

World Café about Campus Climate Responsibility: Report-Back for Participants

Report prepared by Michael Rawson Clark, Executive Director, Campus Sustainability Coalition



“We are at the dawn of an era where our influence on climate, ecosystems, and oceans is unmistakable. We cannot leave this problem to other people, to other governments or to industrial giants.”

University of Alberta President Indira Samarasekera, Fall 2006 Convocation Address

Why does a University need its community to take on climate change?

Even if global carbon emissions ceased tomorrow, the effects of climate change would already be environmentally, socially, and economically serious. Without very large reductions in carbon emissions very soon, effects of climate change will be catastrophic. Yet there is reason to hope that the global community has the political, grassroots and technological means to mitigate climate change and adapt to its effects. Universities, as leaders of thought and innovation, have a pivotal role to play in this cultural, social, political, and technological transformation.

Overcoming climate change across the University of Alberta, and beyond, requires a new process of engagement, one where all members of our community will feel welcome, whatever their preexisting ideas, knowledge, and identity. To move towards a common vision and common action, all people must be free to speak from the heart. With these principles in mind, a diverse group of campus citizens convened a “World Café on Campus Climate Responsibility” on April 7, 2009.



At the World Café, the discussion was among equals. Each community member brought their unique strengths and abilities, whether they were a student, professor or staff member. As citizens, participants listened to different or opposing ideas and arguments. Everyone had the opportunity to offer expertise. Each person was heard – and was able to lead.

Who participated?

Seventy-one people in total attended; about fifteen to twenty of those present had not RSVP'd. Of the ninety-one who RSVP'd, 70% work in academic faculties as faculty or other staff, and 30% work in administrative positions or were staff. Faculty members who RSVP'd represented Education, Political Science, Biological Sciences, Medicine and Dentistry, Arts, and Public Health, Engineering, Business, Rehabilitation Medicine and Extension. There also was representation from Campus Saint-Jean, Agriculture, Life and Environmental Sciences (ALES), Facilities and Operations, the Office of the Provost, Office of the Vice-President (Facilities and Operations), Office of Sustainability, Native Studies, Nursing, the Registrar's Office, Ancillary Services, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Supply Management, UofA International, the University Chaplain's Center, and the Student's Union. The range of positions included librarians, a student life coordinator, assistant and full professors, Deans and Assistant Deans, undergraduate and graduate students, systems analysts, the Deputy Provost, a senior administrative officer, and human resource advisors. Several alumni were also in attendance.



Relatively few students attended, due in part to the event being held during the last week of classes. This nonetheless seemed like the best available time for the event, given our desire expose the community to ‘deliberative democracy’, and to ramp up to a fuller slate of events in the fall.

Our World Café Scenario: The year is 2020 ... we have beaten climate change....

“...we are at the UofA in 2020, having done a better job mitigating and adapting to climate change than we could have dreamed of in 2009 — and we are recognized as leaders in a global environmental and social success story.”

Given this story of an alternative future in which the University of Alberta is a world leader in addressing climate change, we asked participants to address three questions in sequence, at three different tables. At the University of Alberta,



1. “What did we do right?”
2. “What changes were most challenging?”
3. “What changes were most rewarding?”

Question One: What did we do right?

In 2020, we will be a sustainability-focused community. Reflections looked inward at possible actions and mindsets of the University, and outward at our world influence. Themes (Numbers in brackets indicate the number of items from tables falling under each theme):

- ☺ Bold action at the University in energy conservation and technological innovation (9)
- ☺ Alignment of policies, vision and principles to achieve sustainability (5)
- ☺ Guiding financial decisions and funding by sustainability values (2)
- ☺ Fostering a culture of sustainability through awareness, education, and a sense of shared responsibility and social justice (10)
- ☺ Setting targets and measuring outcomes (2)
- ☺ Integrated sustainability across University curriculum (5)
- ☺ Fostering sustainability through leadership and stewardship (4)
- ☺ Use market mechanisms (e.g. incentives) (5)
- ☺ Best practices: the 3 Rs, reduce, reuse, recycle (8)
- ☺ Other (1)

Question Two: What changes were most challenging?

Much of the story was of transforming ourselves as citizens within a community. The greatest challenges were overcoming cultural barriers among individuals and in our institution, and finding our confidence and courage. Themes:

- ☺ Changing mindsets, behaviour, and sense of entitlement (10)
- ☺ Creating a political shift toward more inclusive and accountable governance (6)
- ☺ Getting to consensus for action (5)
- ☺ Overcoming academic barriers (5)
- ☺ Overcoming apathy and motivating a critical mass of people to take action (4)
- ☺ Lack of time for fulfilling the responsibilities of citizenship changing (2)
- ☺ Lack of resources - money and human resource (2)
- ☺ Moving from individual materialism to collective responsibility (5)
- ☺ Having the courage to make change happen to translate words into action (6)

Question Three: What changes were most rewarding?

In 2020, the citizens of the University of Alberta will witness a stronger global community, proud of the many University graduates, staff and faculty composing and leading it. Our greatest reward will be improving the conditions in which others live. We will have learned to measure ourselves by the positive impact we have on the world. Themes:

- ☺ Legacy for future generations (10)
- ☺ Creation of leaders for a sustainable future (3)
- ☺ Strengthened university community (6)
- ☺ Collective responsibility (4)
- ☺ Culture shift and behaviour change (10)
- ☺ Personal and collective happiness and sense of accomplishment (14)
- ☺ Improved health and well-being (5)



Beyond the World Café

This World Café was the first step in a process where members of the University of Alberta community will deliberate together about how we can meet the challenge of climate change, and of building a sustainable campus. We plan to step up the process this fall, with campus-wide summits and smaller deliberations in departments, student groups, and other communities across our campuses. This ongoing initiative has the support of senior administrators, the Campus Sustainability Coalition, the Office of Sustainability, the School for Energy and the Environment, and many others. It also is being watched by partners across the province who are treating our initiative as a pilot for Alberta-wide citizen deliberations on climate change.

We invite you to join us as in planning, implementing, and/or participating in our initiative at the University of Alberta. For more information or to join us, please contact changeru@ualberta.ca or see the University of Alberta Office of Sustainability website at www.sustainability.ualberta.ca.