

THE CRE-COPERNICUS UNIVERSITY CHARTA

Preamble

Human's exploitation of the biosphere is now threatening its very existence and delicate balance. Over the last few decades, the pressures on the global environment have become self-evident, leading to a common outcry for sustainable development. In the words of the Brundtland report, we must learn to care for the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations everywhere to meet their own needs. The awareness is there. What is required is a comprehensive strategy for building a sustainable future which is equitable for all human beings, as highlighted by Rio Conference (UNCED) in 1992. This requires a new frame of mind and new sets of values. Education is critical for promoting such values and improving people's capacity to address environment and development issues. Education at all levels, especially university education for the training of decision-makers and teachers, should be oriented towards sustainable development and foster environmentally aware attitudes, skills and behaviour patterns, as well as a sense of ethical responsibility. Education must become environmental education in the fullest sense of the term.

The role of universities

Universities and equivalent institutions of higher education train the coming generations of citizens and have expertise in all fields of research, both in technology as well as in the natural, human and social sciences. It is consequently their duty to propagate environmental literacy and to promote the practice of environmental ethics in society, in accordance with the principles set out in the Magna Charta of European Universities and subsequent university declarations, and along the lines of the UNCED recommendations for environment and development education. Indeed, universities are increasingly called upon to play a leading role in developing a multidisciplinary and ethically-oriented form of education in order to devise solutions for the problems linked to sustainable development. They must therefore commit themselves to an ongoing process of informing, educating and mobilizing all the relevant parts of society concerning the consequences of ecological degradation, sustainable and just world. To achieve these aims and fulfil their basic mission, universities are urged to make every effort to subscribe to and implement the ten principles set out below.

Principles of action

1. Institutional commitment: Universities shall demonstrate real commitment to the principle and practice of environmental protection and sustainable development within the academic milieu.
2. Environmental ethics: Universities shall promote among teaching staff, students and the public at large sustainable consumption patterns and an ecological lifestyle, while fostering programmes to develop the capacities of the academic staff to teach environmental literacy.
3. Education of university employees: Universities shall provide education, training and encouragement to their employees on environmental issues, so that they can pursue their work in an environmentally responsible manner.
4. Programmes in environmental education: Universities shall incorporate an environmental perspective in all their work and set up environmental education programmes involving both teachers and researchers as well as students – all of whom should be exposed to the global challenges of environment and development, irrespective of their field of study.
5. Interdisciplinarity: Universities shall encourage interdisciplinary and collaborative education and research programmes related to sustainable development as part of the institution's central mission. Universities shall also seek to overcome competitive instincts between disciplines and departments.
6. Dissemination of knowledge: Universities shall support efforts to fill in the gaps in the present literature available for students, professionals, decision-makers and the general public by preparing information didactic material, organizing public lectures, and establishing training programmes. They should also be prepared to participate in environmental audits.
7. Networking: Universities shall promote interdisciplinary networks of environmental experts at the local, national, regional and international levels, with the aim of collaborating on common environmental projects in both research and education. For this, the mobility of students and scholars should be encouraged.
8. Partnerships: Universities shall take the initiative in forging partnerships with other concerned sectors of society, in order to design and implement coordinated approaches, strategies and action plans.
9. Continuing education programmes: Universities shall devise environmental educational programmes on these issues for different target groups: e.g. business, governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, the media.
10. Technology transfer: Universities shall contribute to educational programmes designed to transfer educationally sound and innovative technologies and advanced management methods.

This document is a follow-up to a number of university initiatives concerned with environmental awareness and responsibility, recent example of which include:

- The Magna Charta of European Universities, Bologna, September 1988
- University Presidents for a Sustainable Future, The Talloires Declaration, October 1990
- Urgent Appeal from the CRE, the association of European universities, Presented to the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) Geneva, August 1991
- Creating a Common Future: An Action Plan for Universities Halifax, December 1991

Endorsing the Charta

The COPERNICUS Secretariat invites university rectors to endorse the Charta on behalf of their institutions. Their signature will constitute a commitment to secure the support of their university, teachers and students alike, in adopting and implementing environmental guidelines which are consistent with the Charta. The principles of action listed above are general and open-ended. It is left to each individual institution and its students and staff to give them substance compatible with local circumstances. Expressed in terms of specific guidelines, they should form a key element in the mission statement of the university concerned.

CRE

The Association of European Universities has over 520 universities or equivalent institutions of higher education in 41 countries. It provides a forum for discussion on academic policy, contributes to the institutional development of universities, and reflects on their role within European society. As a non-governmental organization, it represents the universities' point of view in governmental and non-governmental circles concerned with higher education in Europe. CRE organizes bi-annual conferences, training seminars for new university heads, and other meetings on issues of interest to its members. It also runs a number of interuniversity cooperation programmes.