

The Nine Elements of a Sustainable Culture/Campus

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Author, faculty member, former college president and advocate for sustainability.

Built sustainability at Unity College as President, in N Maine, small private college with small endowment and little money.

Sustainability is a response to planetary emergency

No one does sustainability just for the sake of it. There are four aspects:

Megaextinction, lack of biodiversity, climate change, Malthusian Resource Demands. We must of necessity think long term.

Science says - YES! Sustainability requires that we think of the WHOLE earth as an ecological and economic system.

Sustainable economy is - frugality, debt reduction, living within our means, protect future generations, conservation of natural resources. Sustainability helps us reach these goals. (also, encourages job creation?) Sustainability is, therefore, the largest challenge to - the economy, accessibility of schooling, future of the planet. Higher education should aim to address these problems!

As college president, Thomashow was involved with Second Nature and ACUPCC. The sustainability movement has exploded in last 5 years.

Works also with Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), etc. Investing endowments in sustainability has a better return than the stock market.

Culture - thinking, organizing, communicating. Campus - where we work and live and play.

TEMPLATE

Infrastructure - Energy, food, materials

Energy - the ability to do work. Expensive, resource intensive. Sustainability maximizes efficiency. We need a new way to heat and cool, move people and goods, and power our machines without altering the biosphere.

- How do we move toward 0 carbon? Tech, renewables, conservation, accounting

-Energy structures are institutional landmarks!

Food - Everyone has to eat! Edible landscaping, lawns with garden strips, administration with greenhouses, cafeterias serve locally, campus as a regional center for coops.

Materials - production/change of matter - do we choose low toxicity materials? How do we get them? Where do they come from? Recycled?

Community - govt, investment, wellness

Governance - Organizational culture - leadership matters! Alignment between the mission, governance, and work practice. Job descriptions, performance evaluations. Guidelines for operations. Change is okay! Leadership requires boldness/tenderness, urgency/patience, innovation/tradition. Sustainability is beyond left/right politics! NOT some part of “esoteric green politics”

Investment - Colleges have impact on surrounding community. Dynamic economic multipliers. Their investment decisions have profound ramifications. Thus, sustainability. The college can work with communities to create demand for sustainability. It can incubate new tech/ideas. Investment of endowment responsibly?

Wellness - Sustainability promotes community, personal, planetary well-being.

Learning - curriculum, aesthetics, interpretation

Curriculum - We are changing what it means to learn. Learning is everywhere, not just campus! What you know and how you think - a reflection of how you live. The best sustainability is one that provides the hands-on experience of living sustainably. If you create the structures, people are more likely to do the right thing.

Aesthetics - The Art and Sensibility of Sustainability - Using the arts and humanities to move forward. Perceptual challenge to understanding environmental change - scale and biosphere, existential questions. Art is a way to interpret this info and are a bridge to emotional and scientific understanding.

Interpretation - Making sense of it all. Every project needs branding and an explanation. Hide nothing. Measure, keep records, share info in compelling ways. Make energy savings public!