Chapter 6

The University of Hawai'i at Manoa Sustainability Courtyard as a Center for Campus Engagement

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University of Hawai'i at Manoa Sustainability Courtyard provides a venue for campus engagement to educate and increase awareness of developing solutions and/or adaptations to geopolitical and environmental challenges, particularly energy, water, and food security. Few institutions are immune to coping and addressing triple bottom line issues of energy (economy), water, food and waste management (environment), and workplace comfort and safety concerns (equity), so the limited window of time students have on university campuses is an opportunity to engage and prepare them for an uncertain future (+ education).

INTRODUCTION

What evidence will there be that society has been transformed as an outcome of all the rhetoric on sustainability of the past two decades, and how will anyone notice a difference at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa? (Cusick, 2008, p. 246)

This chapter describes a space on the campus of the University of Hawai'i at Manoa (UHM), the State of Hawai'i's flagship institution of higher education, which has demonstrated the potential to effectively contribute to the university's strategic

planning objectives related to sustainability. The UHM Sustainability Courtyard (SC) is an example of what institutions of higher education can do, and are doing, to promote education and awareness in support of civic engagement. The cumulative efforts of the campus community, particularly over the past decade, are relevant in the development of sustainability literacy, and the SC provides a case study of how other institutions may consider the use of campus space for similar purposes.

As is often noted, the terms *sustainable development* and *sustainability* generate multiple definitions and perspectives (Barlett & Chase, 2004; Edwards, 2005). The challenges have less to do with defining terms and more with cultivating the sense of individual and collective effort required to adapt to the scale of challenges likely to confront contemporary societies. While the key concepts of all sustainability definitions focus on economic development, environmental management, and social equity, also referred to as people, planet, and prosperity (or profit), which are collectively referred to as the triple bottom line and three pillars of sustainability, the problems, as noted by David Orr (1992), are that the challenges "feed upon each other." Of relevance to the transformative use of campus spaces as described in this collection of case studies is the role of education itself. Orr suggests that "all education is environmental education" and that the practice of civic engagement to educate people to live sustainably requires that education occur "in part as a dialogue with a place" (Orr, 1992, p. 90). One such place to facilitate the paradigm shift discussed by Andres Edwards in *The Sustainability Revolution* are the campuses of institutions of higher education. "Through education, sustainability can become firmly established within the existing value structure of societies while simultaneously helping that value structure evolve toward a more viable long-term approach to systemic global problems" (Edwards, 2005, p. 23).

Consensus on the application of sustainability at an institution of higher education, let alone a working definition, can be difficult to reach for several reasons. First, many hard choices have to be made by university administrations and faculty for near-, medium-, and long-term goals, whether involving campus planning and capital improvements or research and instructional programs, while students tend to focus on near-term personal goals, such as graduating in a timely fashion and managing the costs and logistics of independent living. Second, complex issues, such as adoption of alternative sources of energy, purchasing of local and green products, and reduction and disposal of solid wastes, can require years of planning to organize and execute across a university campus. Nonetheless, any progress at UHM responding to vulnerabilities to energy, water, food, and waste management systems moves the State of Hawaiʻi closer to the sustainable futures so enticingly articulated by many proponents.

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