

# **Consultation: Assessing Progress Toward Sustainability in Higher Education**

**March 29 – 31, 2001**

## Summary

**Introduction:** University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (ULSF) and the National Wildlife Federation's Campus Ecology Program hosted a two-day Consultation involving 35 experienced faculty, graduate students and practitioners to explore the current status of sustainability in higher education and what hinders or enhances its emergence as a central academic concern in teaching, research, operations and outreach. While the majority of participants came from the U.S., also represented were Australia, Canada, France, Germany, The Netherlands and the U.K. Most participants either presented papers or spoke about their work on panels. All participated in lively plenary session discussions as well as small group discussions devoted to specific topics. The event was co-sponsored by the Global Higher Education for Sustainability Partnership (GHESP), which includes ULSF, the COPERNICUS Program of the Association of European Universities (CRE), the International Association of Universities (IAU) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

### **Program:**

#### Four Plenary Sessions (with papers presented):

- I- A review of general declarations and specific institutional statements of commitment to sustainability in higher education
- II- An analysis of existing campus assessment tools, and a review of campus environmental assessments in North America
- III- A review of "case studies" and "best (and not so best) practices," and a consideration of factors for success and failure of sustainability initiatives
- IV- Next steps in researching and promoting sustainability in higher education

#### Three Working Groups:

- Working Group 1: What assessment and research tasks are essential to advance sustainability in higher education?
- Working Group 2: What are the criteria for good case study methodology?
- Working Group 3: What advocacy strategies are needed for advancing sustainability in higher education?

### **Outcomes:**

1- Themes raised here (see Consultation Minutes) will be discussed at a follow-up event with a more international focus in October 2001, "Higher Education for Sustainability: Towards the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio + 10) in 2002," in Lüneburg, Germany, hosted by CRE-COPERNICUS and sponsored by GHESP.

2- Selected papers from the Consultation and the Lüneburg conference will be published in a joint edition of *Higher Education Policy* and the *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* in early summer 2002.

3- The working group on assessment discussed various projects: further review of assessment tools and criteria for using them; creation of a very simple tool (based on ULSF's Sustainability Assessment Questionnaire and the Campus Ecology Survey among others) for basic sustainability assessment by universities worldwide; development of an assessment training program for university representatives. This group planned to convene again at the Lüneburg conference. (See Assessment Working Group Summary.)

4- The working group on case studies came up with some basic criteria for good case study methodology in higher education for sustainability and recommended further development of a case study profile and rationale. The working group also proposed further analysis of how “action research” might contribute to the development of case studies. (See Case Studies Working Group Summary.)

5- Numerous recommendations from the working group on advocacy were reviewed by all Consultation participants at the conclusion of the event: participants committed themselves to further collaborative work on projects to accelerate the transition in higher education to sustainability. (See Advocacy Working Group Summary.)