



The Role of Higher Education in Supporting Climate Change Solutions

Description

Universities can encourage real progress in the fight against climate change. But what are the potential barriers they might face and how can they overcome them?

Young people are growing up in a world where climate change is a serious and looming threat to their future.

As a result, the last few years have seen a rise in the number of young people taking a keen interest in climate change; pursuing related careers, participating in activism, and demanding action from decision makers.

In 2015, the [United Nations](#) established the [Sustainable Development Goals](#); a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.

The higher education sector plays a crucial role in helping the world to reach these goals, both in conducting research to further the cause and by educating future decision makers.

Education

Education is one of the most important driving forces for change.

By equipping students with the knowledge to develop climate change solutions and to lead a sustainable life, universities can help create a society with a unified mission to revert global warming.

According to a report by [Common Ground](#), most university students trust university scientists to provide truthful information about climate change, which demonstrates the huge opportunity universities have to encourage a movement.

However, the report also shows that there are several barriers that can prevent adequate teaching of climate change at universities.

Some faculty feel that it's not their responsibility to teach students on the subject, and that teachers who find the topic implausible may not be motivated to teach about climate change.

In other words, personal positions on climate change can influence a teacher's willingness to educate their students on the subject.

Among those teachers who are willing to participate, there are some who feel they don't have enough knowledge on the subject to educate their students to an adequate degree.

The report revealed that professors of the sciences were relatively high in both comfort and responsibility to teach climate change, whereas liberal arts faculty members were less comfortable and felt less responsible to include the topic in their classroom.

With climate change stemming from the scientific phenomenon of rising temperatures, the sciences are likely to be more comfortable understanding the evolving situation. However, climate change isn't just a concern among the scientific community.

The issue impacts all aspects of our lives, from politics to changing consumer habits, and therefore requires the content of almost all subjects to address the issue.

Unfortunately, the report showed that, from the two USA universities they surveyed, not enough was being done to educate students on climate change, with less than 1% of courses discussing the topic in any capacity.

Universities have a responsibility to review their offering when it comes to climate change education, seeking to understand and resolve any issues faculty have with teaching the subject to students.

Research

Universities across the world are currently hosting and conducting some of the most impactful research of our time.

Without the right support and funding, crucial climate research that is currently taking place would struggle to continue.

In some countries, climate change is seen as a political issue, with various parties taking different positions on how we should be approaching climate change, or even if it exists in the first place.

With university stakeholders often making key decisions about funding and research, and equally having strong political affiliations, this can have a huge impact on the role a university plays in supporting climate change solutions.

[In July 2019](#), Governor Mike Dunleavy made the decision to slash the University of Alaska's budget by US\$130 million.

This had a huge impact on the climate change research being conducted by the university, as well as the work being done by researchers throughout the country who rely on the university's resources.

Victoria Herrmann, President of [The Arctic Institute](#), said that without this crucial research, there is one less piece to this puzzle that you have to understand global climate change.

If it doesn't put a stop to it altogether, a cut in funding can regress the quality of the research that universities are currently working on, including their work on climate change.

It's important that universities work hard to show their support for the climate change movement, not allowing fear of external opinion to stand in the way of the right course of action.

Working towards the UN's Sustainable Development Goals should be an aim that infiltrates all aspects of university life and education.

For example, [Wageningen University and Research](#) was ranked number one in UI's GreenMetric's ranking in both 2017 and 2018, [with perfect scores](#) for the sustainable education, waste treatment, and water use indicators.

To find out more about how your higher education institution can make a real impact in the field of climate change, please register to attend the [QS APPLE 2020 Virtual Conference](#).