



**ESD@DSU**

Education for Sustainable Development  
at Delta State University



**PROPOSAL:  
AN INTEGRATIVE ORGANIZATION TO BRING  
EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT  
TO THE DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS**

**Abstract:** Inspired by the United Nations' Education for Sustainable Development initiative and practices at other universities around the country, we propose an organization that brings together Delta State students, faculty, administrators, staff, facilities managers, and members of the Cleveland and Mississippi Delta community to put sustainability into practice on the DSU campus. Beginning with five components: Public Education, Curriculum Development, Facilities Management, Student Organizations and Sustainability Inventory, the ESD@DSU organization would offer an institutional venue on campus to incorporate a long-term view rooted in environmental integrity and social justice to development efforts at DSU, as well as in Cleveland and the Delta.

*"Universities are public institutions, which must assume a leading role in creating environmental awareness and in promoting possible solutions to existing problems. This can be achieved by changing their management practices as well as curriculum content. Universities can become model centres for sustainable practice and set an example to other public and private institutions."*

*—S. Calvo Roy, J. Benayas and J. Gutiérrez Pérez<sup>1</sup>*

The United Nations has declared the period from 2005 to 2014 the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). UNESCO is spearheading the U.N. effort to implement ESD worldwide. The goal is "to integrate the values inherent in sustainable development into all aspects of learning to encourage changes in behavior that allow for a more sustainable and just society for all."<sup>2</sup> This goal is supported by four objectives. First is to link ESD stakeholders; second is to improve the quality of ESD teaching and learning; third is to advance the U.N.'s millennium development goals through ESD; and fourth is to incorporate ESD into education reform efforts. UNESCO has identified seven strategies that stakeholders can adopt to put ESD into practice. These are:

- (1) vision-building and advocacy;
- (2) consultation and ownership;
- (3) partnership and networks;
- (4) capacity-building and training;
- (5) research and innovation;
- (6) use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs);
- (7) monitoring and evaluation.

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<sup>1</sup> "Learning in sustainable environments: The greening of higher education," Ch. 9 in D. Tilbury, R.B. Stevenson, J. Fien and D. Schreuder, *Education and Sustainability: Responding to the Global Challenge*. IUCN Commission on Education and Communication, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK. 2002.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://portal.unesco.org/education> for further information.



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What is Delta State University doing to meet the objectives of Education and Sustainable Development?

The ESD@DSU Project is a group of concerned faculty, students, staff, administrators and community members at Delta State University in Cleveland, MS, who are committed to putting sustainable development in place on the DSU campus.

The ESD@DSU initiative has five components: Public Education, Curriculum, Facilities, Student Organizations, and Inventory.

### ***Public Education***

Sustainable development is an evolving concept, which is still poorly understood by the public. Therefore, an important task is educating the DSU community about the principles of sustainable development. Education would include engaging in dialogue to determine what sustainable development means in the Mississippi Delta, and how the DSU community could best enact sustainability on campus and in the community. Public education would include an extension component as well, reaching out beyond the university to incorporate the Delta community in sustainability education. Adopting a participatory education approach would enhance

### ***Curriculum Development***

The Curriculum Development component strives to incorporate the principles of sustainable development into the teaching curriculum at DSU. This would include courses on sustainable development, components on sustainable development in other courses, lessons on sustainable development in courses, and a sustainable development framework in teaching.

### ***Facilities Management***

The Facilities Management component would set long-term goals for energy conservation, building design, materials recycling, and outdoor space management. The aim would be improving the campus living environment, creating efficiency, encouraging equitable social relations, and ensuring the long-term viability of the university.

### ***Student Organizations***

The Student Organizations component aims to motivate activities by student groups that improve the campus' natural and social environment. Our vision is to create a position in each organization that would represent a sustainability perspective, so that decisions made by the group would take into account environmental and social impacts of the activities the groups plan and carry out. Members from the organizations that fulfill the sustainability function would serve as liaisons with the ESD@DSU Project.

### ***Sustainability Inventory***

A primary objective of the ESD@DSU project would be to create and maintain an inventory of sustainable development activities on the DSU campus. The inventory would feed directly into Public Education and Public Relations efforts, and would also provide a central repository of information that all groups on campus could draw on for ideas on how to put sustainability into practice.



## **What is Sustainable Development?**

Defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,”<sup>3</sup> sustainable development rests on the three crucial pillars of environment, economy, and society. Sustainable development is a model for envisioning and enacting a future that is environmentally sound, economically efficient and socially just. The sustainable development paradigm presents a set of parameters to create a world in which everyone can survive, live and thrive. These parameters challenge the dominant “growth fetish” approach to development, in which economic expansion is seen as the primary, and at times, the only measure by which development is assessed. While sustainable development is not antagonistic to the idea of growth, it encourages a broader, multifaceted approach to development that incorporates social and political domains, as well as the natural environment, and always factors in long-term considerations in planning decisions and implementation actions.

Sustainable development is more than just environmentalism or public activism in favor of social causes. It encompasses a large-scale change in thinking and approach to the current growth model, which many agree cannot be sustained indefinitely. Universities must be at the vanguard of this new movement, educating society of the need to rethink our lives and lifestyles, and the institutions that organize our society. Creating a sustainable university is the first step in creating a sustainable society.

The United Nations has endorsed the sustainable development approach, in major international conferences held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (the “Earth Summit”), and in Johannesburg in 2002 (the “World Forum on Sustainable Development”), as well as in numerous declarations, documents, and actions by U.N. agencies. A sustainable development perspective has been adopted by many national and local governments around the globe, as well as non-profit organizations and businesses. Through the Education for Sustainable Development initiative, universities and other educational institutions have taken responsibility for spreading the doctrine of sustainable development.

## ***Education for Sustainable Development***

Education for Sustainable Development emerged from a series of international conferences, and coalesced as a project under the auspices of UNESCO in the early 1990s. *Agenda 21*, a document outlining the basic aspects of sustainable development and approved at the Earth Summit, included education as a key strategy for implementing sustainable development at national and sub-national levels. Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 in particular highlighted the strategy of education. Three themes emerge from Chapter 36: first, improve basic education; second, rethink existing educational strategies to incorporate the principles of sustainable development; and third, extend education to include public awareness, understanding and training.

Building on these principles, UNESCO launched the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development initiative in 2005. Even before the U.N. issued this clarion call, universities

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<sup>3</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1987, p. 43.



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across the U.S. and around the world had begun ESD projects, and have developed a variety of models and procedures to enact sustainability. Various national conferences have emerged, as well as publications chronicling and documenting these efforts. To date, the Southern U.S. has lagged behind other regions in implementing ESD. Delta State, in the heart of the Mississippi Delta region, is poised to be a leader in the state and region in ESD action.