

Universities Fighting World Hunger: A Human Sustainability Model

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Executive Summary

In 2004, Auburn University was invited by the United Nations (UN) World Food Programme (WFP) to be its lead academic partner in a student-focused *War on Hunger* campaign. WFP is the world's largest humanitarian organization and feeds 90 million people each year in 80 of the world's poorest countries. The partnership has resulted in an educational model that addresses both short-term (i.e., hunger awareness and consciousness-raising, fundraising, and advocacy) and long-term (i.e., teaching, research, and outreach academic initiatives) solutions to hunger. Further, the partnership has led to more than 100 universities mobilizing nationally and globally under the banner of Universities Fighting World Hunger. With sustainability as a framework, the comprehensive model outlines a grassroots student campaign and an academic action agenda that are suitable for adaptation or replication by participating universities. The model is designed (1) to produce graduates who are not only technically competent, but globally aware and socially engaged and (2) to challenge universities to assume a leadership role in creating innovative solutions to global sustainability issues like world hunger.

Rationale

For more than a decade, sustainability has emerged as a global issue that universities worldwide are defining as central to their institutional mission. Historically, sustainability has been associated with environmental concerns, such as the energy crisis and global warming. Today, however, it is recognized that social/economic justice is equally important to achieving a sustainable future. Thus, issues such as hunger and poverty should be part of the evolution of any comprehensive sustainability paradigm for higher education.

In 2000, the United Nations established the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – a blueprint to meet the needs of the world's poorest communities. The #1 target goal for the UN was to “eradicate extreme poverty and hunger”, to cut them in half by the year 2015. Despite the strong commitment to this goal, poverty and hunger are actually *increasing* by approximately four million people each year. A dramatic rise in food prices, continuing population growth, and the use of food for fuel have all converged in recent months to further add to the number of hungry people and to create what is being called a “perfect storm.”

Under the current scenario, it is apparent that hunger will not be solved in the near term. Contrary to popular belief, hunger is not solely about an inadequate food supply, but about social inequities, conflict and war, political issues, and other factors that prevent people from having access to food. Short-term solutions like food crisis intervention are necessary, but insufficient, to dramatically reduce the incidence of hunger on a permanent basis. The eradication of hunger can be achieved only when universities collectively share the load with government, the private sector (including NGOs), and philanthropic/faith-based organizations to derive innovative and sustainable solutions to this threatening world issue.

Unlike other institutions, universities create an environment that fosters innovation and critical thinking, intellectual discovery and discourse, and transformative experiences that prepare students to take their place in the world community. In essence, the academy offers a staying power from generation to generation that is essential to addressing long-term problems. Tackling these issues successfully, however, will require new “best practices” that integrate globalization and sustainability through innovative curriculum development, multi-disciplinary/trans-disciplinary research, new generation technologies, and outreach/engagement initiatives involving partnerships and multi-stakeholder networks. The call to take action on a hunger agenda is an immense challenge, but the payoff has the potential to be unparalleled in higher education.

Presented below is an example of a sustainability model that was developed at Auburn University and offers an opportunity for institutions of higher education across the country and around the globe to become engaged. Embedded within a global context, the model’s action plan is built around the specific theme of world hunger, arguably, the most pressing sustainability issue of all.

Universities Fighting World Hunger/World Food Programme Partnership

In 2004, Auburn University was invited by the United Nations World Food Programme to become its lead academic partner in a newly launched *War on Hunger* student campaign. WFP, the United Nations food aid agency, is the world’s largest humanitarian organization. Each year, WFP provides food to an average of 90 million people, including 58 million hungry children, in at least 80 of the world’s poorest countries. The World Food Programme reaches out to hungry people who cannot help themselves through emergency operations, as well as longer term development projects such as school feeding, maternal/child nutrition, and food-for-work.

The partnership with WFP offered Auburn an opportunity to create a learning environment where intellectual discovery and social responsibility converge in pursuit of a sustainable world – a world that protects the natural environment and enhances human health and well-being for present and future generations. Further, the partnership offered a call to action to engage students in a “big picture” issue and sustainability effort that they could both identify with and understand. After four years, the *War on Hunger* continues to gain momentum and has the potential to impact the social conscience of college students worldwide.

Planning Assumptions

The model for Universities Fighting World Hunger (UFWH) is based upon the following general assumptions:

- A world-class education produces graduates who are not only technically competent, but globally aware and socially engaged.
- Global issues will increasingly affect the well-being of individuals, families, and communities around the world.
- Each generation is responsible for stewardship of the earth’s human and natural resources.

- Greater investment in human capital/human resources is critical to success in a knowledge-based, innovation society.
- Twenty-first century learning requires that students and faculty reach beyond the classroom to gain practical experience, an awareness of emerging trends, and a realistic perspective of their place in the world.
- Contemporary issues are complex and most effectively addressed by an interdisciplinary approach and team effort.
- Intellectual discovery and the application of knowledge are strengthened through innovative partnerships with business, industry, and government.

More specifically, the following premises undergird the planning and implementation of the UFWH model.

- Hunger is a solvable problem.
- World hunger is inclusive of both domestic and global hunger/malnutrition.
- There is enough food produced to feed every person in the world.
- Short-term food crisis intervention is a necessary, but not sustainable, solution to ending hunger.
- Hunger is the quintessential complex problem, and all academic disciplines have a role to play in its eradication.
- Use of the term “university” refers generically to all institutions of higher education.
- The UFWH academic model provides institutions with a common vision, mission, founding goal, and action agenda; but it provides the autonomy for each university to determine the strategies and desired outcomes best suited to its own campus and community.

Vision

In pursuit of a sustainable future, universities will lead a global higher education movement focused on eradicating world hunger.

Mission

Universities Fighting World Hunger will be the catalyst mobilizing universities to collaborate in the pursuit of a *grassroots student campaign* and an *academic agenda* to end world hunger.

Founding Goal

UFWH will develop and implement a human sustainability action agenda for students and faculty that encompasses (1) hunger awareness, consciousness-raising, and fundraising; (2) advocacy; and (3) academic initiatives, leading to a university community that is fully committed to and engaged in the effort to eliminate world hunger.

Grassroots Student Campaign Action Agenda

UFWH is an alliance of more than 70 universities in North America that have joined together to make ending hunger a core value of their institutions. This growing initiative presents an exciting and challenging opportunity for students to network with peers across the nation and around the globe to forge a new movement focused on one of the most acute human sustainability issues of our time – world hunger.

Silent Phase. Like all effective initiatives, a planning and self-assessment phase is important to become informed about hunger issues and to identify resources that are critical to the success of your campaign. Recommended strategies include:

- Organize focus groups to assess level of readiness to pursue a hunger agenda; conduct an online survey of students, faculty, and staff to determine baseline knowledge of hunger issues.
- Create a UFWH leadership structure which includes students, faculty, and/or staff advisors representing both academic units and student affairs; designate one or more campus administrators who can play a lead role and provide assistance in obtaining required approvals for selected activities and leverage at least modest resources to support the campaign.
- Learn about hunger in the US and around the world (e.g., see websites such as www.wfp.org, or www.bread.org, and request educational materials as needed to use in your campus campaign).
- Form a student chapter and register with UFWH (See Manual on the UFWH website: www.universitiesfightingworldhunger.org).
- Define short- and long-term goals and objectives for the initiative; plan a public launch to kick-off your hunger campaign.
- Engage the campus office of communications/marketing to promote your initiative.
- Others?

Hunger awareness, consciousness-raising, and fundraising. An effective campaign will typically begin with hunger awareness (learning about hunger) and consciousness-raising (caring about the hungry), which may be coupled with fundraising efforts. It is these activities that inspire students and mobilize their participation, as well as bring heightened visibility to the hunger relief effort on campus. Recommended strategies include:

- Develop a PowerPoint or other visual presentation about world hunger, the World Food Programme, and the campus hunger campaign to use in classes and at other campus and community venues.
- Engage international students and faculty from developing countries to educate and help the campus and community identify with the reality of world hunger.
- Coordinate hunger events with sporting activities to maximize awareness; partner with other groups (e.g., faith-based organizations, student government, NGOs) to co-sponsor events.

- Build a website to chronicle your activities, inform others about your campaign, and link to the UFWH website; promote hunger awareness, consciousness-raising, and advocacy by connecting with peers through social networking sites.
- Host a Hunger Awareness Week; feature hunger experts or advocates as distinguished campus speakers; join UFWH institutions in a fundraising effort to support WFP.
- Select a delegation of students and faculty from your institution to participate in the annual University Hunger Summit and/or the European University Hunger Summit.
- Others? (See UFWH Manual on the UFWH website for further suggestions about implementing Ideas for Hunger Awareness Activities and Events [Appendix A]).

Advocacy. As students come to know and care about hunger, it is important for them to effectively communicate to others that just “knowing and caring” is insufficient to create the political will to end hunger. Students must learn to become strong voices for causes in which they believe. Advocacy, which consists of strategies and actions that influence decision-making at all levels of government, is an important part of the UFWH agenda.

Recommended strategies include:

- Organize training sessions for students, faculty, and staff to develop skills necessary for effective advocacy (e.g., training provided by local NGOs, campus personnel, etc.).
- Ensure that the pros and cons of issues associated with hunger are examined objectively (e.g., food for fuel) and encourage students to reach their own conclusions about any voluntary political action they might wish to pursue.
- Become better informed about political processes, key government leaders, and policy decisions that determine responses to domestic and global hunger.
- Encourage participation, individually and/or with other UFWH institutions, in advocacy activities such as letter writing campaigns, walk-a-thons, online strategies, and lobby days.
- Hold a UFWH rally; invite local, state, and/or federal elected officials to outline their political positions on ending hunger.
- Visit your state legislators and Congressional delegation to communicate the urgency of addressing hunger at home and abroad.
- Others?

Academic Action Agenda

While hunger awareness, consciousness-raising, fundraising, and advocacy contribute effectively to short-term solutions, it is the programmatic mission of the academy that holds the greatest potential for generating sustainable solutions to ending hunger. Developing and implementing an academic hunger agenda carries a dual mandate – (1) creating *best practices* in sustainability for teaching, research, and outreach, and (2) contributing to the solution of a pressing global issue -- world hunger.

Teaching. The most promising way to ensure that ending hunger becomes a core value of the institution, transmitted from generation to generation, is to fully integrate the topic into the university curriculum. The reservoir of talent in the university community is diverse and

lends itself to addressing the many complexities of hunger. Scholars from virtually every discipline have the potential to make a contribution. Issues associated with hunger include: food production and product development; nutrition and health; diplomacy, human security, and terrorism; communications and technology; transportation and logistics; markets and trade; development and infrastructure (e.g., roads, reforestation); economics and entrepreneurship; ethics, humanitarianism, and philanthropy; advocacy and leadership; capacity building (e.g., education, human development, population studies); social and public policy; and creative expression and public relations, just to name a few. Recommended strategies include:

- Inventory current course and curricular offerings to identify opportunities for strengthening subject matter content related to hunger.
- Encourage faculty to identify ways to integrate information about hunger into their classes; offer a graduate student seminar series focused on an issue such as “Hunger and Ethics.”
- Develop a major, minor, or area of emphasis in hunger studies; create a hunger studies learning community.
- Establish a speakers bureau of experts, both on and off-campus, who can address hunger-related topics (e.g., agency representatives from Women, Infants, and Children [WIC], Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program [EFNEP], etc. to focus on domestic hunger; others from international relief agencies such as Care or Stop Hunger Now to address global hunger).
- Promote service learning to foster civic engagement within the hunger community (e.g., WFP feeding sites, NGO operations, etc.); organize an alternative spring break to a destination in the US or abroad where hunger assistance is needed.
- Provide opportunities for study abroad, internships, and public service for students and faculty in the developing world.
- Others?

Research and Development. A university research agenda offers the opportunity to generate knowledge that can be applied in seeking solutions to some of our greatest challenges. Increasingly, disciplinary research has branched into cross-disciplinary collaborations and trans-disciplinary innovation to address the problems of a rapidly changing global community. Recommended strategies include:

- Codify current university research that could contribute to a hunger agenda.
- Encourage faculty to interpret their research, if applicable, within a hunger framework (e.g., researchers working on obesity or HIV/AIDS).
- Hold a research forum and develop a unified strategy among UFWH institutions for addressing hunger issues.
- Identify a target university in the developing world to assist with capacity building and to address the many obstacles that inhibit access to an adequate food supply.

- Establish partnerships among UFWH members, academic institutions in the developing world, and WFP country offices to conduct research in areas relevant to hunger.
- Initiate a renewed effort to train graduate students from impoverished nations served by WFP to enhance the world's human resource base for their respective countries.
- Others?

Outreach and Engagement. Increasingly, all universities are being called upon to use their many talents to address issues that affect the local community, state, nation, and the world. With the changing world order, it is readily apparent that the service mandate for universities becomes one of engagement, recognizing the need to learn from each other, to work toward mutual advantage, and to create partnerships and networks that can strengthen the expertise needed for contemporary problem resolution. Recommended strategies include:

- Become familiar with facts about hunger in your state and ensure access to the resources of the university for those who experience social and economic inequality within your service area.
- Adopt a statewide hunger initiative to educate 4-H and other youth groups about this domestic and global issue.
- Engage the community colleges and K-12 schools in a comprehensive educational hunger initiative.
- Partner with agricultural commodity groups and/or other constituents to cooperate in a hunger awareness campaign.
- Assess where the strengths of your university could best be used in the developing world, and join with other UFWH institutions to launch a multi-country hunger outreach effort.
- Reach out to faith-based, corporate, and civic leaders in your community to inspire their participation in your university hunger agenda.
- Others?

University Leadership. To ensure that the vision of leading a global higher education movement to eradicate world hunger becomes a reality, leadership from presidents, chancellors, provosts, and other key university administrators is critical. Recommended strategies include:

- Hold a high level summit for university presidents and other selected administrators to hear briefings from some of the world's most prominent hunger experts.
- Open a formal dialogue with other presidents and key university officials from the US and abroad focused on establishing a common hunger agenda for higher education.
- Share information with peers about international agreements that you have established with universities in developing countries, and plan a collaborative strategy to build on those relationships.

- Develop a Congressional agenda with other UFWH institutions to strengthen hunger-related policy and/or funding.
- Appoint a strong, well respected UFWH leadership team on campus to assume responsibility for developing, implementing, and evaluating your university hunger initiative.
- Ensure that relevant reward systems are in place to encourage faculty to invest their efforts in a university hunger agenda.
- Others?

Conclusions

Seeking sustainable solutions to the world's most pressing issues is a tremendous challenge, and universities both at home and abroad are positioned to make invaluable contributions. It is time for institutions of higher education to step up to the plate and become not just participants, but leaders in confronting issues like destruction of the environment and human sustainability. Universities Fighting World Hunger offers the opportunity for students, faculty, and staff to take collective action against a global problem affecting almost 1 billion people worldwide. The best practices model outlined in this paper has the potential to achieve outcomes such as:

- Perpetuating sustainability as a worldview that will promote innovative solutions to such issues as hunger, poverty, and environmental degradation.
- Creating a new best practices model involving both grassroots student activism and a comprehensive academic agenda to target global issues.
- Transforming the academic paradigm to include interdisciplinary approaches and systems thinking without losing the rigor of traditional disciplines.
- Producing graduates who are globally aware and socially engaged for greater success in the world community.
- Encouraging university exchanges within the US and abroad in areas of sustainability education, research, and policy formation.
- Bringing universities to the table with other leaders of the hunger community to exert influence in the public policy arena.
- Engaging public and private sector partners locally and globally to build the political will to end hunger.
- Enabling universities to fulfill their moral imperative by providing the vision and expertise needed to foster a sustainable future.