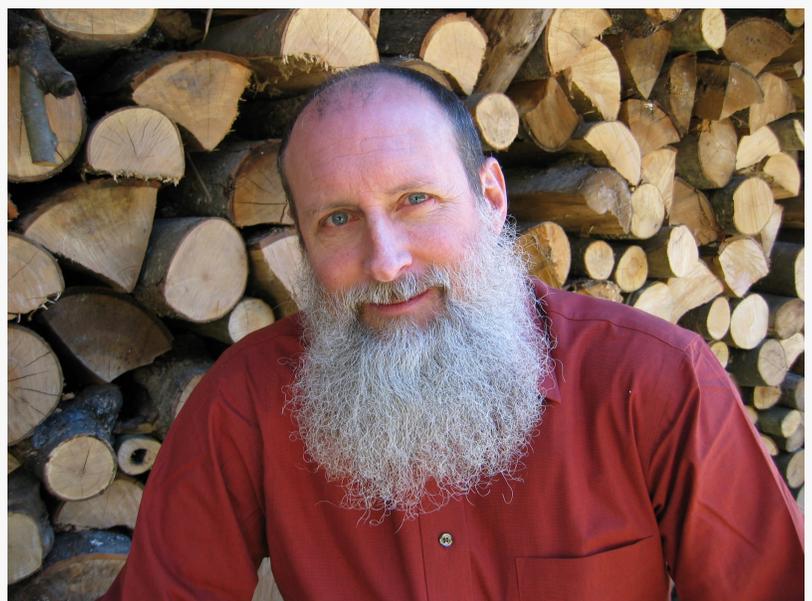
Strengthening the Tom Wessels Environmental Scholarship

This new gift effectively doubles the endowment of the Tom Wessels Environmental Scholarship, which was established in 2022. The scholarship is awarded every year to support students preparing to address today’s most urgent environmental challenges through Antioch’s practice-based, justice-centered curriculum.

The scholarship’s namesake is Tom Wessels, Faculty Emeritus and founder of Antioch’s [Conservation Biology master’s program](#). Wessels is a terrestrial ecologist and author who has taught and led ecology and sustainability workshops for decades. Wessels has been widely recognized for helping students connect deep observation of the natural world with actionable environmental leadership—and through this scholarship in his name, that legacy lives on at Antioch.

“This continued support allows individuals who couldn’t afford a graduate education to become influential agents of environmental change,” said Wessels. “Our deepest appreciation to those who made this gift possible.”

Launching the Peter Palmiotto Conservation Fund at Glover’s Ledge



Tom Wessels



Peter Palmiotto

The gift also endows the brand-new Peter Palmiotto Conservation Fund, which is designed to support a Graduate Student Fellow who will both pursue their studies and work to manage and carry out the mission of Glover's Ledge. The Graduate Student Fellow's work will focus on initiatives including forest management, environmental outreach, expanded interpretation, and engagement with under-resourced schools in the area.

This Conservation Fund's namesake, Peter Palmiotto, DF, is a forest ecologist and longtime faculty member in the Environmental Studies Department who also serves as Director of Antioch Forests. In that role, he has overseen Glover's Ledge since the forest was donated to the University in 2014.

"Glover's Ledge is where Antioch's mission comes alive," said Palmiotto. "This fund will support students who are eager to learn in the field, lead meaningful conservation work, and connect this landscape to broader community education. It's an investment in stewardship of the land, and of the next generation of environmental professionals."

Located in Langdon, New Hampshire, about 30 minutes north of Keene, Glover's Ledge is an 81-acre University-stewarded landscape where students and faculty conduct research and conservation work across diverse habitats, including forests, wetlands, streams, and ponds, with 890 species documented to date. Glover's Ledge supports a wide range of student and faculty projects, including invasive species assessment, wildlife and vegetation inventories, vernal pool research, bird migration monitoring, and interpretive trail work—with the property serving as an immersive learning environment for graduate students.

Learn more about Antioch University's [Environmental Studies and Sustainability Programs](#).

About Antioch University:

Antioch University's first President, Horace Mann—a well-known abolitionist who is considered the father of public education in the United States—believed that education was the cornerstone of a robust and inclusive democracy. 173 years later, Antioch still carries that DNA. Antioch's mission is to provide learner-centered education "to empower students with the knowledge and skills to lead meaningful lives and to advance social, racial, economic, and environmental justice." Today, Antioch is a national university with three interdisciplinary schools offering hybrid, online, and on-site programs at the institution's five campuses in Keene, NH; Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, CA; Seattle, WA; and Yellow Springs, OH. It enrolls approximately 4,000 post-traditional-age students in a wide variety of professional doctoral and master's programs, an undergraduate degree completion program, professional certificates, and endorsements. A bold and enduring source of innovation in higher education, Antioch University is a private, nonprofit institution and has been continuously accredited by the Higher Learning Commission since 1927. In 2023, Antioch and its partner Otterbein University announced the founding of the Coalition for the Common Good.

About the Coalition for the Common Good (CCG):

Antioch University and Otterbein University are the founding members of the Coalition for the Common Good, a higher education system of private, independent nonprofit colleges and universities aligned around the shared mission of educating students to advance their careers and preparing learners to promote the common good, including democracy, social justice, equity, inclusion, and engaged global citizenship. Through sharing resources and creating flexible learner pathways across programs and schools, the Coalition will reduce costs for students and institutions, expand access to degree and non-degree programs, and educate for jobs and justice. The Coalition, approved by the Higher Learning Commission and the Ohio Department of Higher Education, was announced in August 2023.

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