

Overview of the 2024 Earth Charter Conference:

Reimagining Education for Ecological Civilizations

12-14 April 2024
Rollins College; Winter Park,
Florida, USA.



UNESCO Chair on Education for Sustainable Development with the Earth Charter



University
for Peace





The [2024 Earth Charter Conference](#) took place from 12-14 April at the beautiful Rollins College campus in Florida, USA and brought together 155 participants from various countries, including university professors, school teachers, representatives from business and nonprofit organizations, as well as Earth Charter Educators and Young Leaders, among others.

The Conference began with opening remarks by [Michael J. Bracken](#), Chair of the Earth Charter International (ECI) Board, [Grant Cornwell](#), President of Rollins College, and [Mirian Vilela](#), Executive Director of ECI. They reminded participants about the purpose of this Conference, which was organized under the framework of the UNESCO UNITWIN Cooperation Programme on Education for Sustainable Development and Social Transformation.

The main objectives of this Conference were to:

- Find synergies and enhance collaboration among innovative approaches to education for change.
- Share experiences and research in education from various settings that contribute to ecological civilization.
- Identify new ways to reorient education towards creating ecological civilizations.
- Provide learning opportunities for using the Earth Charter to enhance sustainability and global citizenship education.



Mirian Vilela started by raising the questions: What is the kind of education we need if we are to forge an ecological civilization? Can we imagine an Ecological Civilization(s)?

She then shared that this event sought to bring together four streams: a) The fact that UNESCO has been putting together various education agendas that emphasize the role of education as an instrument of social transformation (such as Education for Sustainable Development [ESD], Global Citizenship Education [GCED], climate change [CC] Education, and the new recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development); b) the fact that the US government rejoined UNESCO, opening new possibilities and opportunities for institutions in the US to align with UNESCO's education policies; c) the fact that the Government of China has made a commitment to contribute to the building of an ecological civilization and made a call for institutions in China to contribute to that initiative and d) the fact that a number of individuals and organizations in the US have been working with the idea of Ecological Civilizations. In this context, she said, this conference was envisioned as “a space to bring these streams together and explore the role the Earth Charter can play as a solid ethical foundation for building ecological civilizations.”

[Jeremy Lent](#), Author of *The Web of Meaning: Integrating Science and Traditional Wisdom to Find Our Place in the Universe*, UK/USA, and [Mary Evelyn Tucker](#), Co-founder and Co-director of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, USA, were the first two keynote speakers that set the tone for the conference, offering insights about the concept and vision of ecological civilizations and the type of education that aligns with this vision. Jeremy Lent highlighted the importance of moving from





a worldview of separation to a worldview of connection, where the purpose of education would be to help people fulfill their unique potential. Mary Evelyn Tucker affirmed that the American dream of having more is over; that “we need a new dream” and this dream would be based on an Anthro-pro-cosmic view of life, that considers that we are part of the Universe, and that there is a continuity of being. She also highlighted the importance of moving forward embracing the importance of a civilizational dialogue such as between East and West.

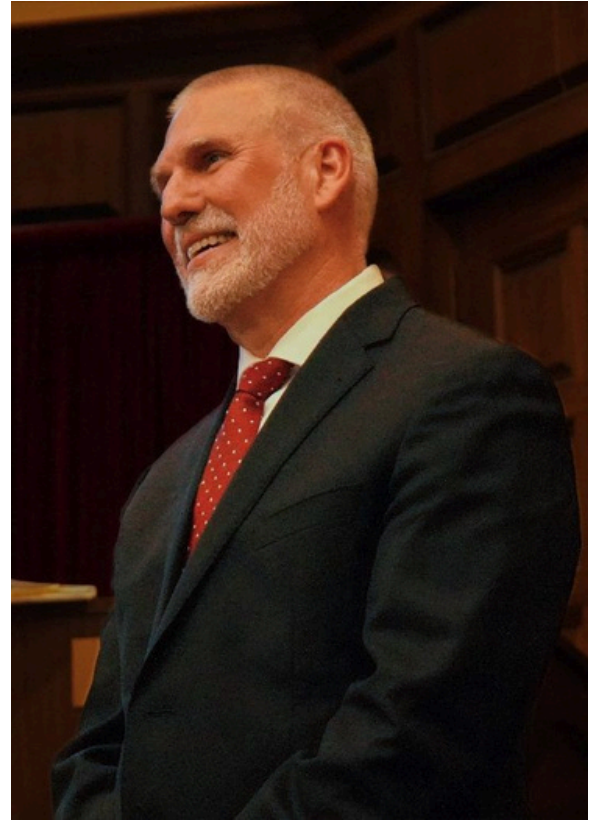
These speeches were followed by a panel, moderated by [Song Li](#), Member of the ECI Council, P. R. China/USA, in which [Ma Shuang](#) from Liaoning University, P.R. China, explained how the Government of China has included the concept of Ecological Civilization in the National Constitution and the implications for institutions of higher education which now have to align with that decision. [Meijun Fan](#), Center for Process Studies China shared how she has been working with this concept for years as part of the John Cobb Institute, making a bridge with scholars in China. [Mirian Vilela](#) offered insights on some of key UNESCO education agendas and how they can contribute with the building of ecological civilizations. Both Vilela and Ma Shuang briefly shared how ECI and LNU have been collaborating using the Earth Charter as an ethical reference and educational instrument in efforts to engage with students and the LNU faculty.



In the afternoon, 20 presentations took place in five parallel sessions. Further details can be found in the agenda and the abstract presentation booklet.



The day concluded with the keynote presentation offered by [James Wohlpart](#), President of Central Washington University, USA, who inspired the audience with his vision and commitment to build a university that is coherent in all aspects with the vision of sustainability, using the Earth Charter as a framework. He specifically referred to Principle 13 as inspiration for a type of shared leadership to apply in Central Washington University, making sure that the vision continues regardless of who is leading the university. He highlighted the importance of being mindful of the pace, to go slow to ensure everybody is on board.



The day concluded with a welcome reception, which counted on the warm remarks given by [Gloria Eby](#), Director for the City of Winter Park's Natural Resources & Sustainability Department, followed by a special Thomas Berry Award Ceremony. [John Grim](#) and [Mary Evelyn Tucker](#) offered this award to Mirian Vilela, Peter Blaze Corcoran, and Rick Clugston, for their longstanding commitment to working with the Earth Charter. In introducing the award, John and Mary Evelyn inspired the audience by sharing some of the learnings from Thomas Berry from his book, *The Great Work*, to awaken the human capacity to experience awe and to dream.





The second day of the Conference began with a presentation from [Sam Crowell](#), ECI Council and Faculty member, USA. He reflected on the type of pedagogy needed for the transformation towards a more harmonious and balanced way of living in this world. He called for an Earth-based learning that recognizes that we are part of the Earth, and which has four main characteristics: embodied learning/embedded cognition, engaged learning (doing something with it), enacted and entangled learning; indicating that our cognition is entangled. Sam said that “The Earth Charter plays an important role in this Earth pedagogy, as it helps us to unveil the connection that we have with the Earth, the cosmos, one another, and oneself.”

This keynote speech was followed by a panel with [Ricardo Young](#), Brazilian Institute of Corporate Governance and ECI Council member; [Olivia Tyler](#), Western Sydney University, Australia and ECI Council Member; and [Edward Feasel](#), President of Soka University America, USA; and moderated by [Akpezi Ogbuigwe](#), ECI Council member from Nigeria. They shared insights about the type of education that is needed for leaders to build ecological civilizations, highlighting the importance of eco literacy, systems thinking and ethics for sustainability, to better address the interrelated challenges we face, connecting the global to the local perspectives. Dr. Feasel indicated how Soka University America is committed to cultivating human shared values and responsibility with the well-being of all.

In the second keynote speech of the day, [Peter Blaze Corcoran](#), Florida Gulf Coast University, USA, and [Cesar Baldelomar](#), Mount Holyoke and Boston College, USA, offered an inspirational talk in the form of an intergenerational dialogue, reflecting on key aspects associated with reimagining education for ecological civilizations, stressing the importance to foster a sense of wonder, care, imagination, and dreams. To further illustrate the importance of care, they referenced a fable on Care that Leonardo Boff, Brazilian theologian, and philosopher, often tells. Click [here](#) to access the handouts with quotations and references.





This was followed by a Panel, moderated by [Stephanie Knox Steiner](#), University for Peace, focused on the changing worldviews needed for the transformation we want to see in the world. Speakers included, [Grian Cutanda](#), The Avalon Project, [Joan Anderson](#), Soka Gakkai International; and [Zhihe Wang](#) from the Center for Process Studies China. They offered reflections on the significance of worldviews and diverse cultural traditions. Grian Cutanda highlighted the importance of the myths of the future that several traditions in the world have as guidance to help us address the difficult challenges we are facing, including the powerful myth of the Rainbow Warriors.



The afternoon unfolded with 21 presentations across six parallel sessions, fostering rich discussions and exchange into building a sustainable future. The day ended with participants joining three different field trips/activities.





The [third and final day](#) of the Conference started with a panel, moderated by [Michael J. Bracken](#), ECI Council and Medcom Benefit Solutions, that focused on actions taken at the local level to promote climate change literacy and move to action. [Rachel Winter](#) from Rollins College, USA; [Wendy Oliver](#), Volo Foundation, USA; and [Timothy David Karsten](#), from Georgia, USA, shared their efforts working on this through their different contexts, e.g. with university students and how communication and social media is very influential in students' environmental behavior; at local levels, such as how funders are supporting grassroots efforts in rural Georgia; and in urban areas, like examples in Florida, that tackling issues, such as lack of access to healthy food, and solutions like organic agriculture and gardens which are promoted for the wellbeing of people and the Planet.



The morning continued with a keynote speech from [Namrata Sharma](#), State University of New York and ANGEL Network, India/USA, on “Pedagogical Implications of Framing Sustainability, Inclusion and Global Citizenship through the Principles of the Earth Charter.” From the outset she invited the audience to think about education for global social ecological justice, on how sustainability and inclusion can be integrated into teaching and learning across formal and non-formal education and offered some elements of a pedagogy informed by the Earth Charter. She indicated that political education is often not talked about and affirmed that it is crucial for students to get familiar with the different tensions and perspectives when making decisions.



The second panel of the day included some youth participants of this Conference and focused on improving how we communicate and engage with youth about sustainability and ecological civilizations. [Jamie Ogbuigwe](#) from AfriBix, shared tips to best use social media channels, and the type of messages that can come across generations. [Kiyoshi Akasu](#) from Soka Gakkai International, presented the Seeds of Hope & Action social media campaign, launched at this occasion, with an open call for anyone to engage in sharing concrete actions they are taking to implement the SDGs and the Earth Charter. Earth Charter Young Leaders, [Laura Restrepo](#) from Colombia, [Ann Cathrin Nachtwey](#) from Germany, jointly with [Phil Eke-Okocha](#) from Nigeria, organized a special interactive session that brought the audience together to question how much we are empowering and engaging the youth in these processes. The audience was invited to engage in self-reflection questions on the perceived role that youth have in decision-making processes, and on what each one is doing about it.



After the energizing panel with the youth, professors from Florida Gulf Coast University shared their experiences using the Earth Charter in their courses in the final panel from the morning's plenary session. [Maria F. Loffredo Roca](#), USA, shared how she incorporates the Earth Charter in her teaching through the lenses of compassion— students reflect and create artwork around the notion of building a compassionate world and how the EC can play a role in this. Then, [Erick Otto and Miles Mancini](#) shared their experience with an Introduction to Humanities course, where they use “scenario-based” pedagogy to talk and practice democratic skills that are being threatened in current polarized societies, specifically they shared the US political context. The moderator of this panel was [Sasha Wohlpart](#), from Central Washington University.



The afternoon involved 23 presentations through six parallel sessions.

[Akpezi Ogbuigwe](#), Co-chair of the ECI Council, Nigeria, offered the closing keynote speech. Through her passionate and inspiring words, she invited participants to bring the wisdom of the elders and thinkers before us, to the present moment, to work together, across generations, and tirelessly to move towards ecological civilizations.



In total there were 64 presentations with 73 presenters during the parallel sessions held each afternoon. There was a rich variety of presentations, from academic research, presentation of projects, sharing poems, storytelling, film / video presentations, a meditation session and sharing of indigenous perspectives around the Conference's topics. Parallel sessions also showcased practical implementations of Earth Charter principles in schools and universities. The experience of developing and implementing the Earth Charter & ESD School Seal was shared. A presentation on the work ECI has been doing to engage and empower them to contribute to sustainable development was also shared.





At the Conference, Chinese elements were portrayed by a pair of captivating artworks by [Mobarick Abdullah III](#). As indicated by the artist, "Confucius and Lao Tzu set the tone of this painting by greeting the world with their peaceful gaze. The two philosophers balance each other here like they did in life, one believing good moral character is the path to 'cosmic harmony,' the other learning toward empathy as a track to ultimate peace and harmony." The 16 principles of the Earth Charter envelop the Yin Yang. The Dragon supports the delicate balance of light and dark, while the lotus flower symbolizes rising from a dark place into beauty and rebirth. The Chinese symbols represent the five virtues of Confucianism. The beautiful paintings were commissioned by Michael Bracken, Chair, ECI Board. Find more details about the paintings and the artist [here](#).

The conference received a valuable support from Ms. [Mamiko Katayama](#), a talented flower artist from Japan, whose beautiful creations decorated the conference. Ms. Katayama created handmade soap flowers for each conference participant, which were delicately crafted with messages and quotes inspired by the Earth Charter. These soap flowers served as a reminder of the interconnectedness between nature and our shared human values.



Conference Materials

- [Conference Agenda](#)
- [List of presentation abstracts and speakers](#)
- [Conference Video](#)
- [Conference Presentation](#)
- Media coverage on the conference in Chinese – [Article 1](#) / [Article 2](#)
- Media coverage on the conference in Japanese – [SEIKYO SHIMBUN](#)

Resources shared by Conference Speakers:

- [Dreaming Together: Reflections on the Principle of Intergenerational Equity - Presentation Handouts](#) Peter Blaze Corcoran, Professor Emeritus, Florida Gulf Coast University and Senior Advisor Earth Charter International and Cesar Baldelomar, Mount Holyoke College and Boston College, USA
- [Interconnected Wisdom: Earth Charter Principles Uniting Youth and Elders for Change, video recording](#) Sue Blyth and Adrian Alvarez, USA
- [The Journey of the Universe: screening - Handout - Journey of the Universe digital project overview 2024](#)
- [Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology flyer](#)
- [Earth Charter Provides an Ethical Framework for the Economy, documentary video screened](#) Janet Roberts, College of Business at the University of Tampa, USA
- [Opening Speech](#), Grant H. Cornwell, President, Rollins College
- [Using the Earth Charter to Re-imagine Education Toward an Ecological Civilization](#), Sam Crowell, ECI Council and Faculty





ECI extends heartfelt gratitude to the generous sponsors whose invaluable support made the 2024 Earth Charter Conference a reality. Their commitment played a pivotal role in bringing together diverse voices and fostering meaningful dialogue.

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