

2020 Edition Introduction: Community Colleges Responding to the Climate Crisis

Krista Hiser, Editor, NCSE Senior Fellow for Community Colleges

2019 was the year that the climate crisis broke into mainstream awareness, through the stance of a courageous Swedish teenager, Greta Thunberg, *Time Magazine's* person of the year, who said to the United Nations, "I want you to act as if the house is on fire." In addition to this statement being made somehow manifest in wildfires, floods, and hurricanes, Thunberg energized a generation of young people. Born after 1995, this group has most recently been self-dubbed [Generation Delta](#), for the constant rapid change that they have experienced, and will inherit. They are coming to college (or not, if enrollment declines continue, but that is another story) with a new set of expectations and a different schema for their future.

What is the role of community colleges in responding to Generation Delta and the accelerating youth awareness of the climate crisis? Framing this year's edition of the Sustainability Handbook, I offer some thoughts about community colleges and climate crisis.

Let's be mindful about the term "crisis." Community colleges and their open access mission are intended to serve a wide demographic in the United States, including underserved communities for whom "crisis" is not a new condition. Tribal colleges and indigenous-serving institutions have the persistence of cultures embedded into their existence. As [Kyle Whyte](#) puts it, climate crisis is "déjà vu all over again" for indigenous peoples and marginalized demographics. The social equity issues of climate crisis must be top of mind, always, at community colleges.

For a community college student working multiple jobs while caring for family and managing health, legal, financial, transportation, and other issues – climate activism may not be on the immediate radar. Even for community college faculty, very high teaching loads of four or five courses per semester create a nose-to-the-grindstone lifestyle that may preclude stopping to ponder, rethink, relearn and redesign courses to respond to climate crisis. Climate change adds existential angst to an already full plate.

A difference from our four-year partner colleges is that, at community colleges, we tend to serve local people, who are FROM the community, and intend to stay and live there. Our students are witnessing climate disruption to the places they know well. In fact, focus groups at community colleges revealed observation and "lived experience" as the number one self-identified source of climate information. We have a responsibility to prepare students of Gen Delta for what's coming, along with nontraditional age students who may have different levels of perception for climate crisis. We must learn from and with our communities about how to adapt in place. Climate crisis is happening much faster than anyone expected, and the state of urgency warrants immediate attention to climate, resource depletion, and biodiversity loss. Students are most able to make sense of climate information when consistent messages are delivered across all courses — including "the trades" which are so central to climate solutions

in automotive, building, HVAC; the healthcare and culinary professions, as well as natural sciences, and the humanities.

What pedagogies will emerge to address the concerns, needs, and prior knowledge of Generation Delta? How can community colleges use our expertise in teaching to develop new strategies, including research, capstone projects, service-learning, and heutagogy (self-directed learning). Community colleges can be the bridge between our students' homes and their futures — whether that is through credentialing, certificates, streamlined transfer pathways to four-year institutions, or lifelong learning and reskilling to address a swiftly changing world.

Readers of the 2020 Edition of the Sustainability Handbook are invited to read each chapter through the lens of response to climate crisis, and to submit YOUR campus experience through the “case study” button. For example, how is your college preparing for climate change impacts such as flooding or fires into Campus Operations? What interdisciplinary ideas are you experimenting with in curriculum for climate literacy? How are partnerships with city infrastructure and business helping your campus to be prepared for disruption? What “living lab” projects have given students experiences they can use in the workplace to improve your campus infrastructure? How do we assess sustainability learning and the impact of our collective efforts? How do we support our faculty to teach climate change effectively (and affectively?). This handbook will not “save the planet” but I am certain you will find a new idea and many kindred spirits to motivate and assist YOUR work.

Reader input will be integrated into the handbook over Summer 2020. At the NCSE Summer meeting, members of the Community College Leaders Network are invited to join the Editorial Board meeting to brainstorm and assign new chapter topics for the year, which are assigned and workshopped at the Winter meeting. The goal of the handbook is to provide a free, current, and accessible publication to share best practices for sustainability implementation across all aspects of community colleges. Chapters are written by NCSE member college representatives to further showcase the scholarship and experience of talented two-year faculty.

Mahalo nui loa (thank you very much!) to all of this year's authors, and special thanks to Nancy Lee Wood of Bristol Community College for helpful input on this introduction. Please enjoy the handbook.

Sincerely,

Krista Hiser
Editor, NCSE Senior Fellow for Community Colleges
Kapi'olani Community College (NCSE Member Institution)