

Creating Common Ground

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In one way, I've been writing this speech all my life. I don't mean in terms of its length, but in terms of how important--to me--are issues relating to the environment and sustainability. Yet I'm not standing before you today as an expert in either the environment or sustainability. You have already heard today, and will hear tomorrow and the day after, people who are national experts in these fields. Let me tell you very briefly how my background does relate to our conference and to the topic I am to address. One of my areas of academic specialization focuses on why social movements succeed and fail, and how people build and sustain real communities. I will draw on these two areas in speaking to you about how we can find common ground and I will talk to you about what we have done at California State University, Chico, what we are doing, and what we hope to accomplish.

Before I go on, a word about the images fading in and out on the screen. For those of you who are not from Chico, these are all photographs taken on our campus, or within a few minutes of the heart of the campus. Environmentally, we live and work in a special place. I hope by the end of my presentation to also convince you, among other things, that this university is also academically and intellectually a special place and that we can achieve distinction by helping to create engaged citizens while deepening our commitment to the sustainability.

First, I want to talk a little about citizenship. How do we help to create engaged citizens? Is this an appropriate role for a public university? The second question may be

the easier to answer. Taking a leaf from Tom Ehrlich's *Educating Citizens*, we would pose this question to our colleagues and community members:

“Do you believe that higher education can (and should) play a critical role in the health of American democracy by helping students become responsible citizens of the nation, the world and their own communities?”

Most of us would probably say “yes.” But just how we go about actively creating engaged citizens is less clear.

Service and service learning have often been offered as the solution or pathway to engagement. But not all service leads to engagement and not all forms of engagement help to create an engaged citizenry. There's a healthy ethic of individual service in American society. More than one American president has suggested that the solution to public problems is to be found in the civic or private sector. Individuals and private organizations are asked to step forward to help the homeless, give money for shelters, mentor the less fortunate. And often they do. But service does not necessarily lead to an understanding of the social, political, and historical circumstances that have given rise to the problems people are trying to solve. In short, service does not necessarily have anything to do with learning.

What does lead to learning is engagement. Recently, many universities have attempted to measure levels of engagement through use of the National Study of Student Engagement (NSSE). The NSSE measure five clusters of activities designed to determine if students are actively engaged in learning: academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, faculty-student interaction, enriching educational experiences (usually out of the classroom), and a supportive campus learning environment. Service

learning has been seen as a key to engagement and as a means to deepen learning of disciplinary material. Let's look at the steps involved in service learning.

First, a faculty or staff member must identify a community-based experience that will illustrate the content of the course. For example, students in a sociology class might be asked to volunteer at a soup kitchen to understand the problems of the homeless or the unemployed.

Second, there must be a structured opportunity for reflection, which is a key component of effective service learning. As Jacoby, et al. have noted in *Service Learning in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices*, reflection promotes "learning about the larger sociological, cultural, economic, and political contexts of the needs or issues being addressed." In the case of our soup kitchen, students would draw on their experiences to deepen through classroom discussion their understanding of the political and economic reasons that some people have limited resources. This is where most classes end; in part, because the learning outcome (a deeper knowledge of the political, historical, and economic causes of social problems) will have been achieved. The teacher and the accreditation society are both happy.

But if we stop with having achieved a deeper knowledge of content, we will have failed in one of our key responsibilities: training responsible citizens. As Ganz notes in "How can a campus encourage students to move from civic service to political engagement?", the problem doesn't lie with our students. They "come to us with strong community values, a desire to serve and the hope of making a difference. But the main activity we offer them for turning values into action is individual social service." (p.54).

We must go a step further; we must help to support civic learning. The *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* (2001) defines civic learning “as any learning that contributes to student preparation for community or public involvement in a diverse, democratic society.” Students must be specifically prepared for civic learning by giving them the knowledge, skills, and values they need to be participants in a democratic society. This is not an easy chore. Ganz believes there are three separate challenges we must deal with to prepare practitioners of democracy.

- 1) The conceptual challenge requires examining teaching practices to determine whether or not social problems are seen as problems of the individual, or problems stemming from deeper structural conditions.
- 2) The motivational challenge requires training students to understand that democracy is contentious, but that by working with others they can change things. We would need them to understand Margaret Mead’s truism that small groups of dedicated people can change the world. In short, students need a message of hope. I will return to this.
- 3) The behavioral challenge requires us to make it possible for students to actually practice and learn the tools of leadership. They need the freedom to design their own projects and carry them out with the help of community partners.

Chico State is in an ideal position to meet these challenges. In fact, we are already doing so, through our campus sustainability initiatives.

Now, I’d like to define what we mean by sustainability. The way we talk about building and sustaining communities is important. We want a language that is as inclusive as possible, rather than being divisive. We are using the United Nations’

(UNESCO) definition, in part because the UN has declared this the decade for sustainable development, and because it is a definition embraced by members of an international community that understands we need to foster through education the values, behavior and lifestyles required for a sustainable future. The values that under gird this initiative should be identified. Sustainable development promotes:

- ? A vital and sustainable economy.
- ? Respect for the dignity of people throughout the world.
- ? A commitment to social justice.
- ? Respect for the rights of future generations.
- ? Respect and care for the greater community of life in all its diversity, which involves the protection and restoration of the Earth's ecosystems.

Education for sustainable development is values driven, and assumes that the people of the world have a common future. Education for sustainable development requires an understanding of the relationships among poverty, wasteful consumption, environmental degradation, health, and the world conflicts that result from the competition for scarce natural resources. Can we pretend that violent clashes in West Africa or conflicts in the Middle East are not related to competition for scarce resources?

Many global and regional conflicts can be understood as a battle for declining resources, as opposed to a battle over political or religious differences. People are killing one another every day in a struggle for food, clear water, and fuel to warm themselves. It can only get worse, if we do nothing.

Sustainable development also requires us to train caring citizens who exercise their rights globally as well as locally. This means, and I must underscore this point, is

that the training of people to be good stewards of the planet, must be interdisciplinary and holistic, embedded throughout the curriculum, drawing on different disciplines and pedagogies. Every single academic discipline has something significant and important to say about what one generation owes to the next, about what our role in the natural world is, and what it means to live a just and decent life. So, a campus effort involving global sustainability will include three essential components: curriculum, outreach to the community, and practices. On a college campus every faculty, staff member, and student has a role to play in creating a more prosperous and sustainable society. Think about it: if every university in the country did this, now, we could turn history around.

Sustainability is about stewardship of the land, about a common future. Because of this, we have an opportunity to connect efforts in the environment tightly to the university's goal of creating democratic citizens. Stewardship of the land involves controversy and compromise. When we speak of the land and raise questions about whether all land is public, what the rights of individual property owners should be, we do not immediately find common ground. Should ranchers, who lease public land contiguous to Yellowstone National Park, be allowed to shoot the wolves reintroduced to Yellowstone? When we pay the ranchers for lost cattle, should they still be allowed to shoot the wolves? Should they be allowed to shoot the bison that stray on the land they are leasing, which is public land that you and I own? The answers and issues are not as clear as you might think. But that's democracy; it involves conflict and compromise. Engaging students in managing land, talking about stewardship, and connecting them to real projects related to the environment will help them to become better citizens.

Sustainability, then, is not about recycling cans and bottles. It's about recycling our values and learning how to live differently. It involves acting now, and it involves acting on behalf of somebody other than just oneself. This is why, when most people speak of sustainability, they couple it with a conversation about environmental equity and environmental justice. Imagine you were rewriting the Constitution today and you were laying out the inalienable rights of humans. Would you not include a statement about a right to clean air and water? Wouldn't you claim that everyone had a right to a safe and healthy life?

But we can't wait for a new Constitutional Convention. We need to act now. Why? Well, the reasons are obvious to most members of this audience. We need to act now if we want our children to have a future; if we don't want all glaciers to melt within a hundred years; and if we want to preserve places of beauty and peace. The value of place, and of the natural world, is almost indescribable. Rachel Carson has tried to describe it. Let me give you two of her quotations to think about:

- ? "It is a wholesome and necessary thing for us to turn again to the earth and in the contemplation of her beauties to know the sense of wonder and humility."
- ? "Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts."

As you can see, if you have been reading the screen behind me, Carson is far from alone.

Chico State has been working systematically over the past several years to build programs that will train citizens who appreciate their responsibilities and act to preserve places of beauty. Let me provide you with a small sample of what people on this campus have done to build capacity for change:

1. We have systematically hired faculty in environmental sciences and environmental studies to focus on research relating to the watershed. Our grant and contract research is strong in this area.
2. We have built and equipped laboratories to support environmental research.
3. We created the Bidwell Environmental Institute to integrate environmental research efforts across all colleges.
4. The campus adopted the Talloire Declaration, which lays out actions a university needs to take to embrace a sustainable future.
5. We have acquired within the last 10 years two new preserves: the Big Chico Creek Ecological Preserve and the Honey Run Preserve. One totals over 4,000 acres and is home to endangered and native California plant and animal species.
6. The Jack Rawlins' Professorship was established, which lead to the creation of an environmentally literacy course. We continue to increase the number of environmental courses in the curriculum and many faculty are working to modify existing courses to focus more on issues of sustainability
7. We will have the first LEED gold certified building in the CSU, which will be used to educate students and visitors to the campus.
8. The Associated Students hosted their first annual conference on sustainability this past fall (2005), under the leadership of Courtney Voss and the Associated Students Environmental Council, and we welcome you today to another conference sponsored by the university about the curriculum, sustainable building practices, sustainable energy, and student life.

9. We have hired a campus director and a campus coordinator of sustainable practices to help integrate the efforts of the students, with the divisions of academic affairs and business and finance.
10. The students will have a vote this spring to create a fund for sustainable practices and they have many wonderful and practical ideas, which we will work to help them implement.
11. There are many new and expanded organizations on campus that focus on the environment:
 - a. EARC. Environmental Action and Resource Center. (AS sponsored and supported.)
 - b. EAC. Environmental Affairs Council. (AS sponsored and supported.)
 - c. Green Campus Program. (AS sponsored and supported.)
 - d. Green Dorm Room. (AS sponsored and supported with the cooperation of Housing.) This has now become a Green Residence Hall, as opposed to room, project.
12. Additional campus sustainability efforts:
 - a. Anaerobic digester and biodeisel fuel.
 - b. Development of a web page for all efforts, because keeping track of all of our initiatives has become a challenge.

CSU, Chico is well positioned to respond to environmental issues and offer real solutions to real problems. Our colleges of agriculture, business, engineering, and natural sciences have a long history of engaging students in applied research projects: building bridges,

designing green buildings, finding solutions to problems of the waste stream, designing irrigation systems--the list goes on.

Issues of sustainability affect everyone. It is our job to find a common ground on which to address environmental issues, to help people realize that resources are finite, and to help them take responsibility for processes that affect not only their lives, but the lives of future generations. But we must do this in a focused manner; otherwise all our good efforts will go for naught. We must align our values, goals, actions, and allocations of resources. Over a hundred of us have been meeting since fall semester to talk about the environment, civic engagement, and sustainability. President Zingg, who shares a personal commitment to sustainability and the environment, is updating the university's Strategic Plan for the Future and has welcomed suggestions about how to modify the plan. A number of us have recommended that we add a 6th Strategic Priority as a way of concentrating our efforts, creating distinction for the university, connecting to the community, and signaling to others that we are serious about sustainability.

Our strategic plan is composed of five value statements. The 6th would also be a value statement:

Believing that each generation owes something to those who follow, we will create environmentally literate citizens, who embrace sustainability as a way of living. We will be wise stewards of scarce resources and, in seeking to develop the whole person, be aware that our individual and collective actions have economic, social, and environmental consequences.

A hallmark of Chico State is the beautiful and engaging physical environment of the campus. Consistent with a natural campus environment that promotes a keen sense of

place, we will become an environmentally engaged university. We will make CSU, Chico the distinctive “green” campus in California and become a national leader in environmental education, science, and policy analysis; the building of environmentally friendly facilities; and practicing and modeling for others sustainable practices. Our goals are substantial but they are achievable.

We will

- ? Strengthen our institutional reputation and record regarding service and environmental stewardship.
- ? Connect with the local community and civic organizations and agencies to educate and assist in the preservation of natural resources, and help to protect the quality of life that has drawn people to the community.
- ? Develop a strong endowment devoted to expanding and managing our current system of preserves, while expanding our capacity to teach, learn, and serve.
- ? Expand our research efforts through the work of the Bidwell Environmental Institute.
- ? Introduce outside experts and mentors on sustainability to the campus, while seeking to deliver our own powerful story of environmental engagement.
- ? Continue to emphasize the need for all disciplines, departments, and programs to address issues of sustainability.
- ? Develop all campus planning within the context of sustainability and encourage resource conservation and recycling.
- ? We will actively monitor our diverse sustainability efforts through outcomes-based assessment, noting successes as well as opportunities for improvement.

- ? We will actively seek partners throughout the North State who share our values and who are willing to share their expertise.
- ? We will host an annual or biannual conference on sustainability focusing on sustainability and conservation; business practices; civic engagement; social policy, and the curriculum.

Embedded in this statement of principles, values, and actions is hope. However, it is a message of hope only if we act to make it so.

Earlier I said that our students come to us full of optimism and with the belief that they can make a difference. We can and should provide them with real and significant opportunities to do so. Expanding student opportunities to be actively engaged in issues related to the environment not only increases deep learning of subject matter, it also allows us to achieve a goal that every single university in this country needs to embrace: to train democratic citizens. Becoming an engaged citizen is not something that happens just by chance; we have to work actively to provide opportunities to overcome the cynicism and defeatism that is so prevalent in American society today. We offer a focus on the environment as a way to do this. Civic engagement and sustainability are easily linked. Combined they offer:

- ? A way to understand that democracy must be actively created and nurtured.
- ? An understanding that you, as an individual can make a difference. You can measure your ecological footprint and you can do something about it.
- ? A chance to preserve the very things that allow for reflection, solitude, reverence, and respect for the natural world.
- ? A chance to work with other people to build and to live community.

? An understanding that history, politics, ideology, and the economy have determined current social arrangements.

? And, finally, it is a way to reintroduce morality into politics.

This does not mean a perfect world is easily at hand. As Aldo Leopold once said, “We shall never achieve harmony with the land, any more than we shall achieve absolute justice or liberty for people. In these higher aspirations the important thing is not to achieve, but to strive.” (*Round River*) We must try and we must try together.

Let me now come back to something I noted at the beginning. One of my areas of interest is how social movements are sustained and why they sometimes fail. I think you can anticipate what my next statement might be: sustainability and environmental efforts are a social movement. That’s not---yet---true. I want to make the point that training environmentally literate students is not the same as enlisting them in a political cause, and we need to take care within our universities to make sure that our primary focus remains on education. We want students to understand resources are finite, that their patterns of consumption and style of life affect not only those in other countries, but future generations. We want them to learn, through experience and projects focused specifically on civic engagement, that they really can make a difference.

But, we can’t pretend this isn’t about politics. Because politics is about who gets what, why, and how much; and how much they get, or others don’t get, is shaped by history, ideology, and the economy. Social policies institutionalize past practices, and they benefit some at the expense of others. Any number of courses will help students understand that. How students choose to use their understanding is up to them. They

will form their own movements and make their own decisions about what is best; it's not our job to dictate.

I'd like to talk, now, a bit about the realities and issues that students and others should consider in focusing their energies, and provide us with some lessons learned from past movements, with specific reference to the issues that brought us to this conference. What are some strategies to consider when trying to deal with social issues and solve real problems?

1. A social issue can fail to be addressed when it is trivialized, or appropriated by others to sell a cause or a commodity. Consider this month's issue of *Vogue* magazine (March 2006), "As climate change continues apace, the world may be saying goodbye to the seasons as we knew them. So how will this affect the way people dress? *Vogue* travels to Dubai, California, Brazil, and Russia for the fashion weather report." Does anyone in the room remember Levi's campaign in the 1960s for "revolutionary new jeans"? When a politician announces that she or he is "green," we need to look behind the rhetoric to determine whether they have genuine and practical policies to address the issues about which we care and whether or not they have actually "walked the walk."
2. Social movements succeed when there is a common message that draws together a wide and diverse constituency. Right now, members of the religious right and left, Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, and members of both political parties, are talking about stewardship of the land, of natural resources, and what one generation owes to the next. This is why it is so important to find a language that

- will draw people together, if we are to take care of our planet. Language is a critical way to identify common ground.
3. Social movements succeed when there is a clear issue and people can see a direct benefit from making common cause. The woman who founded Mothers Against Drunk Driving had lost a child; she found common cause with others who had lost a child, and/or recognized that drunk driving threatened their family. Threats to the environment are too numerous to list, but we need to explain carefully to others that unless they act now the quality of life they enjoy today will be threatened in the course of their lifetimes, not in some remote future.
 4. Timing is a major factor in whether movements succeed or not. The combination of prolonged conflict in the Middle East, rising energy prices, worldwide violence engendered by competition over limited natural resources, and climate change may be sufficient reason to propel people to action.
 5. Movement leaders must agree on common strategies and policies if a movement is to succeed. One of our conference speakers (Michael Gelobter) has identified five big fights worth having: how we fund the public sector; how we use land; how we address the war on terror; how we define human rights; and how we create and allocate wealth. He has also suggested new ways to think about energy use, global warming, toxics, land use, ecosystems, clean technologies, consumption, environmental health, and how we pay for it all. We need conversations designed to forge agreement about what must be done.
 6. Movements fail when there are schisms and a proliferation of groups sharing related ideologies. It is an interesting factoid that in order to erode the power of

the left in Guatemala many years ago, the CIA covertly created and funded a variety of leftist organizations. The CIA reasoned, correctly, that the more organizations on the left with their own agendas and interests, the more difficult it would be for people of like minds to come together. I ask you to consider how to solve the problem of creating a structure and organization that will bring people together and add up to real change. I want you to try this experiment when you get back to your computers. Using Google, type in: Northern California, sustainability, environment. You will get almost 2.8 million references. There are millions of people who care, but they are certainly not all focused on the same goals.

7. Movements succeed when there is a strong core of like-minded people who are directed to accomplishing the same goals. Conferences, such as this, are designed to create leadership teams.

Before I began to highlight some of my points, please note that I have not said the solution to environmental degradation, global warming, and bad policies is technology. Americans have a bad reputation as techno-junkies looking for a quick fix, unable to focus on the future or how our practices affect others. We are, however, now part of a global environment, in which everything is connected. And, by everything I mean our economic, environmental, political, and social systems. Yes, windmills will help; solar panels that are more efficient will help; using less energy in our homes will help; cars that get better gas mileage will help. But, in creating a better life for ourselves, we need to think about how what we want affects others, both today and tomorrow.

In summary:

- ? It's the right thing to do.
- ? We are facing a world crisis that requires action, now.
- ? There are millions of us who care; only a few of us are needed to make a difference.
- ? Every academic discipline has something meaningful to say about these issues.
- ? Sustainability is not about busting jobs, it's about creating a vital and sustainable economy.
- ? Sustainability is a commitment to social justice, human dignity, and the rights of future generations.
- ? We can, through civic engagement focused on the environment, train a new generation of citizen leaders.
- ? This land really is our land.

I have great hope for the environmental movement, for those working toward a sustainable future. I personally see the movement as a way to build community. I see it as a way to introduce morality into the political realm, where it is desperately needed. As a member of this university community, I see it as a way to focus our efforts, to make a difference, and to achieve distinction.

In the end, this movement is not about being a Democrat or a Republican or a Green. It's about being a member of the human community and understanding our role and place in the natural world. If you love this country you will take care of it; if you

love the land you will be good stewards of it; if you care about others, you will help.^[1] In closing, and in the words of the immortal Bob Marley, “Stand up for your rights! Don’t give up the fight!” Stand on common ground; work together.

Thank you.

^[1] Paraphrasing Terry Tempest Williams, “One Patriot,” in Patriotism and the American Land (The Orion Society, Great Barrington Massachusetts, 2002).