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Keynote address: Sustainability and student learning

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UNLV Urban Sustainability Conference

Las Vegas, NV - March 6, 2009

Geoffrey Chase

Sustainability and Student Learning



**SAN DIEGO STATE
UNIVERSITY**

Leslie Marmon Silko:

“Traditionally everyone [in the Pueblo culture], from the youngest child to the oldest person, was expected to listen and to be able to recall or tell a portion, if only a small detail, from a narrative account or story. Thus the remembering and retelling were a communal process . . .”

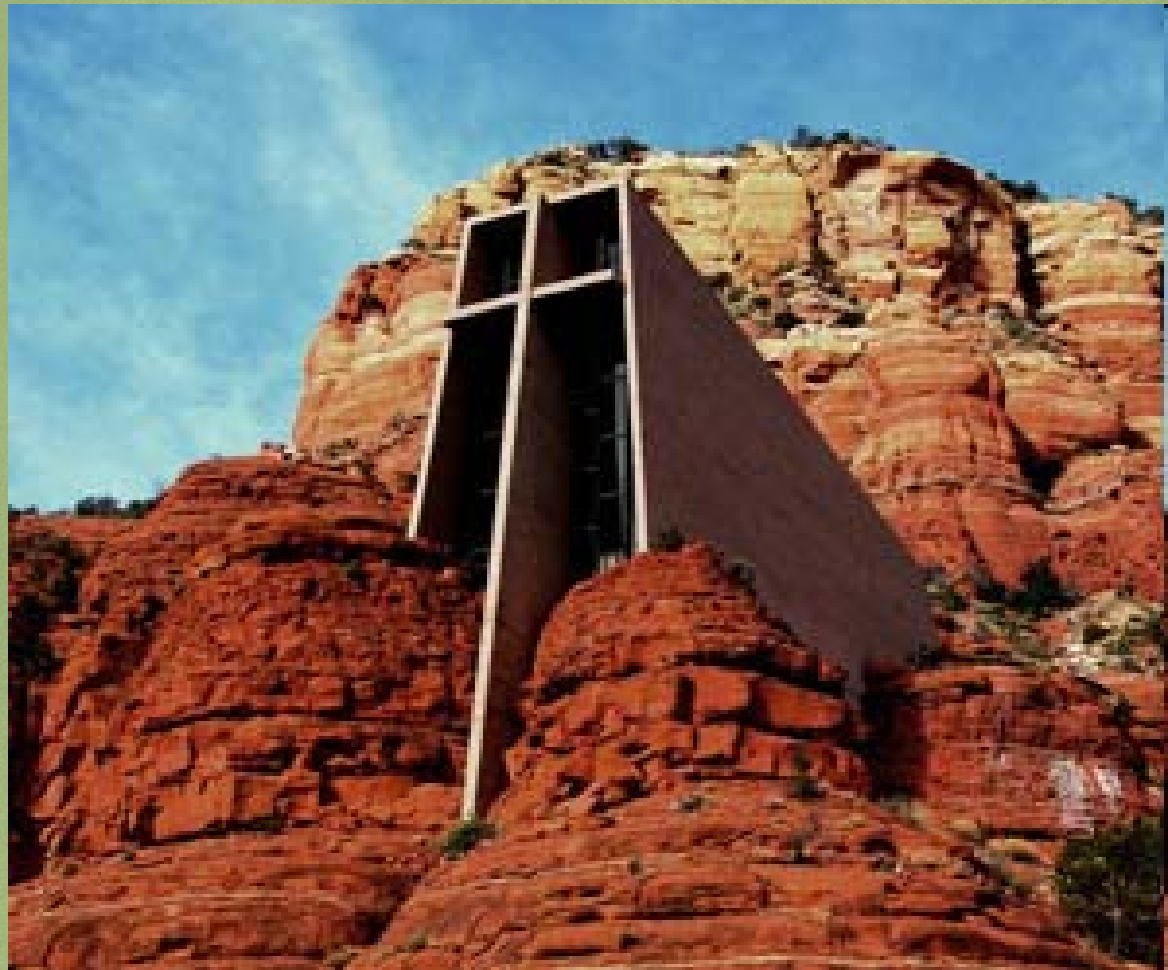
“Through the efforts of a great many people, the community was able to piece together valuable accounts and crucial information that might otherwise have died with an individual.”







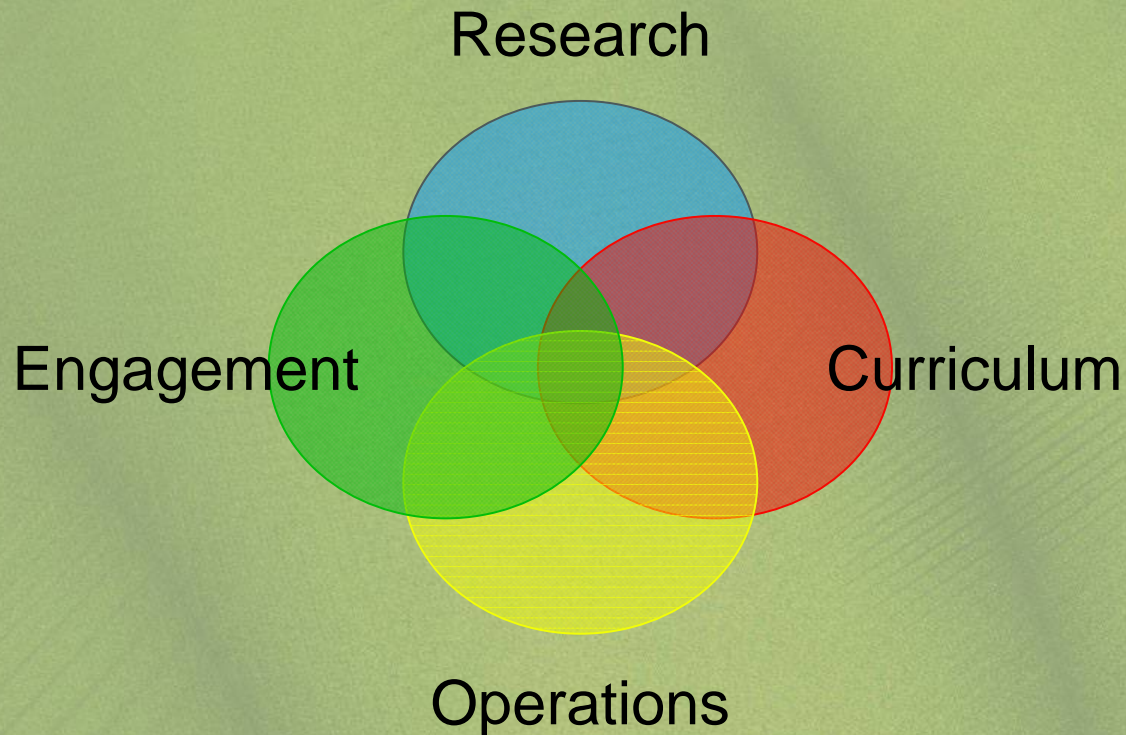




Sustainability

- ▣ Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland)
- ▣ Intersection of 3 domains
 - ▣ Economic
 - ▣ Social
 - ▣ Environmental
- ▣ Vision of the future (Viederman)

Sustainability and Higher Education



- ▣ The [sustainability] crisis cannot be solved by the same kind of education that helped create the problems.

David Orr

- ▣ Rather than being isolated in its own academic discipline, education about the environment . . . must become an ***integral*** part of the normal teaching in all disciplines.

Tony Cortese



Engaging Faculty

- ❑ Faculty in all disciplines are the experts
- ❑ Community is the defining principle
- ❑ Focus on content *and* pedagogy



Challenges

- ❑ Disciplinary boundaries
- ❑ Silos and scale
- ❑ Multiple stakeholders
- ❑ Fiscal constraints
- ❑ Public accountability



Paradigm Shift

- ▣ Starting point is community issues and problems
- ▣ Context and connections, place and problems
- ▣ Focus on student learning and ways of thinking



Integration

- ▣ Multi-year project aimed at infusing sustainability issues across the curriculum
- ▣ Guiding assumptions
 - ▣ Sustainability is the responsibility of the university not just a program
 - ▣ Faculty invited to take part are the experts regardless of disciplinary background
 - ▣ Building relationships among faculty is key



- ▣ 20 faculty/year
 - ▣ Broad range of disciplines: music, nursing, English, criminal justice, philosophy, history, biology, political science, ecology, art history, psychology, anthropology, etc.
 - ▣ Courses proposed for revision had to be part of LS (GE) program

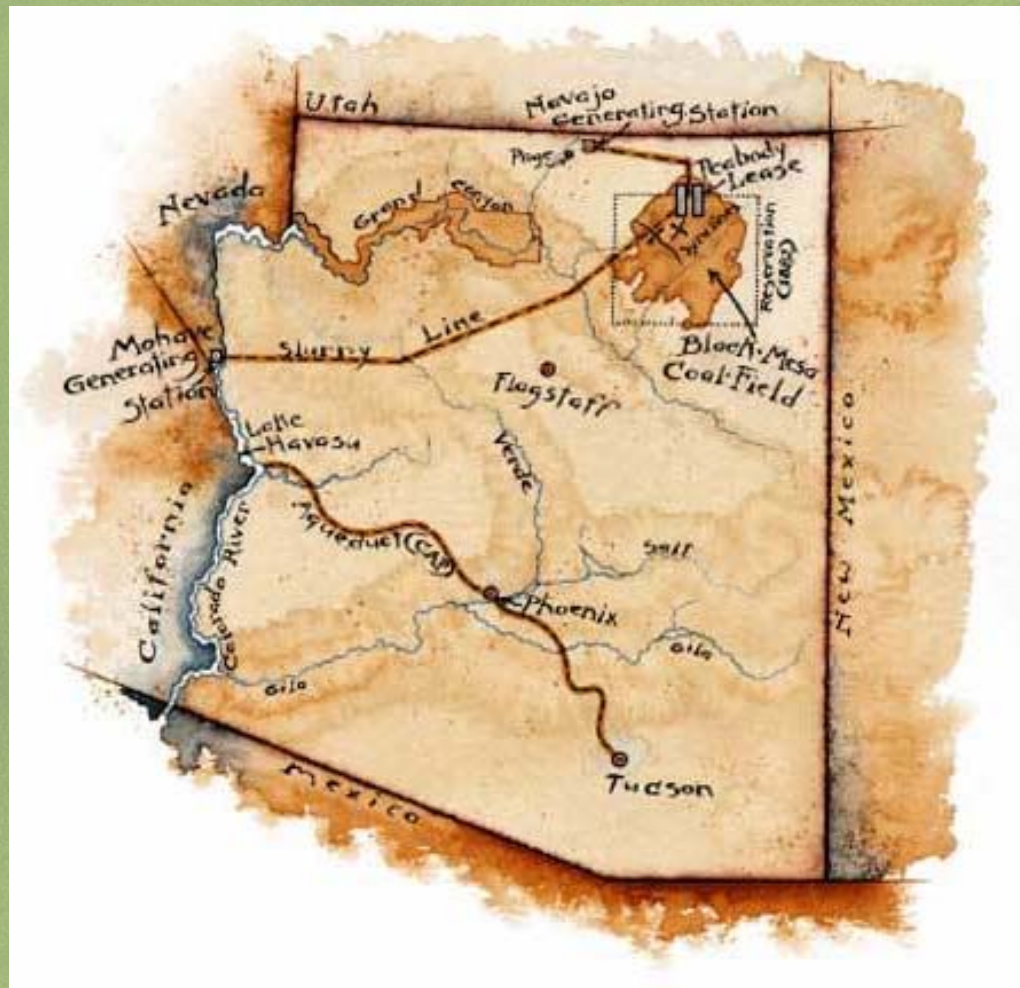
- ▣ Two-day workshop followed by ½ day follow up eight weeks later
- ▣ 100 – 120 courses revised
 - ▣ Medieval Art
 - ▣ Archeology
 - ▣ Contemporary Music Literature

- ▣ New content – assignments, readings, topics
- ▣ New pedagogy – problem focused, discussion, projects, interdisciplinary
- ▣ New research focus

Integration

- ▣ Different Projects:
 - ▣ Ponderosa – NAU (1995 - 2002)
 - ▣ Piedmont – Emory (2001 -)
 - ▣ AASHE Workshop on Leadership and Curriculum Change – 220 Participants (2005 -)
 - ▣ Curriculum for the Bio-Region – 32 campuses (2005 -)











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Teaching students today is like teaching them
to live on a planet we have never seen.

-- Mary Catherine Bateson



