

CARVING A PATH OF SUSTAINABILITY IN HOSTOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Global warming and climate change are topics that have captured headlines in the last decade. A one week summit to address global climate change took place in Copenhagen, Denmark in December of 2009.¹ The start of the summit was not very hopeful, as many of the participating nations showed fractious behavior, exposing their particular viewpoints and concerns the matter. A disagreement arose around China's rejection of American calls for the CO₂ emissions to be independently monitored. In addition, leak of controversial e-mails just before the opening of the summit contributed to complicate matters.²

Participating nations believed in limiting CO₂ emissions, but they were also worried about the economic impact of such limitation on their countries. For example, what would be the cost of cutting emissions in the economies of wealthy nations and developing countries? Would there be an adequate flow of resources from wealthy countries to less developed countries? What would the economic scene of poor countries be while cutting down their CO₂ emissions? Though these and other controversial issues were not adequately resolved, the summit generated enough worldwide attention to put global warming and its effects into perspective. As a result, a summit accord was signed by few nations. Nevertheless, the leadership of the United States, Brazil, South Africa, and India among the signatories infused optimism for other countries to join the accord later on.³

Regardless of the outcome of negotiations at the international level, we, the ordinary citizens of the world, are in the middle of this global imbroglio. It is up to us to understand the magnitude of the problem and seek ways to deal with it. Despite a variety of opinions on the cause of global warming, it is clear that environmental changes are related to an increase in carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere, alterations in the biogeochemistry of the global nitrogen cycle, and land use.⁴

As an institution of higher education, Hostos Community College (HCC) has the responsibility of educating the members of our community on current events effecting our lives. HCC is located in one of the most polluted areas of New York

City.⁵ The college serves a large number of students that need to be educated about environmental issues. It is our duty to channel students' appreciation of the world as a whole, to have them recognize their role as decision makers, and ponder on the consequences of their judgment in the near future.

Despite the fact that scientific evidence on the role of humanity in global warming is still under debate, the changes we will face, whether catastrophic or negligible, are unavoidable. Global warming and climate change have triggered environmental change, they are revolutionizing socio-economic structures worldwide, and are creating new professional fields.⁶ In the view of this global phenomenon the Natural Sciences Department had taken the initial steps by using two departmental events, the Hostos Earth Day and the Natural Sciences department's Open House event, as springboards to foster climate change awareness, doing so as early as April of 2006 at the Hostos Earth Day Celebration.⁷ In addition, during the spring 2007, a selected group of students was prepared by faculty for their participation in the international forum on global warming organized by ATHGO (Alliance Towards Harnessing Global Opportunities) at the United Nations on June 9th.⁸

Furthermore, the Natural Sciences Department is member of two nation-wide movements dedicated to fostering climate change awareness, Focus The Nation (FTN) and the National Teach-In.⁹ Through these affiliations, the department has sponsored a variety of activities, panel discussions, movie showings, conferences, and teach-ins to reach out to the college community. The launching of FTN was in the fall of 2006, with a panel discussion between faculty representatives from each department and institutional leaders. The panelists evaluated global warming from their personal perspectives, expressed their points of view, and provided ideas on how our institution should approach the challenge.

During the following spring semesters (2008 and 2009), teach-in events recruited faculty from several departments, in addition to the entire Natural Sciences department, to participate in the nation-wide movement dedicated to focus the nation's attention to the matter of global warming. Participating faculty dedicated part of their teaching sections or entire sections to discuss global warming, climate change, and sustainability with students, there were also student presentations, slide shows, paintings, poems, and other types of work with practical application, such as energy saving projects.¹⁰ Eventually, institutional leaders and community leaders become involved by participating in panel discussions or giving presentations at college wide events.^{11,12}

The efforts were not restricted to academics. Some of our efforts were dedicated to exploring clean energy alternatives such as recycling, green roofs and solar panels.^{13,14} Coincidentally, in the spring of 2008, the path initiated at Hostos Community College merged with the Hostos Sustainability Council, which was created by CUNY in order to achieve the Chancellor's goal of a 30% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and sustainability by the year 2017.¹⁵ As a result, each of the 23 CUNY institutions was asked to create a measurable 10 year sustainability plan at all levels, energy, water, transportation, procurement, and education.¹⁶

The relevance of the theme of sustainability cannot be overlooked. In view of the positive response and the support we have received college-wide,¹⁷ we hope to count on more faculty members campus-wide to help us in this campaign that is no longer just a campaign of the Natural Sciences' Department, but a CUNY wide

crusade. The next step is to continue developing activities related to global warming, climate change, and sustainability in our courses to begin developing multidisciplinary collaborations that will contribute to establish an institutional culture of sustainability.

The year 2017 is the deadline for all CUNY campuses to demonstrate their achievements in all areas. Faculty's goal as part of the Educational Outreach pillar of the Sustainability Council is to create courses that deal directly with global warming, climate change, green energy, green jobs, and sustainable use of natural resources, green engineering, and others focused in shaping student's academic formation according to the realities of the current and future world. The challenge of carving our institution path to sustainability is in our hands.

ENDNOTES

- 1 New York Times Series (Dec. 7-17th, 2009) <[http://query.nytimes.com/search/?query=copenhagen%20climate%20change](http://query.nytimes.com/search?query=copenhagen%20climate%20change)> (Retrieved December 23, 2009)
- 2 Tierney J. "E-Mail Fracas Shows Peril of Trying to Spin Science." New York Times. Dec. 2009: D1. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/01/science/01tier.html>> (Retrieved December 28, 2009)
- 3 Revkin AC, Broder JM. "A Grudging Accord in Climate Talks." New York Times. 19 Dec. 2009:A1. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/20/science/earth/20accord.html>> (Retrieved December 28, 2009)
- 4 Peter M. Vitousek (1994) Beyond Global Warming: Ecology and Global Change. *Ecology*: Vol. 75, No. 7, pp. 1861-1876.
- 5 The Little College That Could. The Higher Education Digest http://www.internetvz-newsletters.com/datal/e_article000367552> (Retrieved April 23, 2010)
- 6 Senate Passes Green Jobs/Green NY Bill (September 11th, 2009) <http://www.nysenate.gov/blogs/2009/sep/11/senate-passes-green-jobs-green-ny-bill> (Retrieved April 23, 2010)
- 7 Earth Day Celebration at Hostos Community College is an event that was initiated in 1995 by Prof. Amanda Bernal-Carlo. The Natural Sciences Department Open House was initiated in 2007 as a showcase of faculty and student work. Full time faculty, adjunct faculty and staff are active participants in both initiatives. The two events have provided the scenario to promote the theme of global warming.
- 8 Six students, B. Chee, B. Del Rosario, A. Martinez-Hiraldo, E. Modesto, L. Santana, A. Zelalem participated in the International Forum on Global Warming at the United Nations; the event was organized by Alliance Towards Harnessing Global Opportunities (ATHGO). During six weeks, faculty in the Natural Sciences Department provided a boot camp style preparation on the causes of global warming, world geography, the fundamentals of public speaking and essay writing.
- 9 Hostos Community College is member of both Focus the Nation and the National Teach-In. Two nation-wide movements in Global Warming Awareness. <<http://www.focusthenation.org>>; <<http://www.nationalteachin.org>> (Retrieved December 23, 2009)
- 10 Several non-science faculty members have also contributed to our events: L. Altman, M. Bencivenni, C. Bernardini, D. Byas, H. Canate, W. Casari, G. Cicco, R. Cohen, B. Czarnocha, S. Dicker, E. Dincer, P. Frenz-Belkin D. Frick, C. Grindley, S. Figueroa, M. Figueroa-Sanchez, H. Lesnick, K. Lundberg, M. Miranda, A. Morales, M. Sharma,

- C. Sanabria, J. Preciado, M. Rabry, A. Ramson, A. Trinidad, C. O'Reilly, I. Scott, A. Vaninsky, L. Watkins-Goffman, and E. Zucker.
- 11 Guest speakers: D. Fernandez (former college president and member of the Focus The Nation Committee); D. Cocco De Filippis (former Provost); Dean C. Molina, D. McFarlane, College Safety Officer; K. Shackford, Director for Energy and the Environment – BOEDC; R. Colavito Royal Blue Waste Services; G. Nison, NYC Department of Sanitation; P. Lay-Dorsey, artist and photographer from Detroit gave permission to print her poems for public display. (A Year of Poems--2003) <http://www.windchimewalker.com/-webpages/2003-poems.html> (Retrieved April 23, 2010)
 - 12 Community participation at Earth Day and Open House activities regarding global climate change: S. Cruz, New York Power Authority; H. Barnhart, Innovations Coordinator for Environmental Protection Agency Region 2; Y. Yusino, The Green Apple; D. Buckner, President, Solar Energy Systems, LLC; R. Karas, South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corp.; R. Miller (NASA GISS Scientist); J. Quigley, formerly of Bronx Community College - CUNY; M. Pinedo-Vasquez, Center for Environmental Research and Conservation, Columbia University CERC; N. Haque, New York City College of Technology – CUNY.
 - 13 Paper recycling was promoted in the Natural Sciences Department and on campus as a practical approach to help reduce waste. The initiative was coordinated with G. Nison, representative of the NYC Department of Sanitation, and J. Globerman, Building & Grounds Maintenance representative.
 - 14 The potential of installing solar panels on campus was explored with the help of D. Buckner, President, Solar Energy Systems and S. Delgado, F. Virone, Y. Globerman, institutional Building & Grounds representatives. The possibility of installing a green roof on campus was discussed with S. Delgado.
 - 15 Mayor Bloomberg and University officials announce four new universities joining PlaNYC challenge to reach ambitious goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions 30 percent in 10 years (October 23, 2008) http://www.nyc.gov/html/2008/2008-10-23/2008-10-23_419-08.html&cc=unused1978&rc= 1194&ndi=1 (Retrieved April 23, 2010)
 - 16 The CUNY Sustainability Project was given institutional clarity and impetus through the acceptance by Chancellor Goldstein of Mayor Bloomberg's '30 in10' Challenge. This challenge will motivate New York City's public and private universities to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions 30% by 2017. <<http://web.cuny.edu/about/sustainable/taskforce.html> > (Retrieved December 26, 2009)
 - 17 Faculty members from other departments have been integrating the theme of climate change as a discussion topic in their courses. The three National Teach-In activities have included the participation of fifty-three faculty members (thirty of which did not belong to the Natural Sciences department). We have not kept records of the number of students that have attended class presentations during the three teach-in activities, but we can estimate the number can reach around one thousand (53 classes x 20 students) In addition, around five hundred college members watched the documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" during 4 shows/day during 4 weeks in the fall of 2007.