

Blackburn To Expand Campus Bee Program To 20 Active Hives This Summer

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CARLINVILLE - Blackburn College's five-year-old Bee Program is often referred to as the "greatest thing on campus no one knows about." This summer, the College has its sights set on expansion, with the number of active hives the program maintains increasing to 20 and caring for a little under a million pollinators.

Led by Biology Department Chair Dr. James Bray and local bee expert Arvin Pierce, the Blackburn Bee Program began in 2016 when the College was forced to remove a natural beehive from a tree near Lumpkin Student Success Center. The Illinois Native Plant Society connected Blackburn with Pierce to safely transfer the hive into a bee box instead of exterminating it. As of today, the program currently has 13 active hives on campus and maintains two more at Solomon Creek Farm, a private nature preserve in Illinois.

Hives are not the only thing the College seeks to expand within the Bee Program though. Since the beginning of the program, there have been two student beekeeping positions mentored by Pierce. However, they plan to have more students involved with the Bee Program through Blackburn's unique student-led work program. Currently, Caleb Rieger, a senior environmental biology major, and Dade Bradley, a sophomore environmental biology major, have been involved in the program since their respective freshman years at Blackburn. Both student workers have been active beekeepers for hives on campus and at Solomon Creek, responsible for cleaning and maintenance. They

have also worked on capturing swarms, splitting hives, practicing queen rearing, data collection and analysis, and harvesting honey. In the fall, they prepare the hives for winter by relocating bees and insulating the hives. Beekeeping has become more than an on-campus job to them - both Rieger and Bradley are now certified beekeepers and have their own personal hives.

Preventing harm to the bees is a top priority for the Bee Program, so the hives are relatively treatment-free. No chemicals are used in the hives because this could negatively impact the bees' and larvae's lives, which overall, weakens the hive. In addition to being treatment-free, the collection of honey from hives is done with the bees' survival as the main goal. The hives are estimated to produce over 400 pounds of honey each year, however, only 200 pounds were collected this past year to ensure that the bees had enough food to survive winter.

While the Bee Program has been praised for how much honey they have harvested and sold, both Bradley and Rieger explained that selling honey is not their main objective. Being a financially sustainable program has its benefits, but they are more focused on the educational side of beekeeping. Blackburn wants to be regionally known as the beekeeping resource point. Their first step is educating everyone on campus about the bee program. Plans are being made to set up an observation hive in a glass case in the Olin Science Building where visitors, students, and potentially new workers could see how a hive works without having to be near an active one.



About Blackburn College

Founded in 1837, Blackburn College is a four-year, Presbyterian-related, co-educational liberal arts college located in Carlinville, IL. One of only nine federally-recognized Work Colleges, Blackburn has the only program in the nation fully managed by students. Balancing academic rigor and experiential learning, each student at Blackburn gains tangible experience and develops critical skills while contributing to their community and building a resume while earning their degree. In their 2020 Best Colleges Rankings, U.S. News & World Report recognized Blackburn College as one of the top 10 best Liberal Arts Colleges in the Nation for Social Mobility. The Center for Education & the Workforce at Georgetown University ranked Blackburn as a top performer for Earnings-Price Return - 209% (#1 in IL, #10 in the U.S.) and Net Price (#1 in IL; #11 in the U.S.). The Washington Monthly twice ranked Blackburn as the best baccalaureate college in Illinois.

For more information on beekeeping, visit Arvin Pierce's website <https://www.acbees.org/> or on YouTube at [Arvin Pierce](#).