

Examples of the Earth Charter in Higher Education¹

Given the diversity of educational settings in which the Earth Charter can be applied, we believe it is best not to impose one way of teaching the Earth Charter. Therefore, the Earth Charter Education Program is documenting a set of case studies around the world that illustrate how educators have made use of the Earth Charter in schools, institutions of higher learning, at the community level, and in professional development. Some innovative uses of the Earth Charter in the university classroom are described below.

1) ***Western Michigan University, USA***: Dr. Harold Glasser, Professor of Environmental Studies, has used the Earth Charter in his “Environment, Technology, and Values” class. Students are asked to evaluate and critique the document and carefully review each of the sixteen principles. They are asked to consider the following questions: Is the Earth Charter interesting and engaging? Does it encourage you to read on? Comment on whether you agree or disagree with each principle and why. Explain your position. In your view, do the principles do an adequate and effective job of outlining a path for a “sustainable global society”? Why or why not? What would you change to make a more compelling case? Comment on the “Preamble,” the “Principles,” and “The Way Forward.” How relevant do you feel the Earth Charter is as a guide to public policy?

2) ***Michigan State University, USA***: Terry Link and Dr. Laurie Thorp taught a course entitled “Earth Charter: Pathway to a Sustainable Future?” in spring 2002. The course description includes the following statements: “We believe that you cannot talk about global sustainability without including our current system of education as part of the equation. The present patterns of distanced, abstract and objectified teaching and learning only serve to perpetuate a way of knowing and being that is detrimental to planet Earth and her inhabitants. This course has been purposefully designed as an alternative model for students, teachers and the subject to come together in a meaningful way... It will focus on the Earth Charter document as a vehicle for personal, institutional, community, national and global transformation... Each student will be expected to participate in a semester- long project of engagement with the Earth Charter document and their community.” The course includes weekly speakers from various departments and divisions within the university as well as from the local community.

3) ***Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU), USA***: All thirty-five faculty members teaching FGCU’s course, “The University Colloquium: A Sustainable Future,” use the Earth Charter. This course is a graduation requirement in all five colleges of the University. The Charter is also used in composition classes and in the Learning Academy – an academic community-building program for new students. Dr. James Wohlpart relies on the Earth Charter when he introduces sustainability as an organizing principle into his English courses. The English Program is currently refining its major to include an emphasis on humans’ relationship to the environment, a focus that will also be key to the Master’s program in English. Students in these courses will consider how culture creates narratives that provide meaning in life and the way in which sustainability is an essential

¹ A number of the examples in this document have been taken directly from ‘Teaching Sustainability with the Earth Charter’ by Richard M Clugston, Wynn Clader and Peter Blaze Corcoran.

narrative of the twenty-first century. Students engage the Earth Charter as a new approach to global ethics and sustainability. Wohlpart and Peter Blaze Corcoran, former Colloquium Coordinator, also plan to use the Earth Charter as a keystone in their environmental literature course, which is organized around the responses of literary artists to the principles in the Charter.

4) **Hendrix College, Arkansas, USA:** Dr. Jay McDaniel, professor of religion, has used the Earth Charter in a course called "State of the World," which satisfies a General Education requirement called "Global Challenges" at Hendrix. The syllabus states that "the purpose of this course is to enable you to consider 'the big picture' of the state of the world and your own place in making a constructive difference in the world." McDaniel suggests that the Earth Charter's preamble adequately assesses the state of the world and its principles capture the best hopes for the future. McDaniel has also used the Earth Charter in a course on Buddhism in the context of dealing with socially engaged Buddhism; and in a course called "Religion, Animals, and Earth," suggesting that it offers guidelines for affirming animal welfare, environmental responsibility, and human-well being.

5) **Villanova University, Pennsylvania, USA:** Professor Ted Nunez is incorporating the Earth Charter in his undergraduate introductory ethics course at Villanova University in Pennsylvania. He introduces the Earth Charter after the class studies the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and couples it with a discussion of three sustainable development policy agendas to show students what the Charter might look like in practice.

Taking the Earth Charter as an educational and organizational tool, the students work in groups of two to consider the Charter within the context of Neo-Liberal, Ecological Modernization, and Globalization From Below policy agendas. Although some students always resist the Earth Charter, arguing that it is too idealistic and vague, Ted has experienced a generally positive response when he asks students if they would sign the Earth Charter, and what lifestyle changes they would be willing to make if they did.

Ted will also be using the Earth Charter with his "Caring for Earth" course. He will integrate the Charter with a semester of studying short stories, the history of ecology, environmental philosophy, environmental politics and the environmental justice movement. In addition to his classes, Ted plans to have an Earth Charter table as part of Villanova's Earth Day events. His hope is to involve his students, who will by then be familiar with the Earth Charter, in education and outreach to the campus.

6) **University for Peace, Costa Rica:** The 'Introduction to Peace Studies' course, which is being taught at the University for Peace, introduces students to the field of peace studies as an integrated, interdisciplinary area of research. The larger goal of the course is to provide students with a rubric for integrating diverse topics, readings, and information from various disciplines and bringing them to bear on the crucial challenges and dilemmas facing those working for peace. A 3-hour session has been devoted to the Earth Charter with the goal of introducing the Earth Charter as a document, a process, and as a

tool. The applications of the Earth Charter will be examined, particularly focusing on its relevance as a document that furthers the idea and reality of a positive peace, rooted in justice and sustainability. Notions of global ethics in general will also be examined in order to contextualize the Earth Charter.

In another initiative at UPEACE led by Professor Abelardo Brenes, The Earth Charter will be used as a significant frame of reference for the development of a UPEACE Master's Degree in Peace Education aimed at training education policy makers and teacher educators. The Master's pursues two intertwined goals: capacity building (leadership training) and educational reform and change in school systems toward peace-building education. The foundation core courses are being designed to reflect the rationale of the Preamble of the Earth Charter. Their objective will be to enable students to develop an understanding of:

- the main challenges for peace in the 21st century;
- the theoretical and methodological options available in peace research and conflict resolution;
- the fundamental conditions for peace and security, namely culture and learning, governance, human rights, sustainable development, economics and environment;
- the critical thinking and practical skills for preventive diplomacy, peace keeping, peace making and peace building that may be applied in diverse institutional and policy scenarios (with an emphasis on UN programs);
- an ethically conscious sense of personal mission and confidence as change agents.

The content of the Master's degree is geared to professionals in formal education who are working or would be interested in working in the development of peace education programs, particularly in the context of countries and regions that are experiencing conflict and development challenges. It may also be of interest for individuals who work in other social contexts. The preamble of the Earth Charter was used to articulate the learning goals of the program and the Earth Charter was used as the integrating framework for the course.

7) **Yeravan University, Armenia:** The Earth Charter has been the theme of seminars and workshops and is being used as an educational instrument at Yeravan University. An Earth Charter booklet in Armenian, English, and Russian was published and distributed at the National Earth Charter Forum, in seminars and workshops held in rural areas of Armenia, and through national libraries. Related Earth Charter materials are also included (in Armenian) in the book *Towards Sustainable Development of Armenia*, published in September 1999.

In this country, which has lived with a history of genocide and repression, the new regime is embracing the roadmap for democracy and peace offered by the Earth Charter. Both the ASHD and Yeravan University are looking to expand their implementation of the Earth Charter to reach all sectors of society.

8) In 2000, four organizations agreed to form a ***Global Higher Education for Sustainability Partnership*** (GHESP) to combine their strengths in an effort to mobilize higher education institutions to support sustainable development. The organizations are:

- The Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (ULSF) serves as the Secretariat of over 280 signatories of the Talloires Declaration in over 40 countries and promotes education for sustainability based on the Earth Charter;
- COPERNICUS-Campus, formerly a program of the Association of European Universities, is responsible for the University Charter for Sustainable Development, signed to date by over 290 university heads in 36 European countries;
- The International Association of Universities (IAU) provides an international center of cooperation among 800 member universities and institutions of higher education. IAU developed and adopted the Kyoto Declaration;
- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is the task manager for the implementation of Chapter 36, “Education, Public Awareness and Training,” of *Agenda 21* and for the international work programme on education of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development.

GHESP partners believe that higher education must play a central role within the overall process of achieving sustainable development. The partners are convinced that if the leaders of major disciplines and institutions do not make sustainability a central academic and organizational focus, it will be impossible to create a just, equitable, and sustainable future. Together IAU, ULSF and COPERNICUS represent over 1000 universities that have committed to making sustainability a central focus of their teaching and practice. Roughly one third of these signatory institutions are from the global South, and one-fifth from countries in the former Soviet Union and Warsaw pact.

From its founding, GHESP has used the Earth Charter as an inspiration and framework for its programmatic planning.

9) ***Schumacher College, England***: Schumacher College was founded in 1991 upon the twin convictions that the world view which has dominated Western civilization has serious limitations, and that a new vision is needed for human society, its values, and its relationship to Earth. Through interdisciplinary studies, the College aims to explore the foundations of that new vision. Schumacher College offers rigorous inquiry to uncover the roots of the prevailing world view; it explores ecological approaches which value holistic rather than reductionist perspectives and spiritual rather than consumerist values. Schumacher College is currently exploring how the Earth Charter can be integrated into existing and proposed short-courses and Master’s degree programs.

Conclusion: There are many examples in Tertiary education from other countries that are in the process of being documented. UNESCO’s General Assembly recently passed a resolution acknowledging the Earth Charter as an important ethical framework for sustainable development.