Energy & Sustainability Round Table Discussion
GK-12 Uconn

Motivation & Objective:

Students sit through lectures all day when they’re in their academic classes throughout their school careers. They’re more likely to be engaged and care about the topics when they can voice their opinions, think and discuss the topics they’re learning about as adults. Although it’s difficult for a high school class to behave like a group of adults, it increases their sense of importance and helps to open their minds.

With regards to sustainability, most students seem to know about climate change and pollution created by fossil fuels. They think it sounds bad but going green is lame and too much of a hassle. Many don’t care enough to put their water bottle into the recycling bin that’s right next to the trash can. This is not the mindset we want high school students to have! They are the upcoming generation which is going to have to help solve the sustainability issue if we’re to evade the dire consequences of unsustainable human living.

Our lack of sustainability is depleting our world of natural resources including fossil fuel, forests, water supplies, minerals, fish/seafood etc. It’s a major issue which all living organisms on earth are going to have to suffer though sooner or later. The people in the developed world are living lives which are completely unsustainable and it stems far deeper than climate change. The following is a list of some of the unsustainable practices of the average American. It’s not meant as an attack, it’s meant as an eye opener so we can change the trends.

- Excess driving in large vehicles with one person
  - Lack of public transportation
• Lack of carpooling
  o Lack of bike riding, scooters...

• Non-organic food growth
  o Fossil fuel derived chemical fertilizers
    ▪ Less nutrients in food
    ▪ Contamination of water supplies
  o GMOs
    ▪ Unsafe
    ▪ Contamination with natural strains
  o Pesticides are herbicides
    ▪ Water contamination
  o Shipped across country and world

• Meat industry
  o Feed unnatural to the animal
  o Antibiotics and hormones
    ▪ Bacteria super strains
  o Massive farms
    ▪ Water and land pollution

• Lack of recycling and reuse
  o Throwing plastic bottles... in garbage not recycling bin
  o Recycling when reuse would be better suited
    ▪ Could wash and refill
      ▪ Glass bottles...
  o Plastic only has a finite recycling life
    ▪ Derived from fossil fuel
  o Massive use of paper products
    ▪ Paper towels
    ▪ Wrapping paper
- Coffee Cups
  - Planned obsolescence
    - Most products are engineered to fail after X number of years to be thrown away and buy a new one.
  - Lack of preventative medicine
    - Prescription drugs get into water supplies
  - Wasting water
  - More

Much of this list entails heavy use of energy and therefore fossil fuel. If we were to run out of fossil fuel tomorrow, American life would be drastically different. It's important for us to understand how important this natural resource is to our way of life and conserve it. There are a multitude of small changes we can make in our lives that will conserve our resources.

Round table Discussion:
You all get lectured at all day long when you in academics, let's trying something different today. I want to hear what you have to say and I'll try to keep my talking to a minimum. Feel free to ask me questions as we go through this. Whatever you say is fair game, as long as it’s within reason.

- When you hear sustainability or going green, what do you think about?
- What was the topic of the movie that you watched this week?
- What did you think?
- Why do we bother with this whole energy sustainability thing anyway?
- Do you actually care? Why or why not?
- Do you think we’ll ever run out of oil?
  - Have you ever heard of the tar sands on Canada? Why do you think we’d bother to extract oil from sand if we could just keep pumping it out of huge underground oceans?
• What would happen if we run out of oil tomorrow? How do you think that would affect your life?
• What are some of the things we use oil for in our everyday lives? Is there anything else
  o Talk about fertilizers, plastics, makeup, energy, medicine, transportation, heat, electronics.
• So think about it, knowing how much we depend on oil, now tell me what would happen if oil ran out tomorrow?
• What can we do to prolong the oil resources we have on earth?
• Do you want to make a difference and develop alternatives to oil?
• What do you think about recycling?
• What if I told you it uses more oil and energy to recycle a water bottle than it does to make a new one?
  o Does that mean we should stop recycling or try something else?
  o Any ideas?
  o What about the idea of reuse? What does that mean to you?
• What if we could make most of our bottles and packaging from reusable materials that don’t require recycling? All we would have to do is send them back to companies, have it washed, and then refill the package?
  o Why don’t we do that now?
• What about agriculture, what do you know about the sustainability of that?
• Do you know how many normal are grown?
• Do you think that’s sustainable?
• What can we do to stop that?
  o Organic farming, local foods, grow your own, stop waiting so much food.
• How about medicine and health care the way we know it? With all the pills, energy intensive equipment...
  o What can we do to improve the sustainability of that?
• Knowing all of this, what does that make you think about the sustainability of our American lifestyles? Is it going to continue like this forever or are we going to have to make some changes to our lifestyles?
  o Do you think life will be better or worse?
• What are your thoughts, opinions or concerns?