

9-1-2004

Education for Sustainability: Engaging the Polytechnic University

Warren J. Baker

California Polytechnic State University - San Luis Obispo, wbaker@calpoly.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/moebius>

Recommended Citation

Baker, Warren J. (2004) "Education for Sustainability: Engaging the Polytechnic University," *Moebius*: Vol. 2: Iss. 2, Article 10.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/moebius/vol2/iss2/10>

This Essay and Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts at DigitalCommons@CalPoly. It has been accepted for inclusion in Moebius by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CalPoly. For more information, please contact mwyngard@calpoly.edu.

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY: ENGAGING THE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

Warren J. Baker

This year, Cal Poly has joined UC Santa Barbara and CSU Chico to become the third California public university to sign the Talloires declaration, a statement by university leaders around the world in support of “environmental citizenship.”

The international Talloires movement began in 1990, when Tufts University convened a conference in Talloires, France. At this conference, educational leaders voiced their concerns about the accelerating degradation and depletion of the world’s natural resources. They created a document that spelled out key actions institutions of higher education could take to ensure a more sustainable future.

Their 10-point plan, captured in the Talloires Declaration, has since been signed by the presidents of more than 300 universities around the world.

Cal Poly finds it fitting and appropriate to associate itself with the Talloires declaration. As a polytechnic university, it is at the core of our mission to examine the ways in which knowledge may be applied to improve society, manage scarce resources and preserve the precious environmental values that support us physically as a species and uplift us spiritually. Indeed, the University has already undertaken many activities outlined in the Talloires Declaration.

Cal Poly’s Master Plan includes a statement of core values that calls for development of an environmentally responsible campus that demonstrates high regard for bio diversity and energy conservation.

The Master Plan envisions a socially responsible, polytechnic university that meets growing public demand for affordable access to higher education in polytechnic disciplines and for access to careers in high-demand fields in the state's increasingly science and technology-based economy.

The Master Plan also envisions a supportive campus environment that accommodates a moderate increase in students from all walks of life in California, a campus that is physically comfortable and attractive, personally safe, culturally diverse, and intellectually stimulating.

In the implementation of the Master Plan, we are striving to strike a balance among several values and principles that we believe are all essential elements of a comprehensive vision of sustainability—including academic excellence, social justice, economic growth and efficiency and environmental protection.

As you can see on their Web page, our Facilities Planning Department has embraced key principles of environmental, social and economic sustainability. Through awareness activities and events, energy conservation initiatives, environmentally sensitive planning and environmental review protocols, the department has integrated principles of sustainability in its mission and day-to-day practice.

As called for by the Talloires Declaration, Cal Poly provides education for environmentally responsible citizenship, through its educational programs, in polytechnic and other emphasis areas. For example, several colleges offer degree programs, minors or other areas of emphasis: such as Natural Resources Management, in the College of Agriculture, Civil and Environmental Engineering, in the College of Engineering, and in the College of Architecture and Environmental Design, the interdisciplinary "Sustainable Environment Education" emphasis provides exposure to principles of sustainability across the College's programs.

In addition, Cal Poly is home to a number of learning centers and institutes which advise industry and government on a variety of projects. These include the Environmental Biotechnology Institute, the Coastal Resources Institute, the Irrigation Training Research Center, the Renewable Energy Institute, and the Evelyn and Harold Hay project, which supports solar building design.

The Cal Poly Land Project is another important example of the University's growing engagement with issues of sustainability.

Cal Poly has also been active in promoting principles of sustainability on a global scale. The University's College of Agriculture took the lead, for example, in establishing EARTH University in Costa Rica, an institution dedicated to the conservation and sustainable development of the humid tropics.

By signing the Talloires Declaration, and associating the University formally with the declaration's sustainability principles, we wish to communicate Cal Poly's commitment

to play a strong and positive role in applying sustainability principles locally, in our education, research and in the further development of our campus. We are also committed to advocating these principles more globally, in University System deliberations and in policy dialogues beyond the University. 