

Sustainability Education Profiles, March 2007
Submitted by Sylvia Rains Dennis, 2 March 2007

Watch this space for weekly fact sheets and summaries of continued progress on Sustainability Education initiatives for UNM-Taos. This initial email serves to outline upcoming content while leaving room for input and feedback from you!

So far, I have reviewed all higher education programs falling under “sustainability” or similar cultural and ecological and/or green technology headings. The following week, I will describe where and how I think UNM-Taos can make a strong, original contribution to a very necessary curriculum and public outreach/academic link. This contribution serves as the focus for grant applications (pending). Most funding sources have clearly defined “agendas,” sometimes incompatible with the land-based perspectives of our unique ecocultural continuum here, as well as often overlooking knowledge streams not always reflected in mainstream standards/assessments. However, there are a few---such as the Christensen Foundation—that have more closely aligned perspectives.

Several grant deadlines in the Fall occurred during the gap in funding this research, or while time-consuming UNM-Taos responsibilities or other transitions were underway. Sometimes we are just a bit ahead of the curve in terms of applying while other programs are being solidified, while other times we merely need to make our presence known to “hold our place” as future funding opportunities arise. I believe we—collectively and individually—have managed to cover the field well in this regard, making our presence known both collaboratively and as leaders in educationally supportive sustainability measures from the local to regional scale. With this in mind, the next series of grant deadlines approaches, and I will be contacting several UNM staff and faculty with the goal of submitting for those most pertinent to our interests at the Taos campus.

Meanwhile, Dr. Kate O’Neill and I will meet on March 19th regarding some of the funding and future outlook efforts underway since mid-December. I will submit summaries by email, and be available to discuss any of your concerns during March.

The following outline highlights some touchstones to these conversations, summarizing some initial findings:

1. Surveys of programs elsewhere (focusing on higher education initiatives in NM); two Santa Fe programs come close but not quite, with no curricula focusing on local/regional context-based education; not many offer field or internship opportunities, none include oral history or land traditions.

2. Funding strategies; sources and collaboration; agency, public, private; political objectives; criteria.
3. Natural areas, Conservation area, Natural Heritage, and other ongoing involvement related to our curriculum, students and local/N.NM community/rural base. Establish the Talking Circle Sustainability Series as a permanent monthly event, with a weekly drop-in timeframe for Sustainability outreach. Educational and practical resources need to be collected and made available to students, faculty and community members.
4. Ideas for future participation: Sustainable Living Roadshow (invite to visit Klauer Campus next year, preferably during Solar Summer School/Ecocultural sustainability events); Beaming Bioneers (refocus UNM-Taos role); NMSEA; Windpowering America and other wind energy/biofuels programs; Rio Grande Cultural Water Conference, Traditional Healing Conference combo to be held here, Summer 2008?

So begins the first of a series of Friday emails in March. Also watch for opportunities to make a contribution during this year's Earth Day, whose 2007 theme is "Youth and Environment." Ongoing collaborations with youth corps and local organizations make UNM-Taos a necessary participant. If my funding continues, I might also be able to construct some hands-on and rural outreach/registration opportunities during the March 24-25 Land Use Forum sponsored by Sustain Taos. We did very well developing a voice at last year's event, though I would suggest adding a panel or forum to this year's agenda. Please let me know if you'd like me to take this on, as it will require lead-time and considerable effort to make it worthwhile!

Thanks, most of all, for your encouragement and steadfast support of Sustainability Education and what that means here, in Northern New Mexico.

Peaceblessings,
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