

Sustainability Council of Ventura County

Equitable Society, Sound Economy, Healthy Environment
2465 Hall Canyon Road Ventura, CA. 93001 Phone & Fax 805.653.2520

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Dear CSUCI Curriculum Planners:

We in Ventura County are most fortunate to have our State University finally taking shape. We have long focused on securing a site, but now we must shift our attention to the development of the academic plan. The rare opportunity to design a university for the twenty-first century is receiving comment from all quarters. As the LA Times Opinion Section article on CSUCI's curriculum (6-20-99) observed, a major concern is the establishment of a meaningful curriculum as well as one that will distinguish the Channel Islands from the other members of the Cal State University System, as well as from other four year institutions with which it will compete.

Thus far the most commonly referenced theme is the "green campus." While this may be a welcomed orientation by environmentalists, it may not stir the hearts of the business community and others, such as Stanislaus Pulle, who worry about the school producing graduates "with few prospects for employment." The suggested range of studies appear to be practical enough, but no unifying theme has emerged that would distinguish the campus from its peers. We suggest that the central curricular theme of the university should be "sustainable outcomes."

As we end the twentieth century, we are challenged to reform our social, economic, and environmental systems so they will function on a sustainable basis. Too many of our systems are not sustainable as they are presently managed. We know this intuitively when the freeways we design are at capacity when they are built; when droughts strike leaving us with insufficient supplies of water; and when industries collapse because of depleted resources. Our growing population will only add to such system failures. We must explore alternative approaches, ones that are sustainable. And where better to do this than at a university campus.

Having "sustainable outcomes" as a core theme should not lead to fuzzy headed courses feared by Mr. Pulle, but rather traditional areas of study like engineering, business, and biological sciences can challenge students to find sustainable solutions to the problems encountered in their discipline. The suggested accounting courses mentioned in the article could train students in the value of life-cycle cost accounting so they can distinguish between short term "low bid" savings and the long term savings of an initially more costly alternative. The marine sciences could focus on establishing sustainable fisheries rather than boom and bust commerce. Business administration should look to the successes of "Cool Companies" (Mark Hertsgaard Opinion Page June 20, 1999) such as DuPont, 3M and others that are finding that environmental consciousness is synonymous with corporate efficiency and profits.

In addition, sustainability is a whole systems approach to making human society work on a planet with limited resources. This focus therefore has to look at interdependent impacts of environments and business on social equity issues: a sustainable economy and environment requires a sustainable, equitable society. Curriculum from the social sciences and the humanities needs therefore to look to the sustainable outcomes issues as well. Courses that examine and measure the equitable functioning of large systems, such as health care and justice, could be developed, and the focus of literature and the arts could be shifted to give attention to the interconnections between the three elements of sustainability-- living off an environment without damaging it, while supplying human needs and creating a just, diverse, and ecologically conscious society.

The search for sustainable outcomes represents the "third way" to the future. It is not the environmentalism of the 1970s, nor the corporate world's code for how to slash and burn to a stronger bottom line. The pursuit of sustainable outcomes is the business of all of us. It is the theme that unites the interests that have been at odds for decades. What better academic theme could a twenty-first century university be organized around?

Sincerely,

T.C. + Robert Chianese

Todd Collart, Convener

Robert Chianese, New University Task Force

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