



**CHANGE THE FORECAST FOR WILDLIFE**  
SOLUTIONS TO GLOBAL WARMING

## Advocacy for Global Warming and Sustainability Education

**Incorporate sustainability into every student's education – via curriculum, research, and in the classrooms and buildings themselves. Campuses will physically function cleaner and efficiently, businesses and communities will be engaged with the higher education institutions, and well-trained faculty will have the tools to ably prepare a sustainability literate workforce.**

“Advocacy for global warming and sustainability education” means campaigning for changes in our nation's educational system(s) that will ultimately produce a sustainability-literate society.

A root cause of global warming is ignorance: ignorance about how nature works, how our current economic system's rules promote environmental destruction, how our policies advance environmental injustice, how everything is connected.

Our nation's future prosperity is directly tied to the simultaneous achievement of a well-functioning environmental system, economic viability that creates new jobs, and livable communities that provide access to all for participation in their governance. Achieving sustainable environmental, economic and social systems will require new research, education and technology development, and innovative policy approaches that are flexible and use market mechanisms while engaging relevant stakeholders from the private and public sectors.

Meeting the challenges of sustainability (health, social, economic and ecological) requires *a new way of thinking (and learning) by individuals and institutions throughout society*. This new thinking must be systemic, interdisciplinary and integrative in order to meet these challenges.

Higher education plays a critical role in making this vision of a sustainable future a reality. Higher education has the critical mass, diversity of skills, and unique academic freedom to:

- Develop new ideas and technologies;
- Conduct critical research; to raise the level of discourse regarding society and its challenges;
- Engage in experimentation in sustainable living.

Higher education prepares most of the professionals who develop, lead, manage, teach, work in, and influence society's institutions. It also engages in institutional operational practices

that, as a whole, have enormous (but largely invisible) economic, social and environmental footprints.<sup>1</sup>

There are numerous outstanding examples of sustainability education programs that seek to meet this demand for a more informed workforce. Thousands of faculty and administrators across the country are sustainability champions, and several universities are well on their way towards becoming models. The field of sustainability education is growing – it now has a National and several regional associations, an annual national conference, and numerous national advancement projects underway. Principles of sustainability are beginning to be infused into business, engineering, planning, environmental design and other academic programs. Significant campus “greening” and greenhouse gas reduction efforts are underway at hundreds of campuses.

What is now holding back this movement? A good deal of innovation in higher education is driven by federal funding, and almost no federal funding is available to support efforts to infuse sustainability into campus curricula or operations. The vast majority of existing sustainability programs is run on meager, shoe-string budgets. This lack of funding leaves individual colleges and universities without the resources necessary for sharing and networking their programs within the higher education community. What’s more, this same lack of funding also leaves them unable to systematically transfer their sustainable development discoveries to the business sector.

The solution to this problem partially lies with the federal government and its ability to play a catalytic role. Bills such as the **Higher Education Sustainability Act (HESA)** and the **Green Jobs Training Act** will:

- Educate and train the next generation of scientists, engineers, planners, and business professionals who will be developing new strategies and tools for sustainable technological innovation in a global economy.
- Empower “sustainability literate” graduates to understand the resource challenges, the people challenges and the economic challenges of sustainability and have the skills to engage in solutions that will build U.S. strength, leadership and independence.
- Promote good business practices in higher education that will provide living examples to other sectors of how disciplined sustainability practices result in greater productivity and quality of life.

#### **Counterarguments:**

- **Education is too slow. We have an immediate crisis on our hands, and it will take a generation before education has an impact.**

It is true that the education system as a whole is slow to change, but history also shows that it can change rapidly, when conditions are right and enough of the right kinds of pressure are brought to bear.

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<sup>1</sup> The annual operating budgets of the ~1900 colleges and universities and ~1900 community colleges is \$300 billion. This represents 2.8% of GDP and is greater than the GDP of all but 25 countries.

Furthermore, students have immediate influence and impact – through their buying, voting and consumption habits, their influence on parents and other adults, their choice of jobs, etc.

- **Policy changes are more important than changes in education.**  
New policy and legislation is indeed important. But in the final analysis, only a public that truly understands the changes that are needed and can bring those changes into their daily lives will achieve the massive change necessary.
- **Education is too expensive.**  
If you think education is expensive, try ignorance. The price we will pay just to train people with how to deal with potential environmental disasters *after* they have occurred is astronomically higher than an investment in sustainability today. That doesn't include the abatement and adaptation that would not be needed if addressed beforehand.

#### **Who's Doing it Already?:**

- The Campaign for Environmental Literacy ([www.FundEE.org](http://www.FundEE.org))
- The Higher Education Sustainability Act is currently in Congress.
  - It's immediate purposes are to:
    - I. **Support** faculty, staff, and students in their efforts to establish administrative and academic sustainability programs on campus;
    - II. **Promote** and enhance research by faculty and students in sustainability practices and innovations; and
    - III. **Support** colleges and universities in their work with community partners from the business, government, and nonprofit sectors to design and implement sustainability programs for application in the community and workplace.

#### **Further resources:**

- Higher Education Sustainability Act of 2007 (HR 3637): [www.FundEE.org/campaigns/hesa](http://www.FundEE.org/campaigns/hesa)
- Green Jobs Training Act (HR 2847): <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d110:h2847>:
- Idaho State Legislature's resolution encouraging development of sustainability at Idaho Institutions of higher education:  
<http://www.legislature.idaho.gov/sessioninfo/2005/journals/sday74.pdf>