

Planting an apple tree, growing an orchard: establishing climate change for sustainable FYHE initiatives

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We've all heard that 'giving a fish gives a meal for today but a line and a lesson give meals for life'. Our title for this Roundtable discussion captures the same concern: how to ensure that apples for students are secured into the future? It is designed to provide an opportunity for participants to consider the sustainability of their own achievements and to exchange strategies that have helped to develop, or maintain, a climate in which they thrive.

There is now a wealth of information about the importance of the first year to student success and the vulnerability of students at this point in their academic careers. The previous ten FYHE Conferences, as well as a rapidly growing international literature, identify factors, responses, practices and benchmarks that can help inspire new developments, evaluate existing programs and shape future provision. As Cook and Lowe have commented:

It is difficult to be prescriptive concerning the ways in which an institution should deal with individual students. It is clear, however, that there are general elements of good practice which will promote student well being, increase the likelihood of their staying to complete their course and maximise their personal development.¹

It's not hard to become passionate about transition! However, programs depending on individual passion and commitment are inherently precarious: these are neither perennially renewable nor inevitably available resources. How can transition programs be 'drought proofed'? Are their long term stability and sustainability dependent on achieving 'climate change'? If so, which climate has to change and how can this be best achieved?

The discussion will be structured to maximise opportunities to pool experience and exchange strategies for sustainability.

Participants will be invited to state how long their program has been running. This will generate potentially two subgroups of 'established' and 'establishing' programs. Within each subgroup, participants will then be asked to individually identify and then discuss two factors that most enhance the sustainability of their work and two factors most likely to risk its successful continuation and development. To expedite discussion these factors will be written up for viewing: on Post it notes/butcher's paper/white boards, as available. [10 minutes]

A plenary discussion will then explore the results of the small group exercise, highlighting common factors and distinctive features and the extent to which these may be widely reproduced or avoided. [15 minutes]

¹ Cook A and Lowe H *Hitting the Ground Running: The Role of Induction in Preparing Students for University* Educational Department Unit, University of Ulster, Coleraine, Northern Ireland at www.ulster.ac.uk/star/resources/hgr.pdf last accessed on 8 March 2008

In concluding, the plenary discussion will ensure that contributors can identify strategies for securing:

- Renewable energy for planning, administering and delivering programs
- Continuous improvement and innovation in the design of the programs
- Reliable resources in support of the programs
- A triple bottom of line of benefit, accountability and sustainability [15 minutes]

Before leaving, participants will be invited to continue the discussion via a wiki, to allow further and longer exchanges of information, reflections and experience. The facilitators will undertake to establish this function if there is interest in using it.

In his presentation to last year's FYHE Conference, George D Kuh endorsed the view that 'sustainable transformations follow a predictable pattern of buildup and breakthrough'.² This Roundtable is intended to help participants accelerate that pattern in their own environment.

² George D. Kuh, (2007), What Matters to Student Success in the First Year of University .10th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference