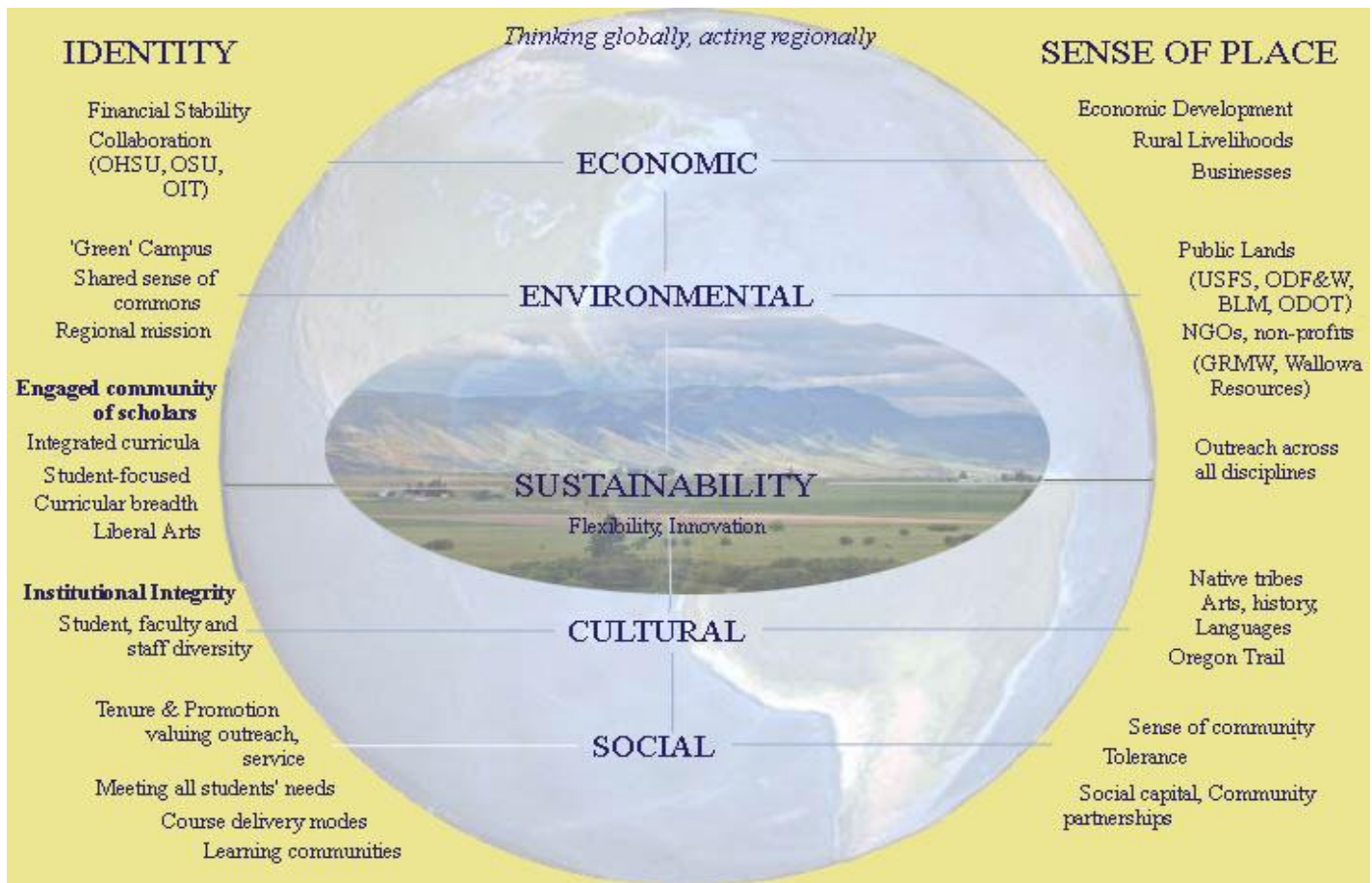


# The Power of Place:

A proposal for an all campus theme for 2010 – 2011

## Genesis of the idea:

In 2004, when we were encouraged to submit proposals for the “Blueprints for Excellence” initiative, Kim Sorensen, Joella DeVillier, and Sam Eggert<sup>1</sup> offered a thoughtful proposal that they called “A time for rediscovery : a vision for a Real EOU.” In materials presented for this proposal, they emphasized connection to the rich heritage of the land in this region and the importance of strengthening community bonds—among students and colleagues at EOU, and with the wider world. In 2007, in response to the BART reorganization plan, the AAP faculty union wrote similarly about a “sense of place,” calling for EOU to embody in programs and relationships the deep meanings of such concepts as student – centered, regional, diversity, community of scholars, “globalization”, community partnerships, flexibility / innovation, sense of community, sustainability. This faculty group visualized this commitment to “thinking globally, acting regionally” as follows:<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Kim Sorensen, Joella DeVillier, and Sam Eggert had attended a conference together, and on the way home came up with ideas that formed the basis of The Real EOU. You can see the powerpoint of their presentation at Kim’s homepage at [www.eou.edu/~ksorensen](http://www.eou.edu/~ksorensen).

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Bill Grigsby for creating this visual representation.

I have drawn on both of these visions, as well as my awareness of the new circumstances in which we find ourselves, in presenting this proposal for an all-campus theme for 2010-2011 that I am calling *The Power of Place*.

### *The situation today:*

Senate Bill 442,<sup>3</sup> passed by the Oregon Senate in 2009, requires focused attention by rural post-secondary institutions to increasing participation of rural Oregonians in higher education. This bill includes other mandates, and in short requires us (and other rural post-secondary institutions) to provide convincing evidence of the importance of our continued existence as publicly funded entities.

The Oregon State Board of Higher Education must present evidence of progress in this regard by October 2010, and I will be co-chairing a committee composed of the presidents of OUS institutions and rural-situated community colleges to address this requirement of the statute.

We have made good progress at EOU in the past year in increasing student enrollment, but with the continued fiscal challenges, we face daily uncertainties about the future. We can try to muddle through, hunker down and hope the storm blows over, resign ourselves to a poverty of imagination (concluding that new initiatives have little chance in an environment with few financial resources), or find new ways to work together to strengthen Eastern Oregon University as the essential intellectual/cultural center for eastern Oregon and a strong advocate for a sustainable future—economically, culturally, environmentally and socially.

Our new president Bob Davies has emphasized the importance of bold action at this time—for access, affordability, and community engagement. Certainly ideas have already been percolating; hopeful projects are on drawing boards and in focus groups, and there are probably many things being considered about which I know very little. As a teacher, I think most often in terms of educational adventures as a way to bring people together. As a sociologist, I am fascinated by the way groups work, and intrigued by the scientific understanding of the potential of self-organizing systems. I believe deeply that if we create opportunities for people to talk about questions that matter, and think together about responses that might make a difference, that we **can** make a difference that **matters**.

My proposal is a modest one, and the long-term effects uncertain. Still, I believe a common focus can help us move out of turf-protecting silos and status-quo thinking and imagine a different future together. I hope you agree.

### *What is The Power of Place?*

If we agree to the theme, this would be a year-long commitment of the EOU community to organize a variety of curricular, extra-curricular, and other aspects of life/work at the university around what it means/could mean to be in this place—geographically/environmentally, culturally, economically, socially. This would not be simply about “celebrating” place, but about investigating the **power** that places have—to sustain or to constrain, and how we might add our voices and actions to promoting a sustainable future. In a world shaped by global forces, and at a university that exists in many *places*, there is no “place” that exists in isolation, and so we would be challenged as well to make connections between the local, the regional, and the global, examining such things as carbon footprints, food and clothing sources, the politics of different communities/places, equity in our treatment of one another and those from other places whose labor we consume in the products we buy, how we organize our educational enterprise to effectively address the needs of all our students, wherever they are *placed*.

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<sup>3</sup> For the full text of SB 442, see <http://www.leg.state.or.us/09reg/measures/sb0400.dir/sb0442.en.html>

The following are some initial thoughts about ways to involve the whole campus in the exploration of this theme. There may be other groups I did not consider, and I apologize for that. Certainly individual groups mentioned below will have a deeper sense of what they might consider doing to support the common theme.

We could plan major symposia, art exhibits, music events, theatre productions dealing with sense of place, power of place, sustainability issues of food, water, transportation, health, energy, built environment, cultural heritages, equity among groups, education, business, challenges in rural communities, etc... Featuring regional artists, writers, activists, planners etc. wherever possible. Build on current efforts to protect/promote the health of our region with week-end and evening informational events, interdisciplinary exchanges in our classes, encouraging student class projects, senior projects and internships on the theme

**College of Arts and Sciences** could commit to focusing on “the power of place” in designing the 4-term schedule for AY 2010 – 2011. (for example, try to offer as many of the environmental studies proposed courses as feasible; schedule throughout the curriculum existing electives that focus on issues of environmental, social, cultural and economic sustainability; develop new 310/410 courses specifically for this theme. Could initiate planning for public symposia and cultural events suggested in previous paragraph

**Environmental Studies:** This would be an excellent opportunity to implement, market, highlight the interdisciplinary Liberal Studies pre-approved major in Environmental Studies.

**College of Education** might highlight environmental education, place-based education, the efforts of rural schools to connect students to nature and considering threats to sustainable eco-system. Might consider an institute for rural teachers to present teaching ideas to strengthen students’ connection to place/nature/sustainability issues. Might partner with groups like Women in Timber’s education efforts.

**College of Business**, in addition to feasible elective courses (or segments in required courses), might offer one-day, weekend, short courses, on-line resources for local aspiring entrepreneurs—incubators for new business ideas; could offer courses on sustainability and business practices, partner with area businesses/government entities to offer an event focused on economic sustainability in rural Oregon.

**Library** could highlight theme by providing focused bibliographies/films/other items available for use in promoting the theme. Could promote it as a center of “place-based” knowledge, emphasize partnerships with summit, regional libraries, make connections with area museums and coordinate displays regarding “place” and sustainability issues over the year. Could involve student interns in archivist projects relating to holdings.

**Spring Symposium** could have the Power of Place as an overarching theme, with faculty encouraging students to present work on the issues explored during the year. We could bring a keynote speaker on this topic to draw more people to the symposium.

**ASEOU** could develop its own goals around the theme, possibly a conference for rural student leaders that would bring high school students from the areas we serve. Could identify projects for the good of campus/community with regard to sustainability, school/community relationships, support food gleaning projects, area beautification projects. Could promote environmental awareness with student initiated projects researching carbon footprint of our energy use on campus, food service, transportation choices, etc. Might pursue global connections regarding the power of place by developing partner relationships with student governments from schools in other countries, sharing what each is doing regarding respecting the earth and one another.

**Regional centers/distance student involvement:** Center Directors could consider how they would like to promote this theme in their specific locations. EOU might assist with a “traveling” display on the effects of EOU’s presence in these sites, or develop a traveling troupe of EOU instructors offering something appropriate for the whole community—poetry, art, history, archeology, etc. regarding the issues that community is currently dealing with/as well as providing a chance to learn what that community’s heritage and meanings are. We might develop a no-credit or low credit possibility for distance students to share their own sense of connection with EOU through blogs or short on-line essays about the virtual place of on-line

instruction, or the “we bring it to you” experience of on-site instruction. We could even consider buying an island in the on-line world of **Second Life**, and build a virtual EOU for people to visit and engage.

**Admissions:** Could focus the new student application and/or scholarship essay questions on issues of sustainability. Perhaps we might designate a specific scholarship for a new or returning student who demonstrates interest and accomplishment in promoting sustainability and respect for place. Could involve the **EOU foundation** in the scholarship aspect or other ways to provide incentives for working on the theme.

**Student Affairs** could structure fall orientation around the theme. We could all participate in a summer reading program (a book chosen for freshman orientation, bringing the author to campus in the fall, but all of us participating in reading a common text). Could organize ongoing activities for the year around the theme, with field trips to amazing natural places in Oregon, and reflective investigation of the meaning of “place”—learning about the importance of small rural communities and the EOU campus (e.g. Hum 110s could emphasize what places on campus “mean” or might mean to students). Student housing could develop programs, field trips on the theme.

**Food service** could commit to emphasize local products wherever possible. We could provide education about the “carbon footprint” of the foods used on Campus (student research perhaps).

**Marketing/home page visibility:** Could develop the promotional materials needed to demonstrate the importance and extensiveness of the theme, and solicit logo suggestions and promotional text from programs/colleges/other units..

**Information Technology** could offer informational events that help us to understand what goes into making our “connections” possible—could co-sponsor events with local IT/computer/internet providers to assist the technologically-challenged gain more confidence in managing virtual spaces/place and how that connects to the “real world.” Offer informational events for general public on the ways IT can affect meaning of *place*.

**Facilities and Planning:** As those who know most about the physical place/space we share, might work with student interns to map carbon footprint of energy consumption, provide tours of and explanations of systems that we seldom consider until something goes wrong.

#### **Partnerships:**

\*Current EOU university partners (OSU, OHSU, OIT): promote theme with them and explore synergies.

\*Consider working with those involved in the OSU Rural Sustainability Initiative,

<http://ruralstudies.oregonstate.edu/Publications/SRC%20Initiative%20v3.pdf>,

<http://center.uoregon.edu/conferences/OUS/Sustainability2008/pdfs/OSU%20sustainability%20brief.pdf>

\*Confederated Tribes: As those with the longest connection to this region, we could find a variety of ways to learn from them and to engage them in discussions/events throughout the year.

\*Local political entities--City of La Grande and Union County—could find ways to involve campus in the Main Street program, other local, county initiatives. Promote student involvement as interns where feasible in local issues/programs.

\*State and federal agencies—a good time to promote collaborations with these groups as we roll out the environmental studies program.

\*Non-profits who are working on issues of sustainability and promoting healthy rural communities (such as Oregon Rural Action, Wallowa Resources, Rural Organizing Project)

\*Entrepreneurs working to increase economic sustainability in the region

### *So, what do you think?*

Thank you for considering this proposal. I plan on circulating it to various groups at EOU, and welcome your ideas for specific events or approaches that might further this vision. I can imagine individual groups signing on, and once we have critical mass, it will happen. -----Rosemary Powers 10/29/09

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