



**Office of Sustainability Programs
University of New Hampshire**

What is sustainability?

As Director of the Office of Sustainability Programs, I am asked almost daily “what is sustainability”? This is also a question that I ask faculty, students, staff, and other professionals representing a range of disciplines in meetings and presentations. Far and away the most common responses fall into the categories of “environment, natural resources and recycling.” Beneath these responses I sense a broadly held perception that sustainability is essentially about environmentalism moving into the mainstream of society; a “greening” of institutions like universities and corporations. This resource-based view of sustainability leads to conceptions like the World Bank’s organization of societies into human, environmental and financial capital—the values of economic theory stretching just far enough to admit environmental externalities. For the majority of groups I talk with, it seems to make good sense; and the response is “sure, let’s be more efficient and not pollute the environment.”

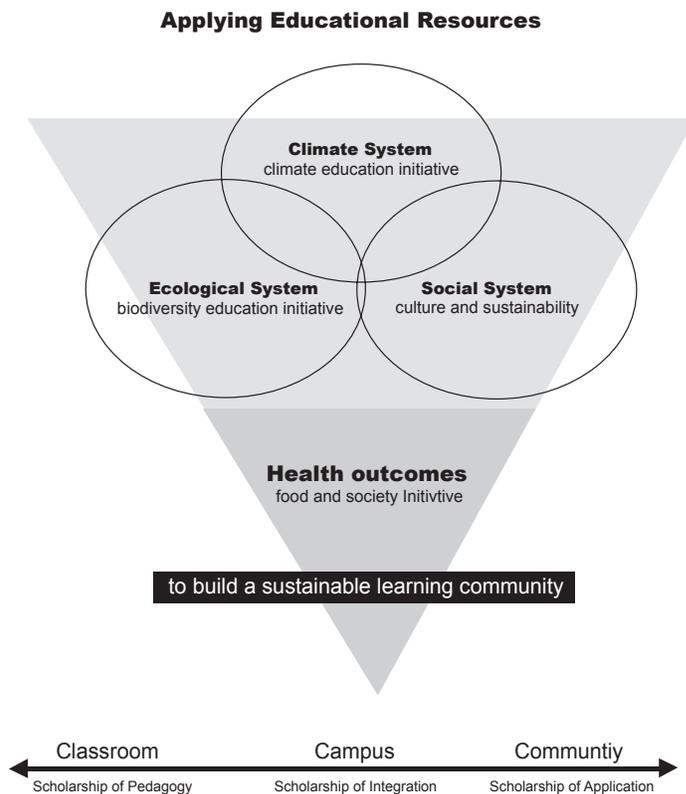
What is it that sustains you, your family and community? This is a question I am never asked. When I raise this question with students and colleagues, “love, beauty, relationships, meaning and identity” are quick to emerge as common responses. Variations of “community services and jobs,” as well as “clean air and water” normally follow. This is a view of sustainability where nature and culture are inseparable, locked in a dance of coevolution.

Sustaining families and communities has been a preoccupation of human culture reaching back to antiquity. From this perspective sustainability is not a new idea or aspiration. What is new, is the context in which we are collectively pursuing sustainability: Humanity now constitutes a geologic force that has transformed the atmosphere, hydrosphere and landscape on a global scale. Collective decisions related to everything from energy and material consumption to healthcare and the arts reverberate around the increasingly networked globe. Sustainability is about integrating knowledge in all its forms into cultural institutions to establish patterns of living that sustain us now and generations into the future. It is this conception of sustainability that generates the vision and projects of the UNH Office of Sustainability Programs including our collaboration with the New Hampshire Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and the Granite State Landscape Architects in this monthly publication.

Over the past six years, since the founding of the UNH Office of Sustainability Programs with a far-sighted, generous endowment from an alumnus, we have worked to integrate fragmented knowledge residing in disparate disciplines, professions and practices into a form that allows us to bring it to bear on community life.

The integrating framework that is so fundamental to our effort is rooted in a public health outlook that emerged over the last decade from efforts to understand the relationship of climate variability and health.

As illustrated below, the framework presents health outcomes as the result of interactions of the climate system with ecological and social systems. Health outcomes are understood in their broadest sense to include the health of ecosystems and communities. Climate includes physical and chemical climate on short and long time scales: so an ozone alert in summer is a chemical climate event just as record cold temperatures or drought are physical climate events. Climate both impacts and is impacted by social systems and ecological systems which as noted above are assumed to be inextricably linked. When these interactions are incorporated into teaching, research, campus policies, and outreach, we move toward a sustainable learning community.



Close up on projects

All of our programming is derived from this framework and is organized around four initiatives: Climate Education, Biodiversity Education (relating to ecosystems), Culture and Sustainability, and Food and Society. The latter is associated with health outcomes as the food system is a powerful integrator in which everyone feels they have a direct stake.

In the accompanying *Close up* section we list some of the many projects that are representative of our approach. In future issues, we will provide greater detail about projects in each of these areas. Project profiles will demonstrate how we are building knowledge into our culture, which in turn will be incorporated by students and learners from all disciplines and professions as they participate in our sustainable learning community.

We often talk about how to make the whole greater than the sum of its parts. This is normally expressed as an aspiration related to synergy and other creative concepts. But when it comes to sustainability, in the world as it actually exists, the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts: whether we want it to be or not, whether we recognize it to be so, or not, or whether we conduct our professional and civic activities accordingly, or not.

This fact is nicely expressed in the popular laws of ecology: *everything is connected to everything else, you can never do just one thing, there is no free lunch and nature knows best*. So from the perspective of sustainability, integrated, interdisciplinary planning, design, construction and management is an urgent and critical development that must take place if we are to sustain community life. But integration of professional and academic disciplines has been talked about for quite a while, and yet notwithstanding some encouraging developments and examples, it remains an elusive and seemingly impractical goal.

We hope that our collaboration with the *NH Forum* will provide a rich learning experience for all of us so that we can advance sustainability.

Tom Kelly, Ph.D.
Director

Transportation Demand Management (TDM)

The goal of TDM is to reduce demand for single occupancy vehicle transportation by providing effective and efficient alternatives that meet commuter needs. UNH's TDM initiative includes a community bike program, carpooling, vanpooling, Amtrak service, and a campus bus and shuttle fleet.



Climate Education Initiative

Composting

The compost program at UNH began in 1998. Food waste and other organic materials are collected three times per week by student interns and taken to the windrows at the University's agronomy research farm. During fall semester 2002, over 25,000 lbs of organic waste were diverted from the landfill.



Food and Society Initiative

Sustainable Building, Design and Construction

A small-scale renovation and remodeling project was conducted to create a new office space for OSP with enduring materials, functional designs, energy efficiency, and minimal impact to the environment. From this renovation project, the university developed a set of guidelines to be used for future small projects across campus.



Climate Education Initiative

Promise of the Sun

A solar panel was installed on the roof of the Memorial Union Building that provides 1 kilowatt/hour of energy. As part of this project, a 17x32 foot interactive educational exhibit was designed to enable students, staff, faculty and campus visitors to explore the question of energy use and alternative energy options.



Climate Education Initiative

Sustainable Landscaping

A sustainable landscape requires integration of aesthetic and biodiversity objectives that promote ecological health, save maintenance dollars, and minimize the use of chemicals, water, and mowing. Several demonstration sites with native plants are complete and are part of the UNH campus "learningscape."



Biodiversity Education Initiative

The Scheier Project

To help promote the culture of art and its place in our community, a documentary film celebrating the lives and artwork of former UNH faculty Ed and Mary Scheier was produced. The film was broadcast on over 100 public broadcasting stations throughout the country and a pottery exhibit put on display at the UNH Dimond Library.



Culture and Sustainability Initiative

For more info about the above projects visit our website @ www.sustainableunh.unh.edu or phone 603.862.4088