# Global Sustainability: World Cafe

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# Abstract:

The objective of this project was to implement a World Cafe in which professors at the University of Virginia could collaborate on how to include more topics of sustainability into their courses. The goal was to bring together professors who are experienced in the field of sustainability with professors who do not have such firsthand experience in order to enhance the knowledge of all professors in attendance. The first iteration of this World Café was less successful than anticipated in terms of attendance, but we hope that future renditions of this event will see more attendants.

# **Introduction:**

In today's world, sustainability is a key topic that almost everyone has given some amount of consideration to. But while almost everyone has heard about sustainability, not everyone knows enough about it to feel motivated to change their beliefs and actions. One approach to truly educate and impassion people about both general sustainability topics and ways to incorporate sustainability into their lives is through university education. Incorporating sustainability into the curricula at universities is a great way to reach a wide audience and affect change in a generation of people that has the ability to make an impact far into the future and really lead the way for sustainable growth and development.

Finding ways to add sustainability into a university curriculum is not as easy as just adding a required class about sustainability, taught by one professor to hundreds of students who have been mandated to take the course. That is a possible option, but it is just one option apart from many others that may be more appealing and effective. Professors in many different departments need to be involved, because sustainability is such a widely applicable topic.

Another option to add sustainability into a school's curriculum is to have professors of all disciplines incorporate topics of sustainability into their existing courses. Professors, along with students, must be made aware of the importance of sustainability and the wide array of ways it can be implemented in different fields. Before we can educate the students, we must educate the professors. Our goal for this project was to create a way to educate our professors and provide them with the resources they need to integrate sustainability in their courses through a collaborative effort known as World Cafe, held with the assistance of the Teaching Resource Center in UVa.

### **Body:**

Our approach with this project is to work off of the plans made by our predecessors and expand them into a successful World Cafe. There was already some groundwork laid by the previous project head for the World Cafe, so incorporating their ideas with the new ones from our group will, we believe, provide the best opportunity for success. With the help of the Teaching Resource Center, we are creating a rotating roundtable event to facilitate a discussion about the current steps being taken to incorporate sustainability into courses across the University and to encourage improvements or suggestions to these methods. We hope to see more professors learn and try to incorporate sustainability into their classes in ways that best suit their curriculum.

The World Cafe will begin with a brief introduction given by the TRC as well as by our student group members to establish what we are trying to accomplish. The basic structure will include one host or "expert" at each table leading the conversation and demonstrating what they have already done to incorporate sustainability into their classes. Meanwhile, participating "travelers" will visit each table and take part in an open discourse. The idea is to take lessons learned from each round and continue to build upon it throughout the event. Each round will last 20 minutes with a 5 minute transition given in between each. In the final 10 to 15 minutes, time will be given to discuss as a full group what was taken away from the roundtables. Our student group will wrap up the event with some final thoughts and our hopes for the professors in implementing what they have taken away from the World Cafe.

Our hope is to see professors in a wide range of fields attempt to incorporate the idea of sustainability into their own curriculum to the best of their abilities. We understand the difficulties that organizations in the past have faced in trying to see sustainability awareness become an issue of importance for the University, particularly with executive managers. We feel that if we can start by showing what professors can do within their classes, significant changes in attitude and awareness can be made for this topic of growing importance.

The World Cafe is an opportunity for teachers to discuss, plan and execute methods that best suit their classes based on what has already been done. We hope that the setting and structure of the World Cafe will allow professors to feel in control of how they can go about teaching sustainability. We also hope that we can show the importance of sustainability

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education to a wide population of students in the University and the significance of spreading the practice across schools.

We have reached out to four professors (Mark White, Hank Shugart, Phoebe Crisman, and Paxton Marshall) to lead each table. We have also been in contact with Ms. Dorothe Bach from the Teaching Resource Center to help us establish the event and spread the word to professors across the University. The date is set for Friday, April 19, from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and we have reserved the Runk Green Room to host the event with refreshments provided by UVa Dining. We will be in attendance at the event, taking notes, pictures and videos to document the happenings. We also plan to send a follow-up survey after the event to all professors in attendance in order to gauge the effectiveness of the World Cafe, and more importantly, leave our successors with suggestions and recommendations on how to better host World Cafe workshops in the future.

# **Conclusion:**

We were able to implement the World Cafe, but it unfortunately was not as successful as we had hoped. We had 8 professors who had RSVPed to the event, 4 discussion leaders who were planning to come, and 2 confirmed student sustainability leaders.

Unfortunately, only 1 professor who RSVPed came, along with 3 discussion leaders, and the 2 students. There was only one small, but productive discussion among the attendees. See Appendix for images from the event. Although there was only 1 RSVPed professor in attendance, he was a great example of the kind of professors we were looking to attract. He was a professor in the English Department and his main concerns were in how to integrate sustainability into his courses and whether students would really take the sustainability talk to heart. He brought up very interesting concerns, which led to a lively discussion among the people in attendance. Discussions of further action on the part of both students and faculty was cultivated and if nothing else, the positive reinforcement that this is an issue looking to seriously be brought forward was success in itself.

#### Future work:

Our group was able to implement the World Cafe this semester, but it was not as successful as we had wanted it to be. We hope that there are further iterations of the World Cafe in years to come and it expands into a well-attended, popular event. It would be ideal if another group takes on the task of planning and executing future World Cafes, learning from our mistakes to improve the success of such events in the future. If this event were to become more successful, it may be appropriate to host such an event either yearly or semesterly.

### Lessons learned:

There were a few technical errors that would need to be addressed in future World Cafes. Booking a location very early is extremely important. The location that was available to us by the time we were at the point where we could start looking into a venue, was both far from central grounds and had no available parking areas. It made it extremely difficult for professors to attend. This was one aspect our team had not thought of in advance, the possibility that many attendees would be driving and the location was more difficult to get to. This problem can be easily eliminated in the future if a location closer to grounds could be used. The event also requires a lot of background work to be done well in advance, such as solidifying "expert" discussion leaders and inviting the larger UVa community to attend. It was because we had such a limited time by the time we solidified what exactly we wanted to do for the World Cafe that it was difficult to establish a manageable and popular event. We found that many times, the project could not move forward until small details were confirmed. For example, we could not promote the event until the leaders were set. To invite the leaders however, required a specific layout of what we expected for the structure of the event, a date and time, location.

We have learned invaluable lessons from the experience. First and foremost, we learned about the difficulty and the amount of dedication and patience required to plan a successful event. There were aspects that we did not address fully, and ended up becoming our greatest barriers to success. It was not until we met with Dorothe that we were made fully aware of the time sensitivity of an event of this nature. Time is crucial in ensuring professors learn of the

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event, decide whether than can be in attendance, and plan their schedules accordingly. It took a substantial amount of time to draft up emails to send to professors asking for their time in leading a table, as well as receiving responses and discussing details of the event with them. We also pushed the time limit when it came to aspects of the event that required confirmation outside of our control—for example reserving a location, being sponsored by Green Grounds, requesting food donations from UVa Dining. Many steps in promoting our event could not be accomplished until the foundations were confirmed. We recognized that we needed to think ahead and think in great detail, walk through the actual event to make sure every small aspect would be accounted for.

### **Budget:**

Our group did not use any money ourselves, but booked a free venue through UVa and procured refreshment donations from UVa Dining. We also used TRC resources to advertise our event and to register and communicate with professors.

# **Acknowledgements:**

Our group would like to acknowledge those that helped us with every stage in this project:

- Carla Jones for providing us with the background work and ideas for the World Cafe.
- Dorothe Bach from the Teaching Resource Center (TRC) for giving us guidance with logistics and helping us take advantage of the resources at the TRC.
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- Green Grounds for helping us sponsor this event and secure a location.
- UVa Dining for donating event refreshments.
- Professors Paxton Marshall, Phoebe Crisman, Mark White, and Hank Shugart for acting as discussion leaders

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# Appendices:







