

# **EDUCATING STUDENTS FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY:**

## **Teaching Sustainability and the Equitable Distributing of Resources**

**REPORT TO SUPPORT  
STRATEGIC PLAN DISCUSSION**

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# **Educating Students for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

## Sustainability and the Equitable Distribution of Resources

### I. Philosophical overview and justification

At last, issues of sustainability have arrived as global imperatives and are now included on the “must-do” list at all levels of education.

What is the most efficient and effective approach for Otis to adopt to insure successful teaching and learning of sustainable development? And how can we best become a model in what we do as well as what we teach?

Over the last ten years, the descriptor “sustainability” has eclipsed other words used to describe the response we must make to insure that the ecology of the planet will be able to survive the effects of the burgeoning human population.

According to the Convention of Biological Diversity, sustainability can be defined as utilizing components of social, cultural, and biological diversity in a way and a role that does not lead to long term decline, thereby maintaining the potential to meet the needs of future generations.

The United Nations Bruntland Commission describes sustainable development as development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

The Bruntland Commission further identifies three spheres of sustainability that must be approached concurrently to insure a successful outcome. Known as the “three E’s” they are;

Environmental: Preserving ecosystems, conserving natural resources and protecting biodiversity. In general, preserving the biological infrastructure necessary to support life.

Equity: An equitable distribution of resources which would allow the needs of all people to be met without lower socio-economic populations depending on large families to meet their economic needs thereby further endangering the ability of the planet to support the human population. And, also, allowing people to live peacefully (i.e. Not fighting over diminishing resources such as oil, water, and food supplies, and in the process further destroying the ecosystem).

Economics: Making sustainable choices as individuals, groups or institutions. Educating and informing ourselves and others to use new protocols such as the C2C initiative (Cradle to Cradle) or lifespan analysis to determine choices and activities which are sustainable for the individual and institution as well as the global environment sustainable choices may result in less immediate economic gain, but may show long term profitability.

It is important that the college community understand the relationship between the three aspects of sustainability. The sustainability approach differs from Green Development as it does not prioritize the environmental factor as the expense of human equity or economic factors. Neither does it prioritize the economic over the environmental factor as does the free market. Instead, it provides a balanced and thoughtful framework for creating a workable long term solution for environmental issues.

The Bruntland Definition considers various factors as inter-related. The report's definition of sustainability provides a teachable model which is ideal for our educational institution as the three sphere model corresponds to the activities and function already present in the college. This will provide a basis for uniting present institutional programs and initiatives under one theoretical umbrella and will move the college forward in a logical sequence.

## II. Campus Audit of Existing Academic and Non-Academic Programs, Practices (Please see attached documents.)

The current audit findings supports the notion that sustainable activity is already flourishing on the Otis campus. These findings could also be organized by subject. We have chosen here to organize entries by academic and non-academic headings as well as relevance to the Bruntland Commission's three E's. The document could be updated periodically to provide an ongoing tally of campus activity.

It is important to note that the large number of scholarship students supported by financial aid contributes to the practice of equity by the college. The director of OTEAM was not available for interview. Although not included in this audit, the activities of the OTEAM would also sustain the practice of equity on campus.

## III. Suggestions

While it is easy to point to the success of Otis' accomplishments in developing sustainable programming such as the green architecture of the Galef building and the retrofit and environmental upgrades to Ahmanson Hall, programs which support issues of social justice, classes on environmental conservation and the soon to be launched Greenhouse Gas Audit, the Otis learning community needs to use the opportunity afforded by strategic planning to consolidate, institutionalize and direct these efforts.

I had originally planned to use the third section of this report to list successful programs of other institution of higher education. It soon became clear that the best program grew out of needs which were specifically designed to meet the profiles of individual universities and colleges.

Instead, I will use this section to enumerate a series of suggested steps Otis could take to ensure a position of leadership rather than be forced later into a game of catch up. They are:

1.) List sustainable education as one of the college's student learning outcomes. Otis needs to move from non-circular practices and classes toward organized circular inclusion of sustainable programs and processes already existing on campus.

Director of IL, Rick Shelton, has suggested that IL junior classes partnering with businesses and corporations would partner with a thematic emphasis, such as homelessness. This change would support sustainability.

If college SLO's included sustainability, departments would follow. This shift should be relatively easy as many practices and classes are already in place as shown in Section II of this paper. Please note that ALI has already adopted two new departmental goals reflecting sustainability.

The inclusion of sustainability as a college wide goal would also institutionalize cross cutting practices. An example of this could be the Environmental Steering Committee partnering with Communication Arts to provide environmental signage throughout the campus.

2.) Review the American College and University President's Climate Committee. As we are currently embarking on a Greenhouse Gas Audit for this campus, it makes sense that we would review this system for maintaining our efforts. Is it possible that Otis could meet the obligations of the PCC? In summary, they consist of:

- Auditing greenhouse gases.
- Developing concrete plans for becoming carbon neutral.
- Reporting progress.

If we are not going to commit to the PCC, we need to clarify our reasons.

3.) Hire a graduate student as a environmental coordinator to create a student leadership program in sustainability. One such program at SMC trains "sustainable crews" to teach environmental practices to college students, Santa Monica homeowners and businessmen. In return, the city commits to financially support aspects of the program. Leadership at Otis in this area could be developed by Student Services with credit being given to those who join crews in BFA classes which address sustainability. The program could be led by work study graduate level students in Public Practice.

The coordinator would be responsible for supervising and providing support to other student environmental programs and groups.

- 4.) Partner with industry to finance programs to retrofit the college with environmentally sustainable features such as solar electricity. Chevron is currently offering attractive financial packages to institutions of higher education to install carbon reductive energy sources.
- 5.) Publicize sustainable policies, practices and curricular inclusions which are already existing at Otis. Develop a few high profile programs and practices such as Pratt's partnerships with scientists.
- 6.) Develop a strategy to integrate sustainability content in the core curriculum for all Otis students as required courses, units included in existing courses or electives. (Contributed by Associate Provost Gwynne Keathley)
- 7.) Develop a concentration or sequence of courses (14-18 credits) that would be optional for students who are interested to incorporate an understanding of the environment and sustainable practices into their courses work, alongside their major. It is an opportunity for cross-disciplinary, issue-based study that extends and complements the major area. The concentration may be a combination of both Liberal Arts & Sciences and studio-based courses that introduce students to the science, ecology, economics, ethics, systems and materials that influence our understanding of the environment. (Contributed by Associate Provost Gwynne Keathley)
- 8.) Develop a track(s) within relevant majors that focus on sustainability (Contributed by Associate Provost Gwynne Keathley)
- 9.) Eventually a director of sustainability will need to be hired. This hire could be combined with other institutional needs. I agree with Joan Ogawa's excellent suggestion that the sustainability/environmental component be part of the Center for Innovation.
- 10.) Promote activities in campus (big and small) that address sustainability in our institutional practices and academic programs (on the website, etc.)