

NWEI: The Impact of our Discussion Courses & the Role of Personal Action

One particular gap within the current sustainability movement is civic engagement. With technology and market forces moving quickly ahead, it is easy for the populace to believe these sectors can solve the environmental challenges we all face.

Current results indicate that after participating in an NWEI course:

- **More than 72% of NWEI participants take more seriously the challenges of climate change, rising personal consumption and limited natural resources**
- **80% of participants feel a greater sense of personal obligation for solving environmental challenges**
- **Over 73% more regularly make reductions in household energy and water consumption**
- **79% buy more local and organic produce**
- **Almost 60% more frequently volunteer for environmental causes and make alternative transportation choices**

The results of a 2008 study commissioned by Paul Ray, author of *The Cultural Creatives*, “A New Values Survey on The Emerging Wisdom Culture and New Political Compass” highlights this apparent lack of civic engagement. This perceived problem is confirmed by the contradiction between what respondents say they value vs. their relative unwillingness to take action. For example... 80% of Americans agree with the statement: “We should change the way we live now so that future generations have decent lives.” Yet, only

23% would be willing to pay more for goods that lessen our impact on the environment. In other words while the interest and awareness of the need for a healthy physical environment has grown considerably over the last three decades, citizens as a whole are still relatively resistant to taking action on their own. A deeper view suggests that our challenges are not first and foremost technological, but rather social and behavioral.

As such, NWEI has chosen to develop programs specifically designed to foster social and behavioral change. NWEI worked with Malek Hall, PsyD at the Oregon School of Professional Psychology, at Pacific University, to develop an evaluation instrument to measure outcomes of the discussion course model. This on-line evaluation is designed to assess the following course outcomes:

- Increased awareness of adverse environmental consequences
- Increased reports of belief that one’s actions contribute to and/or can alleviate adverse consequences
- Increased sense of personal obligation to tackle environmental dilemma
- Reports of increased action to address ecological challenges

Further Research

In 2003, Ciliberti & Associates, LLC, a research firm based in Portland, Oregon, conducted a study to assess the impacts of discussion courses on participants in relation to NWEI's mission. The research explored changes in awareness, values, attitudes, and perceptions as well as changes in concrete acts.

Data was compiled from 10 focus groups, 271 survey respondents (1,000 mailed) and 29 personal interviews with past course participants.

Key Conclusions

Key Conclusion 1. The discussion courses bring increased awareness of the need to protect the earth. As a result, participants experience renewed hope, reinforcement of their values, and a new vision of the world.

Key Conclusion 2: The discussion courses produce high levels of motivation and commitment that allow participants to make and maintain change.

Key Conclusion 3: The increased awareness of the need to protect the earth, brought about by the discussion courses, engenders changes in both consumption patterns and broad lifestyle choices of participants.

Key Conclusion 4: The discussion courses motivate participants to influence others by setting examples, engaging in dialogue and advocacy, and organizing groups. This influence tends to occur within existing social networks: the family, church or neighborhood groups, and the workplace.