

## The Earth Charter Student Award



Earth Charter Student Awardees, UNA 2010

The National University of Costa Rica (UNA), a supporter of the Earth Charter Initiative since 1996, has created the **Earth Charter Student Award**. The idea of offering this award came from the University's **Earth Charter Network**, created in 2010, and was specifically proposed by Mrs. Elizabeth Ramirez, UNA's Extension Director.

According to Mrs. Ramirez and Mrs. Nancy Villalobos Sandi, member of UNA's EC Network and coordinator of Scientific Education, UNA traditionally grants awards to the students with excellent academic qualifications. The students with achievements on the fields of Sports and Creative Arts and Science and Technology, had also been recognized with awards. But something important was missing.

Since UNA promotes the values of the Earth Charter, it seemed quite essential to create an award that would recognize also those students who actually put the values of the Earth Charter into action. With the Earth Charter Student Award UNA wants to recognize and give credit to those students who act as ambassadors of ethical values, dedicating their free time to helping others and doing voluntary work for the wellbeing of their communities.

As Mrs. Elizabeth Ramirez said, "it is very easy to grant an award to students with good grades or with good sport's performance, but no one ever recognize those who serve the others". These are students who don't mind to spend their free time helping others, and are good leaders that have a positive influence in their sphere of action.

The ideal Earth Charter Student fulfills well his/her academic responsibilities, is responsible, tolerant, good team worker, loyal, fair and honest. All his/her actions promote the values of sustainability and ethics.

### *Selecting the candidates and next steps*

To find and select the candidates for the Earth Charter Student Award, vice deans of each faculty were given a list of characteristics that the candidates for this award should represent. The suitable candidates were then selected within faculties. In 2010, 13 students were nominated for this award.

On 22 April 2010, UNA organized a special event to celebrate the Earth Day and offer the awards to the students ([Find here a news article about this event](#)). The profile of the awardees can be found in this [document](#) (in Spanish).

UNA's EC Network aims to continue granting the Earth Charter Student Award in a yearly basis, for this, they are seeking the approval of Vice rector Mr. Francisco González and discuss further about the articulation and commitment of the Earth Charter Students (Estudiante Carta de la Tierra, ECT) as important ethical actors and leaders.

Their role as ethical ambassadors was emphasized with the first Earth Charter Student Award winners. However, this engagement goes beyond the activities fulfilled at the University. Therefore the current selected Earth Charter Students were those who were already involved in several community projects from reforestation to the care work of elderly people. For Mrs. Villalobos, the awardees felt very proud and moved about such recognition.

According to Mrs. Ramirez, the University government from 2005 to 2010 (with Dr Olman Segura Bonilla as Rector) was very positive about the Award, as well as most of the deans and vice deans of UNA, who offered good feedback about the award. Furthermore, UNA has received requests to help organize similar awards in other educational institutions in Heredia (province where UNA is located).

The idea is to implement the Earth Charter Student Award the same way as the other type of recognition offered to UNA students. Members of UNA's EC Network hope that the election of the Earth Charter Student will be one of the main priorities for the deans and vice deans of UNA in 2011. The grant is meant to be awarded every April during Earth Day celebration.

Overall, the Earth Charter Student Award has had a very positive impact on UNA's student community. The voluntary work done by the students has been recognized; it has helped as motivation for the awardees to keep their good work, and hopefully has inspired other students to get more involved to work towards the common good. The Earth Charter is an important guide in recognizing the good ethics and practices in an educational level.

Find more information about the involvement of UNA with the Earth Charter in the article: "[An integral approach towards sustainability: Experiences of the National University of Costa Rica and the Centre for General Studies.](#)"