The Urgent and Critical Role of Higher Education in Creating a Healthy, Just and Sustainable Society

Presentation at the 2010 Presidents’ Forum of Southeast and South Asia and Taiwan Universities

National Cheng Kung University
Tainan, Taiwan

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October 2, 2010

It is a great honor to participate in the 2010 Presidents’ Forum of Southeast and South Asia and Taiwan Universities. I bring you the greetings of the board of directors and staff of Second Nature and the 675 U.S. college and university presidents that have made a special commitment to creating a healthy, just, secure and sustainable society. Second Nature is a non-profit organization whose mission is to help transform the education, research and practice of higher education to create a sustainable society (www.secondnature.org).

The Importance of Higher Education

As we all know, higher education prepares most of the professionals who develop, lead, manage, teach, work in, and influence society’s institutions, including the most basic foundation of elementary, middle school and secondary education. Higher education has been a crucial leverage point in making a modern advanced civilization possible for an unprecedented number of people in almost every important way and will be even more important in a world that is rapidly expanding and interdependent. In addition, college and university campuses are microcosms of the rest of society – they are like mini cities and communities that mirror society. Society looks to higher education to solve current problems, anticipate future challenges, develop innovative solutions and model the action and behavior that society must take to continue to evolve in a positive direction. Since knowledge is the adaptive characteristic of humans, higher education is one of the most important, though often overlooked, leverage points in the transition to a healthy, just, secure and sustainable society.

Humanity and Higher Education at an Unprecedented Crossroads

Higher education now has a challenge bigger than any other it has ever faced because humanity is at crossroads without historical precedent.

Because of the extraordinary and exponential growth of population and of the technological/economic system, humans have become pervasive and dominant forces in the health and well being of the earth and its inhabitants. The sum of humanity and the expansive dynamic of industrial capitalism constitute a planetary force comparable in disruptive power to the Ice Ages and the asteroid collisions that have previously
redirected Earth’s history. While the earth’s population has grown from 1 billion to 6.7 billion in the last two centuries, energy consumption has risen 80 times and economic output has risen 68 times. Most of that has occurred in the last half century. Despite the impressive array of environmental protection laws and programs in the industrialized countries since 1970, all living systems (oceans, fisheries, forests, grasslands, soils, coral reefs, wetlands) are in long-term decline and are declining at an accelerating rate, according to all major national and international scientific assessments. Some (e.g., major ocean fisheries, coral reefs, forests) have collapsed and more are moving rapidly to total collapse. Humans and the rest of nature are burdened by a staggering array of persistent, toxic natural and manmade chemicals as well as air and water pollution that are affecting our health and the viability of large ecosystems.

At the same time, we are not succeeding in many health and social goals: 3.2 billion people are without sanitation and earn less than $2.50/day, over a billion have no access to clean drinking water. The gap between the richest 20% of the world and the poorest 20% has jumped from 28:1 to 85:1 since 1960. Even in the U.S. the gap is the greatest since the Gilded Age of the late 19th and early 20th century. We have a worldwide economic recession and international conflicts and wars over resources such as oil and water that are destabilizing world society. This is happening with 25% of the world’s population consuming 70-80% of the world’s resources. At the same time, all of the world, led by many Asian countries, is rapidly expanding to lead more than 2 billion people out of poverty and increase the health, well-being and quality of life for the majority of the world’s population.

And the challenge that will accelerate all the negative trends is human induced global warming, primarily from the burning of fossil fuels that is now destabilizing the earth’s climate and most of its other life supporting systems. Despite what we may read or hear in the news media (especially in the U.S.), human induced climate disruption is real and is already affecting us: it is worse and happening faster than predicted by the most conservative scientists just 3 years ago in 2007. What most people do not understand is that destabilizing the earth’s climate can undermine modern civilization. As Dianne Dumanoski asserts in her recent book, The End of the Long Summer.
“Our way of life depends on a stable climate. The cores of ice drilled from the ice sheets on Greenland and Antarctica tell us we live at a truly extraordinary time within the Earth’s volatile climate history. Through most of our species 200,000-year existence, our ancestors had to cope with a chaotic climate marked by extreme variability, a climate that could not support agriculture. The world as we know it, with agriculture, civilization, and dense human numbers, has only been possible because of a rare interlude of climatic grace—a “long summer” of unusual climatic stability over the past 11,700 years. The human enterprise has become a risky agent of global change. The gargantuan size of our modern industrial civilization is now disrupting our planet’s very metabolism—the vast overarching process that maintains all of earthly life. Because of humanity’s planetary impact, this exceptional moment on Earth is drawing to a close. What lies ahead is a time of radical uncertainty.”

While this may (and should) make us uncomfortable, it is current reality and leads to the central question for the future of humanity:

The Big Question:
How do we create a decent quality of life
for all current and future humans
on a planet whose capacity to support life is precarious?

How will we ensure that all current and future humans will have their basic needs met, will live in thriving, secure communities, will have economic opportunity in a world that will have nine billion people and that plans to increase economic output 4-5 times by 2050 on a planet who’s capacity to support life is more precarious every day? The scientific consensus among earth systems scientists is that if everyone lived like the average American we would need 4-5 planets (3 planets for a European lifestyle) to continually supply all resources and provide critical ecosystem services including conversion of waste products into useful substances. At the same time, Asia, Africa and Latin America are expanding economically at unprecedented rates to lift 3 billion people out of poverty and creating a higher quality for all of their people. This is not just an environmental challenge. It is arguably the greatest civilizational, moral and intellectual challenge that humanity has ever faced. It is not about saving the planet. The planet has survived 5 major biological extinctions, the last being 65 million years ago in the age of the dinosaurs and it will survive the 6th being caused by humans. The goal is to create a thriving civilization for all of humanity.

It is built on the understanding that all human activity and survival is completely dependent on the earth for all of its resources and key ecosystem services including converting waste products into useful substances. It is what I refer to as the aspiration of a sustainable society.

**A Change in Mindset**

How did we get here? The cultural operating instructions of modern industrial society are that if we just work a little harder and smarter and let the market forces run society, all these challenges will work themselves out.

But the routine business of our civilization is threatening its own survival, and by putting Earth’s living system in jeopardy, it also risks foreclosing the conditions for any civilized life. In the industrialized world, we are guided by a myth of human separateness from and domination of nature for our purposes and of continuing “progress” fueled by economic growth because it has worked in the last 3 centuries to create a modern society offering spectacular increases in the quality of life for a significant portion (though still a minority) of the world’s population. This guiding myth contains an implicit assumption that the earth will be the gift that keeps on giving - providing the resources and converting our wastes into useful substances - ad infinitum, and irrespective of the size of the population or its level of its material desire. The guiding myth assumes that human technological innovation will allow us to ignore planetary limits.

Moreover, we are dominated by linear short-term thinking that makes it difficult to recognize the cumulative dangers of current actions or that the impact of collective humanity is now global, intergenerational and prone to rapid, unexpected shifts. For example, greenhouse gas emissions released today will begin to have their most serious effects in 30-50 years and will continue for several centuries. Through economic globalization we are spreading this cultural and economic paradigm even while its hyper-interdependence makes our societies more vulnerable to the growing instability of natural or human systems. Witness the impact of the 2008 global economic crash that continues to depress the worldwide economy and the recent volcanic eruption in Iceland that wreaked havoc with travel to and from Europe and with the economy of large parts of Africa that supply flowers and food to Europe. Culturally, in western industrialized society, we view of increasing material consumption as the principal measure of individual and group success, despite increasing negative health, social and environmental effects.
We need a transformative shift in the way we think and act. As Einstein said, “We can’t solve today’s problems at the same level of thinking at which they were created.” We currently view the array of health, economic, energy, political, security, social justice, environmental and other societal issues we have as separate, competing and hierarchical when they are really systemic and interdependent. We have a de facto systems design failure.

**SYSTEMS DESIGN FAILURE!**

For example, we don’t have environmental problems, per se. We have negative health and environmental consequences of the way in which we have organized society economically, socially and technologically. The 21st century challenges must be addressed in a systemic, integrated and holistic fashion with an emphasis on creating a new and more desirable ways of helping society succeed, e.g., local, sustainable food production that provides healthy food, local jobs, protects soils, water supplies and ecosystems.

Unfortunately, the current higher education system is reinforcing the unhealthy, inequitable, and unsustainable path that society is pursuing. As David Orr has said – “It is not a problem in education it is a problem of education”2. This is not intentional. The structure of higher education and its evolution in the last one and a half centuries is based on and is reinforcing the deep cultural (and therefore hidden) assumptions referred to above. The guiding myth of humans as separate from nature, nature as primarily a source of resources to be utilized and controlled for human purpose combined with the disciplinary structure of learning and purpose in higher education is the dominant paradigm in society and in higher education.

As one example of the many undesirable consequences of the current paradigm, our current ecological, health and social footprint is largely invisible to most of us and almost completely absent in the price of products.

Take photocopying and printing.

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Most people think that the environmental impact comes from the printer or copier and the paper. The real impact is all the way up the supply chain with energy, resources, pollution and waste every step of the way—often one to two orders of magnitude greater than the actual printing. This is true of most industrially produced products, food and services.

In the U.S. in the 1950’s & 1960’s there was a TV game show, “The Price is Right” in which you won the item offered if you could guess the price. Our economic system acts as if the price is right. In truth the price is mostly wrong because it generally doesn’t reflect the negative impact on human health and communities, workers and the earth’s ecosystems. Currently, the price is the proverbial tip of the cost iceberg. The best estimates of the true life cycle health, social and ecological cost of a gallon of gasoline, for example, is between $8 and $12 (the latter especially for the U.S. because of the defense spending to keep the oil flowing from the Middle East including two disastrous wars.)

As a result, the average person in an industrialized country does not know that through the economic system, we consume the equivalent of our body weight in solid materials daily, over 94 percent of which goes to waste before we ever see the product or the service. Consequently, the market fails in efficiently and effectively allocating resources and allows us to practice a kind of group self-deception about the impact of our daily living. An important part of education must be to make the invisible impacts, (positive or negative), visible.

Making the “invisible” “visible”

- Systemic life cycle impacts
- True cost pricing & accounting
- Better measures of well-being
- Timely ecological and social signals

Hundreds of businesses are paying attention to the life cycle of their products through the supply chain. Walmart is now requiring all its 64,000 suppliers worldwide to report on and minimize their “greenhouse gas” footprint and reduce the environmental impact of packaging in order to remain a Walmart supplier.

HOPE AND POSSIBILITY

In the next few minutes, join me on a journey of hope and possibility. Here is what we know about living sustainably over the long run and the best chance for modern civilization to thrive:
1. Use as little resources and energy as possible, power the economy with renewable energy.
2. Move from linear “take, make, waste” to a circular industrial production in which the concept of “waste” is eliminated because every waste product is a raw material or nutrient for another industrial activity.
3. Live off nature’s interest, not its capital - use natural resources only at the rate that they can self-regenerate – the ideas embodied in sustainable forestry, fishing and agriculture.

This is the concept of biomimicry – learning from and imitating Nature that has figured out what works and survives after 3.4 billion years of experimentation.

These principles afford the best chance that all current and future generations will be able to pursue meaningful work and have the opportunity to realize their full human potential both personally and socially.

**A New Human Story?**

**Sufficiency:** Needs over wants
**Community**
**Cooperation and collaboration**
**Caring for all life:** golden rule
**Sustainable economy**

The new human story must do more. It must find a way for everyone to have their basic needs met and an emphasis for those that are living beyond basic needs to emphasize the quality of life over the consumption of stuff. The latter is critical because human wants can be insatiable while the earth’s ability to meet our wants is finite and shrinking. In an August 5, 2007 New York Times story: “In Silicon Valley, Millionaires Who Don’t Feel Rich”, executives with a net worth of more than $5 million discussed how their families were unhappy with their lifestyle because they compare themselves with neighbors whose net worth is 5-10 times greater. As one executive put it, “Here, the top 1 percent chases the top one-tenth of 1 percent, and
the top one-tenth of 1 percent chases the top one-one-hundredth of 1 percent. You try not to get caught up in it," he added, “but it’s hard not to.”

The new story would seek to have all current and future generations are able to pursue meaningful work and have the opportunity to realize their full human potential both personally and socially because we ensure that communities are strong and vibrant, celebrate cultural diversity, are designed to encourage collaboration and participation in governance.

To make this a reality we must realize that the road to sustainability is one of culture and values as much as it is about scientific and technological development. It must be guided by the arts, humanities, social and behavioral sciences, religion and other spiritual inspiration as well as the physical and natural sciences and engineering, in other words, through the fundamental framework of learning and culture. It must also be guided by commitment to have all humans have their basic needs met and have the opportunity for a life of fulfillment.

These ideas must be the heart of the design principles of a healthy, just and sustainable society - principles based on a human consciousness in which we apply the Golden Rule to our dealings with all current and unborn humans as well with the rest of life that evolved on earth. To work, these principles must be become the basis for society’s economic and governance framework and, therefore, a fundamental part of all education.

**CAN THIS BE DONE?**

Yes, because we must. Necessity is the mother of invention. A growing consensus of business, government, labor and other leaders around the world believe that a “clean, green economy” based on these principles is the best way to grow the economy, create tens of millions of jobs, help solve global health and environmental problems and have a chance at creating geopolitical stability and justice. For example, DuPont has reduced heat-trapping emissions by 72% since 1990 and saved $4 billion. Ray Anderson, the chairman and founder of Interface, Inc., the world’s largest modular carpet manufacturer with annual sales of $1.2 billion and one of the world’s leading companies dedicated to economic and governance framework and, therefore, a fundamental part of all education says:

“At Interface, the business case for sustainability (as a core purpose of our business) is crystal clear: A capitalist to the core, I can’t think of a better business case than lower costs, better products, higher morale, loyal employees and goodwill in the marketplace. Our costs are down, not up, dispelling the myth that sustainability is expensive. Our first initiative—zero-tolerance waste—has netted us $433 million in saved or avoided costs, more than paying for all capital investments and other costs associated with sustainability. Our products are the best they’ve ever been. Sustainability is a wellspring of innovation; our product designers have been particularly successful using ‘biomimicry’ as a guide, nature as inspiration. Our people are galvanized around our mission and a shared higher purpose—Maslow at his best: self-actualization that comes when people commit to something bigger than themselves, a type of top-to-bottom and bottom-to-top alignment that sustainability has fostered. The goodwill of the marketplace is tremendous, winning business for Interface because customers want to be aligned with a company that is trying to do the right thing. No amount of marketing, no clever advertising campaign, could have created the kind of customer loyalty that we have experienced.”

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This represents an important societal shift in thinking. There have been 6 major international economic downturns in the last 50 years. In the first 5 of these, many in industry and governments called for not embracing, or, where in existence, relaxing environmental, health and safety standards to cope with the economic challenges. In the current one, it is just the opposite. Environmentally preferable actions are considered to be the best way of restoring and sustaining economic stability.

**Higher Education's Role**

It is clear that today’s and tomorrow’s businesses, government and professionals - architects, engineers, attorneys, business leaders, scientists, urban planners, policy analysts, cultural and spiritual leaders, teachers, journalists, advocates, activists, and politicians - will need new knowledge and skills that only Higher Education can provide on a broad scale.

What if higher education were to take a leadership role in helping to make this a reality?

**Higher Education Modeling Sustainability as a Fully Integrated Community**

A college or university would operate as a fully integrated community that models social, economic and biological sustainability itself and in its interdependence with the local, regional and global community. In many cases, we think of teaching, research, operations and relations with local communities as separate activities; they are not. Because students learn from everything around them, these activities form a complex web of experience and learning. All parts of the college or university system are critical to achieving a transformative change that can only occur by connecting head, heart and hand. The educational experience of graduates must reflect an intimate connection among curriculum and (1) research; (2) understanding and reducing any negative ecological and social footprint of the institution; and, (3) working to improve local and regional communities so that they are healthier, more socially vibrant and stable, economically secure and environmentally sustainable.

What if the educational experience of all students is aligned with the principles of sustainability outlined above? To achieve this…

**The content of learning** would reflect interdisciplinary systems thinking, dynamics and analysis for all majors and disciplines with the same lateral rigor across, as the vertical rigor within, the disciplines.

**The context of learning** would change to make human/environment interdependence, values and ethics a seamless and central part of teaching of all the disciplines, rather than isolated in programs for specialists, or in special courses or modules.
The process of education would emphasize active, experiential, inquiry based learning and real-world problem solving on the campus and in the larger community.

Higher education would practice and model sustainability. A campus would "practice what it preaches" and model economically and environmentally sustainable practices in its operations, planning, facility design, purchasing and investments, and tie these efforts to the formal curriculum.

Finally, the learning and benefit to society of higher education forming partnerships with local and regional communities to help make them socially vibrant, economically secure and environmentally sustainable will be a crucial part of successful higher education. For example, in the U.S., the 4,100 higher education institutions in the United States are, themselves, large economic engines with annual operational budgets totaling $350 billion annually – this is about 2.5% of US GDP and greater than the GDP of all but thirty-one countries in the world. Higher education has the ability to create new and better markets for goods and services that will improve society in all ways – not just in narrow economic terms.

Frank Rhodes, former president of Cornell University suggests that the concept of sustainability offers "a new foundation for the liberal arts and sciences." It provides a new focus, sense of urgency, and curricular coherence at a time of drift, fragmentation, and insularity in higher education, what he calls "a new kind of global map." Sustainability provides a vital source of hope and opportunity for facilitating institutional renewal and revitalizing higher education’s sense of mission.

The Current Reality in Higher Education

The great news is that there has been unprecedented, exponential growth in distinct academic programs related to the environmental dimension of sustainability in higher education, especially in the last decade. Exciting environmental (and now sustainability) studies and graduate programs in every major scientific, engineering and social science discipline, business, law, public health, behavioral sciences, ethics and religion are abundant and growing. Progress on campuses modeling sustainability has grown at an even faster rate. Higher education has embraced programs for energy and water conservation, renewable energy, waste minimization and recycling, green buildings and purchasing, alternative transportation, local and organic food growing and ‘sustainable’ purchasing - saving both the environment and money. The rate of increase is unmatched by any other sector of society. In the U.S., according to the U.S. Green Building Council, the higher education sector has nearly 4000 new buildings that are being designed or have been designed to meet advanced levels of sustainable design under the LEED system (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) in the last decade. The student environmental movement in the U.S. is the most well organized, largest and most sophisticated student movement since the civil rights and anti-war movement of the 1960’s. And higher education environmental efforts have become publicly visible to a degree that was unimaginable a decade ago. These developments represent one of most encouraging trends in higher education innovation since World War II.

Unfortunately, higher education is doing a poor job on the health, social and economic dimensions of sustainability. The overwhelming majority of graduates know little about the importance of sustainability or how to lead their personal and professional lives aligned with sustainability principles. Moreover, most of the excellent

and exciting sustainability-oriented innovation in higher education have been led by (1) individual groups (students, a subset of the faculty, a subset of the business and operations staff - often working together), (2) have primarily focused on the environmental dimension of sustainability and (3) have largely focused on educating environmental and sustainability professionals within the framework of existing academic disciplines. Most have not been significantly integrated with other socially focused efforts such as civic engagement, social justice, economic development in impoverished parts of the U.S. and the world, and human rights.

With a few exceptions sustainability, as an aspiration for society, is not a central institutional goal, or lens for determining the success of higher education institutions.

**A Beacon of Systemic Change: The American College & University Presidents’ Climate Commitment**

Nature, the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) and ecoAmerica. It is a high-visibility, joint and individual commitment to measure, reduce and eventually neutralize campus greenhouse gas emissions, to develop the capability of students to help all of society do the same and, importantly, to publicly report on their progress. Second Nature provides the ongoing support and organization of the ACUPCC Network.

Emission inventories, action plans and progress reports are all publicly available on the ACUPCC website – [www.presidentsclimatecommitment.org](http://www.presidentsclimatecommitment.org).

As of October 2010, just under 4 years later, 675 colleges and universities in all 50 states and the District of Columbia have made this unprecedented commitment. They represent 5.9 million students – about 35% of the student population and include every type of institution from 2-year community colleges to the biggest research universities.

**This is unprecedented leadership by higher education. Higher Education is the first and only major U.S. sector with a significant number of its members to commit to climate neutrality.** This is especially important given the inability of the international community and, in my case, the US Congress to act. These schools are doing what is scientifically necessary, not what is easily doable within their current mode of operation. They are sending a strong signal to society that climate change and

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7 Home | Presidents’ Climate Commitment Web. 1 October 2010.

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**Second Nature**

Education for Sustainability

The lead supporting organization of the American College & University Presidents’ Climate Commitment.

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other large scale unsustainable societal practices are real, that urgent action is needed and that higher education is taking action to model sustainable behavior and to provide the knowledge and educated graduates necessary for society to do the same. They believe that the positive impact of collective leadership by a large number of colleges and universities will be huge. Global climate disruption and creating a sustainable society is a global problem requiring global solutions of immense proportions. The scope, scale and speed of the challenge demand an unprecedented level of collaboration by all of higher education.

For the members of the network the ACUPCC has created a successful learning community among the participating institutions. Participating institutions are sharing plans and experiences, working together to address challenges and helping to create new knowledge and financial resources to benefit all of the institutions in higher education. Finally, the ACUPCC has fundamentally shifted higher education’s attention on sustainability from a series of excellent, distinct programs to a strategic imperative of presidents, academic officers, business officers and trustees. Sustainability is becoming a key lens for measuring success. It represents an unprecedented institutional and cultural shift to focus on all aspects of social, economic and ecological sustainability.

The first 300 campuses have submitted climate action plans and the results are very exciting and all available on line for public review. Here are two examples:

Ball State University in Indiana with 44,000 students is taking the current, aging coal-fired boilers offline, reducing the amount of carbon dioxide emissions nearly 80,000 tons annually and will save the university $2 million in fuel costs annually when fully implemented.
Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) with 180,000 students on 9 campuses has installed 6 megawatts (MW) of solar panels with another 3 MW ready to turn on. At Los Angeles power rates, 6 MW translates into a current annual savings of roughly $2.2 million in reduced energy cost. Their goal is 60 MW (enough to make them energy independent), which they hope to achieve in 2011.

**CONCLUSION**

Many inside and outside of higher education argue that achieving climate neutrality and sustainability as a society and/or getting higher to lead this effort is too hard or impossible. **What we must do is make the impractical or seemingly impossible inevitable.** If we continue business as usual, today’s students and their children will experience the worst effects of climate disruption and other large unsustainable means of meeting human needs and will find themselves in a world with greatly diminished prospects for a good quality of life, peace and security. We are faced with the greatest intergenerational equity challenge in modern history. The earth does not recognize how hard it is for us humans to change. It will respond to the physical changes we cause on its own schedule and in its own ways. It doesn’t have the cognitive ability to decide to wait for us to figure out how we can change to preserve our way of life and ourselves.

The opportunity is for us to have vision for the kind of healthy, just and sustainable world and mobilize to make it a reality. To quote Benjamin E. Mays, former president of Morehouse College and mentor to Dr. Martin Luther King said “The tragedy of life doesn't lie in not reaching your goal, the tragedy lies in having no goal to reach.” Richard Cook, who retired in 2008 as president of Allegheny College – one of the founders of the American College & University Presidents’ Climate Commitment - wrote in a letter to another president who had not yet made the commitment:

“I liken this pledge to President Kennedy’s promise to get men to the moon and back within the decade. Neither he nor a cadre of engineers and scientists knew exactly how this would be accomplished or if, indeed it could be. But making a bold pledge to accomplish a strategically important end spurred attention, resources, talent, and urgency to a lofty goal that would be difficult to attain. In much the same way, the Commitment to becoming climate neutral institutions will spur development and accountability, and will surely, in most cases, produce more and better results in a shorter period of time than something short of a specific target. The collective voice of higher education can spotlight our sincere concern and commitment to action in ways that few if any other sectors can. We have largely provided the research that has highlighted the climate concern; we also can provide many of the solutions. If the colleges and universities don’t lead, who will?”

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For an undertaking of this magnitude and complexity, the active involvement of an organization’s senior leadership is crucial. This active involvement must go far beyond merely “checking the box” that sustainability is a priority. It requires constant, skillful, and persistent attention, and the kind of energy, vision and creative thinking that can inspire large numbers of people to imagine a better future and stay committed to create it.

I hope that the member universities of the SATU Forum will consider making education for a healthy, just and sustainable society an active goal of your efforts. It would seem the perfect issue for joint collaboration among the institutions. Further, I hope that you will consider joining or making a commitment similar to the American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment. We would be happy to work with you to make this a reality.
Biography

Anthony D. Cortese is the principal founder and President of Second Nature, a nonprofit organization with a mission to develop the national capacity to make healthy, just, and sustainable action a foundation of all learning and practice in higher education. He is the organizer of the American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment signed by 670+ college & university presidents in all 50 states. He is co-founder of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education and co-founder and co-coordinator of the Higher Education Associations Sustainability Consortium. He is frequent speaker, author and consultant to higher education, industry and non-profit organizations on institutionalization of sustainability principles and programs.

Dr. Cortese was formerly the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. He was the first Dean of Environmental Programs at Tufts University and founded the award-winning Tufts Environmental Literacy Institute and the internationally acclaimed Talloires Declaration of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future.

Dr. Cortese is a trustee of Green Mountain College, a Fellow of the American Association of the Advancement of Science and a Woodrow Wilson Fellow for higher education.

Dr. Cortese has B.S. and M.S. Degrees from Tufts University in civil and environmental engineering, a Doctor of Science in Environmental Health from the Harvard School of Public Health and honorary doctor of philosophy from Allegheny College.