UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Edited by Enakshi Sengupta,
Patrick Blessinger and Taisir Subhi Yamin

INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER
EDUCATION TEACHING AND LEARNING

VOLUME 20

UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Series Editor: Patrick Blessinger

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SERIES EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING AND LEARNING

The purpose of this series is to publish current research and scholarship on innovative teaching and learning practices in higher education. The series is developed around the premise that teaching and learning are more effective when instructors and students are actively and meaningfully engaged in the teaching–learning process.

The main objectives of this series are to:

(1) present how innovative teaching and learning practices are being used in higher education institutions around the world across a wide variety of disciplines and countries;
(2) present the latest models, theories, concepts, paradigms, and frameworks that educators should consider when adopting, implementing, assessing, and evaluating innovative teaching and learning practices; and
(3) consider the implications of theory and practice on policy, strategy, and leadership.

This series will appeal to anyone in higher education who is involved in the teaching and learning process from any discipline, institutional type, or nationality. The volumes in this series will focus on a variety of authentic case studies and other empirical research that illustrates how educators from around the world are using innovative approaches to create more effective and meaningful learning environments.

Innovation teaching and learning is any approach, strategy, method, practice, or means that has been shown to improve, enhance, or transform the teaching–learning environment. Innovation involves doing things differently or in a novel way in order to improve outcomes. In short, innovation is positive change. With respect to teaching and learning, innovation is the implementation of new or improved educational practices that result in improved educational and learning outcomes. This innovation can be any positive change related to teaching, curriculum, assessment, technology, or other tools, programs, policies, or processes that lead to improved educational and learning outcomes. Innovation can occur in institutional development, program development, professional development, or learning development.

The volumes in this series will not only highlight the benefits and theoretical frameworks of such innovations through authentic case studies and other empirical research but also look at the challenges and contexts associated with

implementing and assessing innovative teaching and learning practices. The volumes represent all disciplines from a wide range of national, cultural, and organizational contexts. The volumes in this series will explore a wide variety of teaching and learning topics such as active learning, integrative learning, transformative learning, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, meaningful learning, blended learning, creative learning, experiential learning, lifelong and lifewide learning, global learning, learning assessment and analytics, student research, faculty and student learning communities, as well as other topics.

This series brings together distinguished scholars and educational practitioners from around the world to disseminate the latest knowledge on innovative teaching and learning scholarship and practices. The authors offer a range of disciplinary perspectives from different cultural contexts. This series provides a unique and valuable resource for instructors, administrators, and anyone interested in improving and transforming teaching and learning.

Series Editors

Patrick Blessinger
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FOREWORD

Education for sustainable development (ESD) is now an international trend. Thousands of colleges and universities globally are including sustainable development (SD) in courses, as majors and minors, and as graduate degrees. While this trend is positive, more progress is needed. Partnerships are key to creating this progress.

Higher education's mission includes preparing students to help create a better society. Colleges and universities can fulfill this mission by researching and teaching SD pathways for environmental, social, and economic responsibility, and by helping students learn how to engage in sustainability solutions in their adult roles as community members, workers, and consumers. The extent to which higher education embraces the sustainable development goals (SDGs) may determine the quality of life that all humanity enjoys in the decades ahead. The habitability of the planet and the suffering of hundreds of millions of people if not billions are at stake.

From developmental psychology, we know young children first participate in solitary play, then parallel play, and finally, collaborative play. The same pattern has occurred in the emerging world of ESD. Many people initially worked as the solitary sustainability champion on campus, with enthusiasm, but without collaboration for a larger and more impactful plan. As individual colleges and universities developed sustainability initiatives, there was little collaboration between institutions and almost no collaboration with other societal sectors. Parallel play was occurring as the sectors of business, government, education, and non-profits developed their own sustainability initiatives but rarely reached out to each other. Redundancies occurred as similar tools and analyses developed in the separate sectors and synergies were lost. Humans do not have the time or the luxury to be so redundant and inefficient. Our societal sustainability challenges are too great. Our timelines to create solutions to prevent massive human suffering is too short.

Higher education has a unique and important role to play in the creation of a more sustainable society, and this role requires quality collaborative structures and incentive systems across all sectors of society. Partnerships between higher education and government, non-profits and businesses are key to creating these collaborative synergies and scaling up the pace of sustainability implementation.

Students and staff are generally aware that we are exceeding the carrying capacity of the planet and our ecosystems are degrading. After learning about our sustainability challenges, including but not limited to climate change, students often feel worried and disempowered. The components of a quality sustainability education include promoting understanding beyond doom and gloom; focusing on potential solutions; and empowering students with knowledge, skills, and informed attitudes to produce systems change.

Students need to learn how to be change agents for systems change. These change agent skills include the abilities to: create a shared vision of sustainability with

multiple stakeholders, understand formal and informal power structures to identify leverage points for change, build coalitions of support, manage the momentum and emotional climate of a change effort, and institutionalize the changes for long-term impacts. These skills cannot be just described; skill development takes practice. High-impact learning practices have long identified that students learn most when they learn by doing. Universities need to help students move beyond doom and gloom by including in their curricula and co-curricular activities multiple real-world, problem-solving opportunities, so students learn how to help create sustainability solutions. Partnerships are key to providing these opportunities.

Examples abound of universities infusing real-world, problem-solving opportunities about sustainability into curricula, co-curricula, professional development, standards (e.g., tenure, promotion, and accreditation criteria), informing legislation, and community education about how to help create a sustainable future. The challenge is now to move from exciting examples to establishing these practices as the new norm in higher education. If we don't do this, higher education risks wasting the opportunity we have to solve our urgent sustainability challenges and threatens increased and unnecessary human suffering and irreversible ecosystem damage.

To scale up the use of university–community partnerships as the part of this new norm, there are a few crucial components that have to be addressed. Professional development and support are needed for faculty and support staff to create quality partnerships with clearly defined roles and scope for partnership success. Recognition toward tenure needs to include publishing in applied journals and publishing in venues designed to assist/empower the practitioners in the community in addition to peer-reviewed journal articles. To incorporate the teaching of (sustainability related) change agent skills and mindsets into curricula, development of new course-learning outcomes and standards for the major are required.

The chapters of this book reflect the need for these crucial components.

This book also helps identify the main actors to institutionalize university and community quality partnerships. At the campus, these changes can be made and facilitated by the provost, student services, faculty, the sustainability office, department chairs, civic engagement staff, the co-curricular student affairs, and housing officers and staff. At the national and international systems levels, the changes can occur within the academic societies and at the accreditation level for both undergraduate and graduate programs. Journal editors have a particularly important role to play to connect effectively with practitioners working on the front edge of the SDGs, identifying the issues to be addressed and highlighting those topics regularly into journal issues.

The chapter authors provide examples and key insights about how to create successful partnerships. This book will inspire sustainability champions throughout higher education. More importantly, may this book inspire the scaling up of these ideas to the establishment of new norms that help higher education reach its fuller potentials. The need to attain these potentials is beyond a wish; it is a societal necessity.

Debra Rowe