

Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU)

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A) How did your or your organization first hear about the Earth Charter?

The Earth Charter Commission had decided that the most important priority to pursue after the drafting of the document was complete was education. I had the privilege of being invited in Paris to meet with the Earth Charter Commission the morning after the Charter had been finalized and we discussed its possibilities for Earth Charter Education.

From the beginning, the Commission had felt that the Charter was a valuable educational resource and wanted the 1st meeting after the finalization of the wording to be about its educational uses.

I was inspired by the comprehensive and integrated nature of the ethical statements and particularly pleased with its concern for social justice and peace, especially because as an environmental educator I've that one of our failures in this field of study was our inability to reach across environmental problems to include social problems. So I was inspired by its breath and remarkable coherence. As an educator I immediately saw the challenges of teaching a set of principles that was so broad and value laden. But I was particularly struck by its potential as a definition of sustainability. Prior to the Earth Charter, I think we had lacked a comprehensive integrated vision of Sustainable Development that could be presented as defining what it is.

B) Tell us about the project/program that you are working on with the Earth Charter

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 an English 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 new 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 narrative of the twenty- first century.

Wohlpert and I also use the Earth Charter as a keystone in our environmental literature course. Students engage the Earth Charter as a new approach to global ethics and sustainability.

In early 2004, FGCU established a Center for Environmental and Sustainability Education. The Earth Charter will be used as inspiration in reconceptualizing environmental education. The Center will work with the Earth Charter Initiative in Costa Rica on specific projects including teacher education related to the Charter.

C) Can you tell me how you visualize the Earth Charter being an educational tool for higher education organizations?

I think that perhaps the greatest educational value of the Earth Charter is in its potential to inspire teachers and students to the challenges and possibilities of creating a better world. It helps all of us in education to understand the interrelated nature of the problems while also identifying many specific problems. In this way one can use the Earth Charter to go into depth in many directions while still maintaining a vision of the whole of a sustainable future. It also has great usefulness as an ethical statement inviting consideration of what the right response to these issues ought to be.