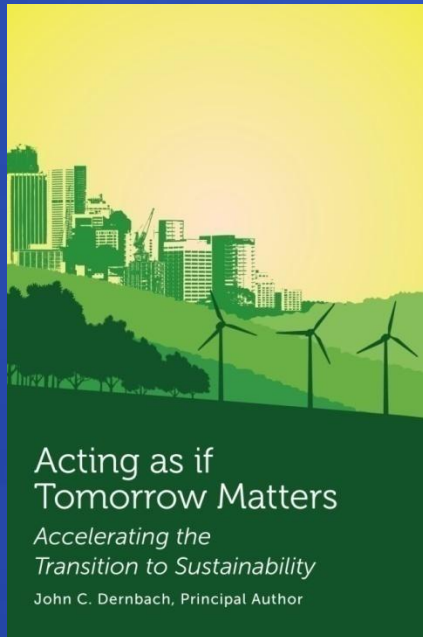


# Acting as if Tomorrow Matters



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*October 28, 2014*



Widener University

**“They gave their today for our tomorrow.”**



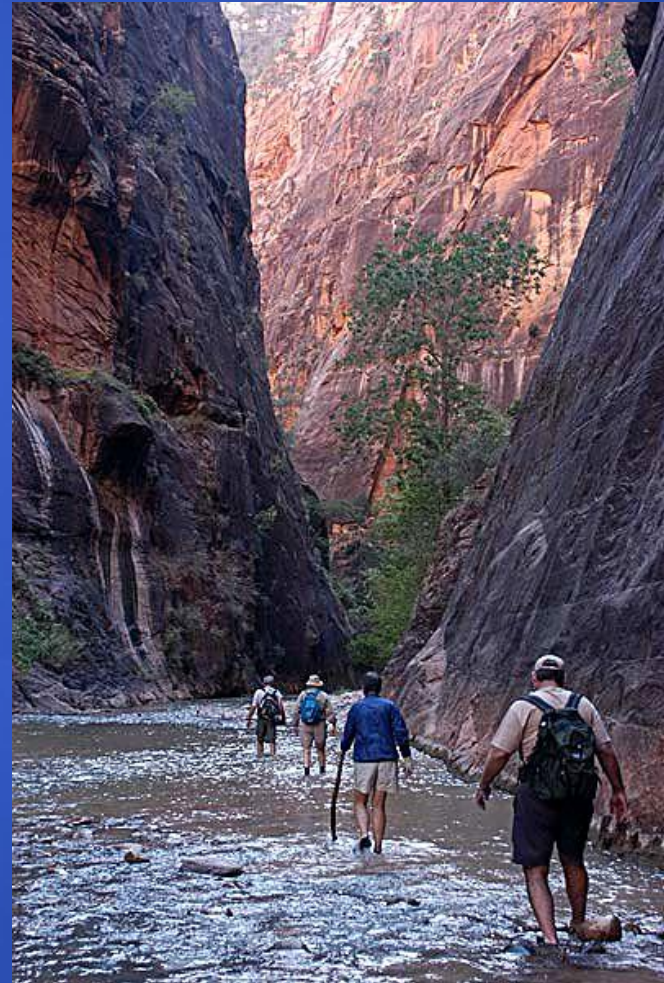
# This is part of our inheritance





# Three options, only one real choice

- Development but not environment
- Environment but not development
- Environment and development  
(a/k/a sustainable development)



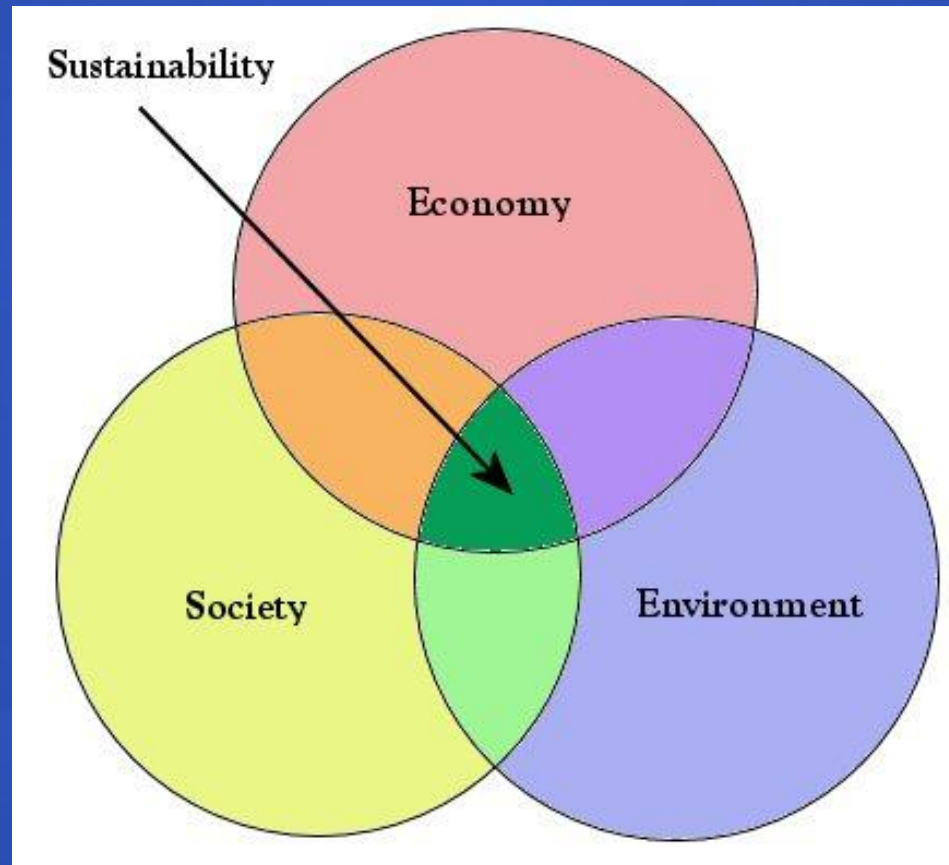


# Sustainability includes, but is broader than, environmental law

- Environmental regulation—
  - More than four decades
- Emerging sustainability movement—
  - This is new, and much broader than environmental regulation



# The focus of this emerging movement



# Take Away Messages

- U.S. sustainability effort thus far is primarily bottom up—based on seizing opportunities and limiting risks.
- Stronger sustainability movement, involving all sectors, including business, industry, and law, is needed.
- Patterns in progress thus far suggest a workable framework for moving ahead.
- Sustainability creates opportunities for everyone—including students—and this framework can assist in finding and creating them.
- This is how we sustain our inheritance.





- And: we all have a role to play.



# How these ideas were developed

- 51 Contributing Authors—experts in particular sustainability fields (e.g., sustainable agriculture, green building, sustainability in higher education)
- Four questions:
  - What progress was made in your field over past two decades?
  - What are drivers for progress?
  - What are obstacles?
  - How can we overcome obstacles and accelerate progress?
- Book is based on patterns in the answers.
- Collaborative process employed to refine and clarify patterns
- *Book provides an experienced-based framework or theory that any organization can use to make greater progress toward sustainability*

# Overview

- 1. Sustainability*
- 2. U.S. Sustainability Efforts in Last Two Decades (briefly)*
- 3. Drivers for Sustainability*
- 4. Obstacles*
- 5. How to Accelerate Progress (and create opportunities)*





# 1. Sustainability

- *The iconic definition: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”*
- *World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future (1987)*

# World in 2050

- Two billion more people (from 7 billion to 9 billion)
- Global GDP will likely increase by factor of four
- Energy use will likely increase by 80%
- Atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases could reach 685 ppm
- There is already considerable environmental degradation, poverty, and inequality

# Conventional Development

## ***PROGRESS:***

- Peace & security***
- Economic Development***
- Social Development/Human rights/Healthy Communities***

## ***PRICE OF PROGRESS:***

- Environment & Natural Resources***
- Living people who are harmed***
- Future generations that are harmed***



# Sustainable Development

## ***PROGRESS:***

- Peace & security***
- Economic development***
- Social development/human rights/health communities***
- Environmental protection/restoration***
- Supportive national governance***

# Thus, sustainable development is:

- *Development that--*
  - *Protects and restores the environment.*
  - *Eliminates and prevents large-scale poverty.*
- *Or: Ecologically sustainable human development*
- *Or: U.S. environmental and conservation law and practice applied to a wider range of resources and problems (e.g., climate change/biodiversity)*
- *Sustainable development is not the same as:*
  - *"Traditional environmentalism"*
  - *Sustainable growth*

# Purposes

- *Development—*
  - Freedom
  - Opportunity
  - Quality of Life

- *Sustainable Development—*
  - Freedom
  - Opportunity
  - Quality of Life

For this and future generations



# Why should U.S. care?

- Freedom, opportunity, quality of life
- Future generations
- Stronger, more efficient America
- Safer, more stable and secure world
- “Special role” of U.S.
- Moral and religious basis for sustainable development



# Moral/Religious Foundation for Sustainable Development

- Environmental degradation or pollution almost always hurts human beings sooner or later.
- They tend to be the poor and people of color, and the poor and people of color tend to be most severely affected.
- But the people who are hurt are not only the poor and people of color.

- “[L]et us be ‘protectors’ of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.”

- Pope Francis, March 19, 2013



# Small steps toward sustainability are not enough

The challenge is  
to *accelerate*  
the transition  
to  
sustainability.

- Zero carbon or negative carbon emissions
- Dramatically reduce overall environmental footprint
- Create more positive environmental, social, and economic impacts
- Developed and developing countries

## 2. U.S. Efforts in Last Two Decades (briefly)



# U.S. 20-year summary: Modest progress toward an increasingly distant goal

- Most substantial efforts include: green building, community sustainability, corporate sustainability, brownfields redevelopment, higher education
- Our environmental footprint has grown.
- Greenhouse gas emissions have grown in spite of growing evidence of:
  - The seriousness of the risks climate change presents
  - The fact that climate change is already occurring.



# Even the scientists are surprised

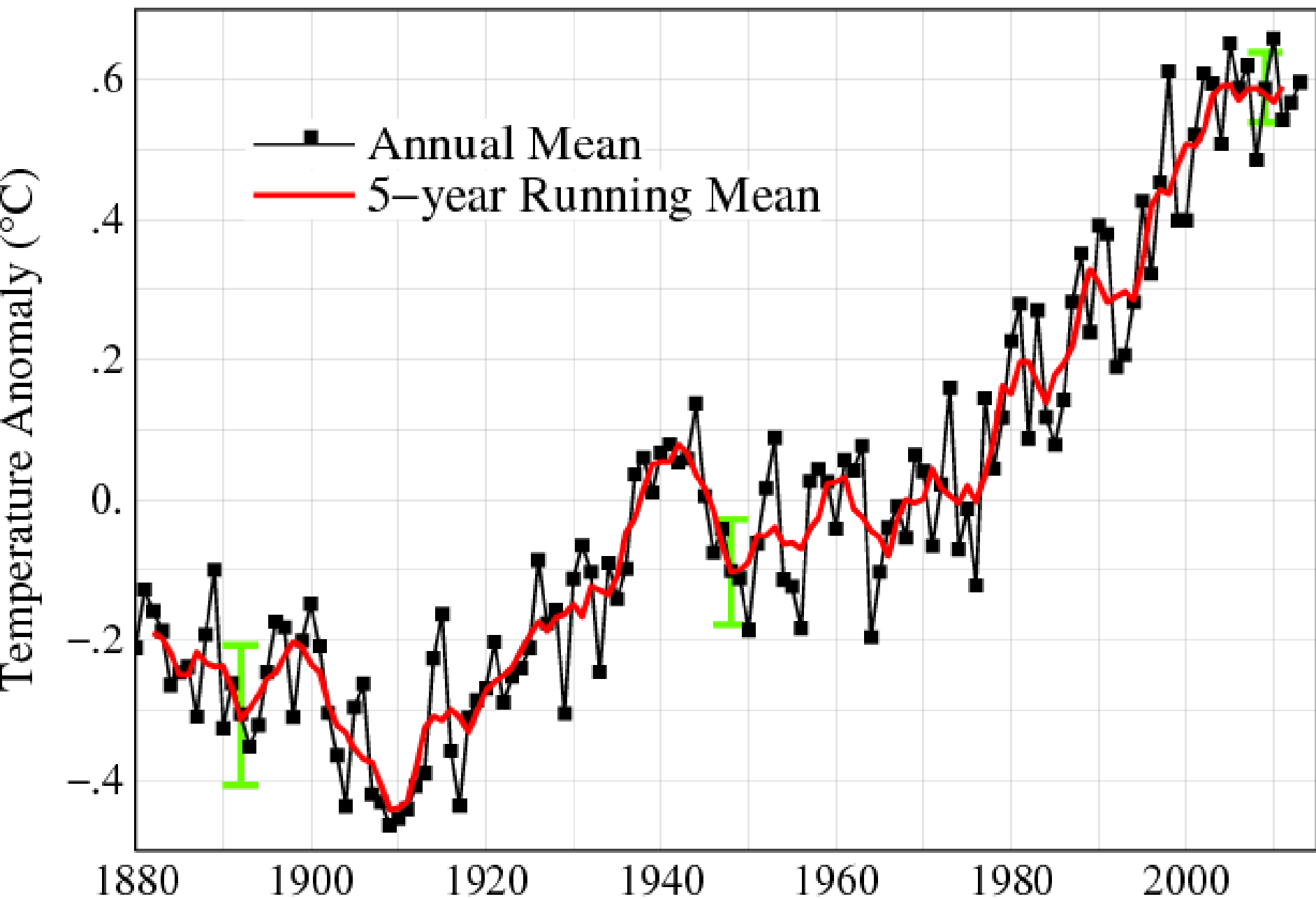
“As practicing scientists who study the earth’s climate system, we and many in our profession have long understood that continued human-caused emission of greenhouse gases....would eventually warm the earth's surface. Most were skeptical that we would see strong signs of human-induced climate change in our lifetimes.”

--Brief of Amicus Curiae Climate Scientists at 2, Massachusetts v. EPA, No. 06-1120 (U.S. Aug. 31, 2006)

For more, see <http://johndernbach.com/MassVEPA.html>

**“But by the beginning of this decade, we observed that global temperatures are rising, plant and animal ranges are shifting, glaciers are in retreat globally, and arctic sea ice is retreating. Sea levels are rising and the oceans are becoming more acidic.”**

# Global Land–Ocean Temperature Index



# What is to come?

**“To the extent that these changes result from human alteration of the atmosphere, we know that they are just the first small increment of climate change yet to come if human societies do not curb emissions of greenhouse gases.”**

**--Brief of Amicus Curiae Climate Scientists**

# 3. Drivers for Sustainability



# Growing support in spite of mixed public opinion

- On one hand: Mixed opinion polling
- On the other hand:
  - More-supportive public opinion on specific issues
  - More supportive nongovernmental organizations and corporations
  - Support and advocacy by NGOs
  - Public-private partnerships
  - Market and peer pressure





# Contrasting(?) Examples

- Business and industry
  - Corporate sustainability reporting
  - Voluntary environmental performance commitments
- Growing recognition of ethical/moral dimension
  - Environmental damage sooner or later also hurts people
  - Abstract “future generations” = one’s children/grandchildren or, for younger people, themselves

# More-sustainable decisions are easier to make and more attractive

- Better practices
- Attractiveness of more-sustainable alternatives
- Growing cost of, and limits to, business as usual
- More and better tools

# Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens— Center for Sustainable Landscapes



# Sustainability in seven core areas of higher education

- Curriculum & teaching
- Scholarship & research
- Buildings & operations
- Outreach & service
- Student life
- Institutional mission, policy, & planning
- External stakeholders

# Pitt accomplishments include:

- 5 Pitt construction projects have earned LEED Gold certification, with 9 more pursuing certification.
- Energy conservation at Pitt has resulted in more than \$44 million in energy cost avoidance since 1996.
- Pitt signed the 1990 Talloires Declaration supporting mobilization of higher-ed resources for sustainability.
- Pitt's Mascaro Center for Sustainable Innovation is a world leader in sustainable engineering.

# Sustainability as a mindset

Most importantly, [historically black colleges and universities] are transforming sustainability from something you do to who you are....

- HBCU Green Report 2014



# Lawmaking is not limited to environmental regulation

- Implementation of existing environmental laws
- New economic development laws for environmental sustainability
- Government financial or other support
- Other legal and policy tools



# 4. Obstacles



# Basic challenges to departing from “business as usual”

- Existing habits
- Lack of urgency
- Uncertainty about alternatives



# Do you agree?

- “[I]t’s almost impossible for people to simply *choose* sustainable lifestyles, however much they’d like to. Even highly motivated individuals experience conflict as they attempt to escape consumerism.”
- Tim Jackson, *Prosperity Without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet* 153 (2011)

# Unsupportive law and governance

- Laws that support and encourage unsustainable development
- Lack of substantial and bipartisan consensus
- Governance failures

# Political opposition and growing influence of other countries

- Economic recession and budget deficit
- Political opposition
- Continuing adherence to conventional development





# 5. How to Accelerate Progress (and create opportunities)



# More and better sustainability choices

- More credible and demanding standards
- Broader availability of sustainability options
- Better decision-making tools
- More use of behavioral tools

# Or, put differently:

- **Better Defaults**

(thanks to Jake Reynolds, Director, Business and Policy Leaders Groups, Cambridge Program for Sustainability Leadership)

# Law for sustainability

- From a primary focus on environmental regulation to a focus on the law of sustainability
- Address climate change in a manner that corresponds to its seriousness



# Disclosure & reporting

- Emissions reporting already required:
  - Toxics Release Inventory
  - Greenhouse gas emissions (required beginning in 2011)
- Areas where broader and more complete disclosure would help consumers and/or investors:
  - Sustainability labeling (FTC Green Guides are a start)
  - Corporate reporting of business risks and opportunities from climate change

# Visionary and pragmatic governance

- Bipartisan narrative and strategy
- Improved public education and engagement
- Prioritize transformational technological research
- Willingness to discuss and act on hard issues



# An American movement for sustainability

- Emerging movement already exists
- Should include middle 60-80% of public
- Include all sectors, all groups, that are supportive
- Why participate?
  - Higher quality of life
  - Sustainability is economically attractive
  - Sustainability is right thing to do





# Summing Up

- There is emerging sustainability movement in the U.S., and it is primarily bottom up.
- Movement is growing and will continue to grow—in response to growing environmental pressure and population.
- Patterns in progress thus far suggest a framework for moving ahead—providing more and better choices, employing law on behalf of sustainability, and governing in both visionary and pragmatic ways.
- Sustainability movement, involving all sectors (and your organization), is needed.
- If challenges are great, so are opportunities, including opportunities for students.



# Let us all be good ancestors

- If we are to be good ancestors, transmitting the possibility of a better life and the joy of living, we have work to do now. The first step is open ourselves to the as yet unrealized possibilities of humankind. Only in the future will it be known whether we have been wise ancestors. However, now is the time to accept the challenge.

- Jonas Salk, Jan. 10, 1977

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