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Inspiration and insight to change
minds and policy

19 - 20
June 2019

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Weathering the storm together: Climate change support groups

Jen Myers (she/her/hers)
Oregon State University

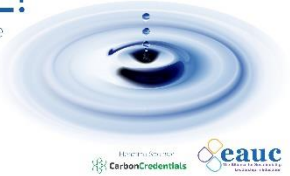


IPCC Report

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“United Nations’ scientific panel on climate change paints a far more dire picture of the immediate consequences of climate change than previously thought and says that avoiding the damage requires transforming the world economy at a speed and scale that has ‘no documented historic precedent.’” - Davenport, 2018



IPCC Report

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“Enormous gap
between where we
are and where we
need to be to prevent
dangerous levels of
warming.”

– Mooney & Dennis,
2018



IPCC Report



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“The pledges countries made during the Paris climate accord don’t get us anywhere close to what we have to do... [And] they haven’t really followed through with actions to reduce their emissions in any way commensurate with what they profess to be aiming for.”- Drew Shindell, IPCC report author

How do we *respond*?

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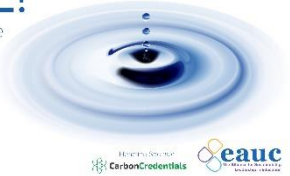
- What is you feel when you sit with this information?
- How do you cope with the gravity of sustainability challenges on a daily basis?

Climate change is an existential crisis

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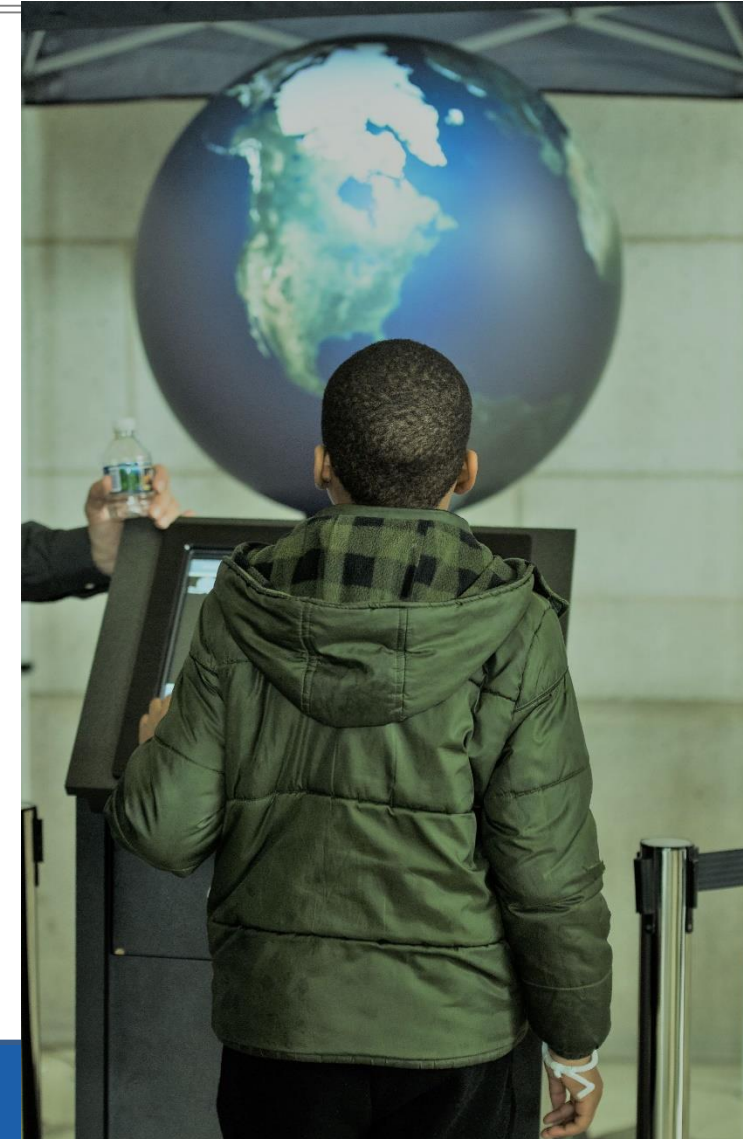
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“We’re facing a crisis in our basic way of making meaning about the world and our understanding of the recipe for living life... We don’t know who we are. We don’t even know what’s real. Because on every level the story that answered those questions is breaking down – politically, economically, and especially technologically and in our relationship to nature.”

- Charles Eisenstein



Climate Psychology

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Acute and Immediate Impacts	Chronic Impacts
Trauma & shock	Violence & aggression
Post-traumatic stress disorder	Increased mental health emergencies
Compound stress	Loss of important places
Physical health impacts of stress & anxiety	Loss of autonomy & control
Strains on social relationships	Loss of personal & occupational identity
	Helplessness, depression, fear, fatalism, resignation, ecoanxiety

(Clayton, Manning, Krygsman, & Speiser, 2017)

Ecoanxiety & Solastalgia

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- Ecoanxiety: “watching the slow and seemingly irrevocable impacts of climate change unfold, and worrying about the future for oneself, children, and later generations.” (Clayton et. al. 2017)
- Solastalgia: “the pain experienced when there is recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault ... a form of homesickness one gets when one is still at ‘home.’” (Albrecht, 2004)
- “People exposed to environmental change experienced negative affect that is exacerbated by a sense of powerlessness or lack of control over the unfolding change process.” (Albrecht et. al 2007)

Disparate impacts: Frontline communities

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“I like the word in English because it conveys a lot more of what we don’t have. **We have no power.** And what has happened is in the darkest moment, people get their energy not from an electrical grid, but from the strength of their soul. But for heaven’s sake, what is it gonna take? How much more do we have to endure for somebody to understand that what is happening in Puerto Rico is a violation of our human rights?”

- Carmen Yulín Cruz, Mayor of San Juan, Puerto Rico

Moving through grief to action

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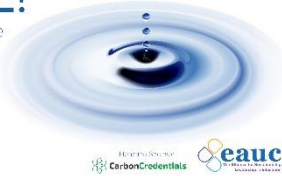
Tim DeChristopher: Bidder 70

Motivating question

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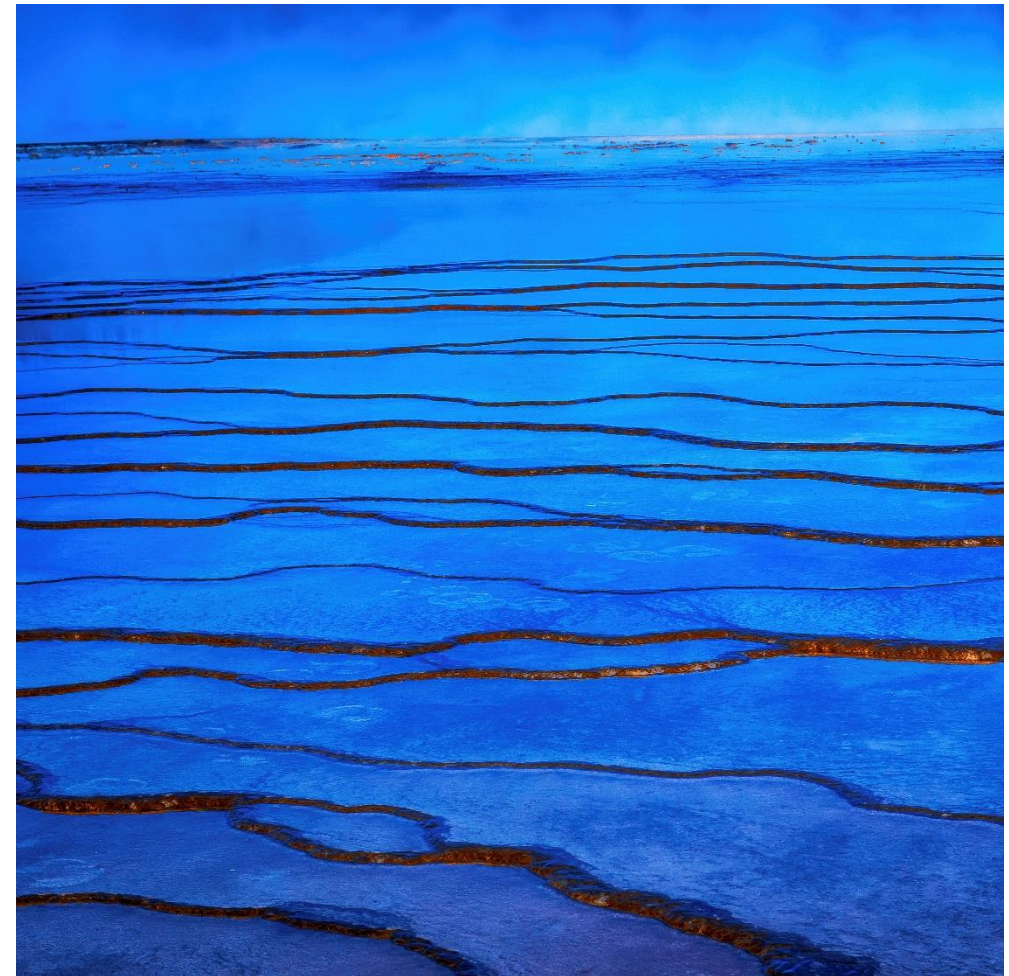
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The unspoken challenge of university in the age of climate change: students diligently prepare for careers while scientists sound the alarm that business as usual is untenable.

How can we expect students to become transformational leaders if they are left alone to grapple with the existential and emotional burdens of climate change?



Supporting emotional resilience

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- Recognizing the challenges of self-authorship & identity development in a historic period of change & uncertainty
- Creating space for authentic, vulnerable conversations about stress, ecoanxiety, and other emotional issues



Context: Support Groups at OSU

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- Survivors of Interpersonal Violence
- Family Chaos
- Grief and Loss
- Living Well
- Making Peace with Food
- Multiracial Students
- Student Parents
- Student Autism Community
- Womxn of Color



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OSU's Climate Change Support Groups

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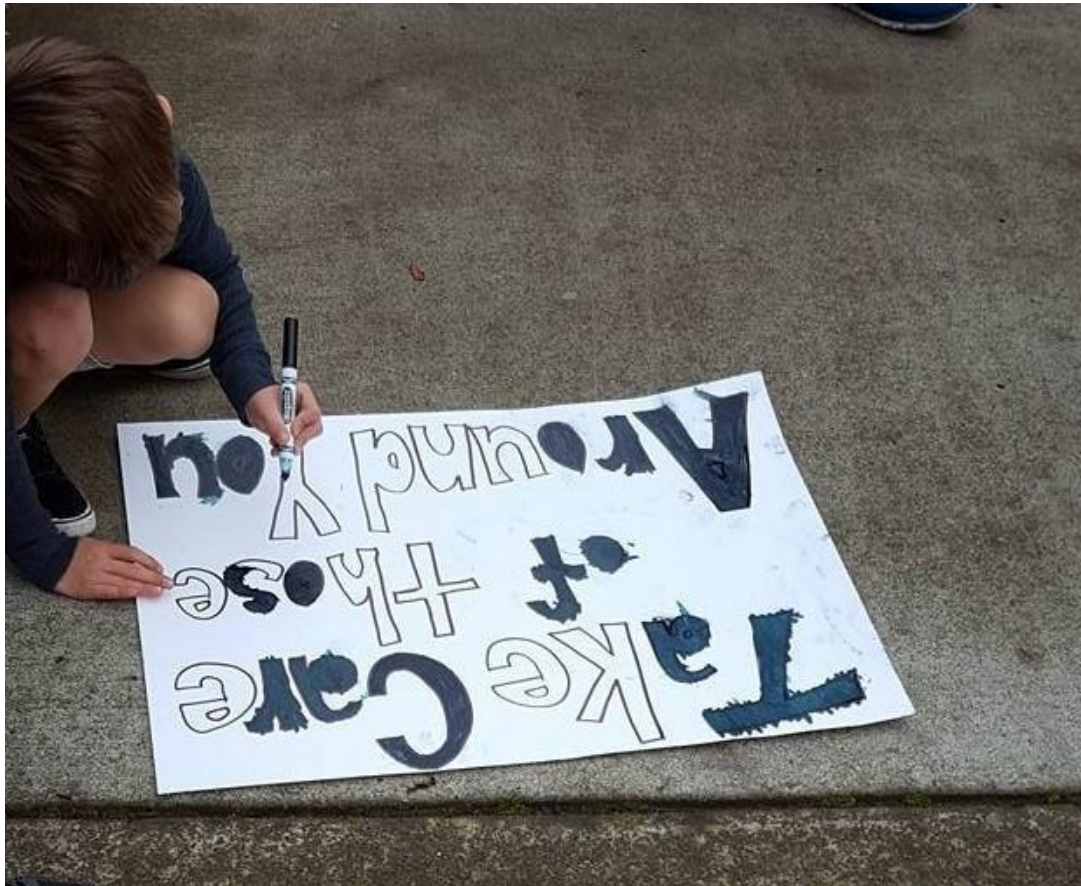
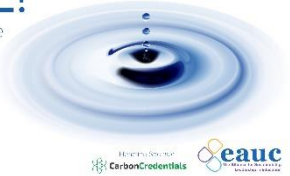
- Weekly hour-long drop-in meetings
- Free food
- Co-facilitated by sustainability faculty and Counseling & Psychological Services staff (Emi Sumida)
- Brave Space with verbal commitment to confidentiality
- Attracted student sustainability leaders & students in related disciplines

Student-identified stresses

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- Frustration, feeling like they're the only ones who care
- Helplessness, nothing they can do matters enough to make a difference, it's too late to turn the tide
- Seek strategies to navigate stresses of college life while maintaining perspective on global catastrophes

Lessons learned

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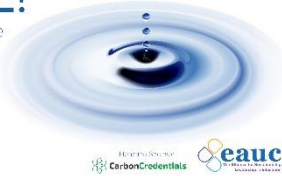
- Partnership between content expert and psychological staff key
- Start where students are
- Model deep listening
- Help students dig deeper as trust and relationships develop
- Student leaders need space to process stress & develop personal resilience strategies in community
- Important opportunity to be with others who care
- “Support Group” title didn’t resonate with students

“Taproot of Action”

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“I think that what no one tells you is, if you go into that dark place, you do come out the other side... If you can go into that darkest place, you can emerge with a sense of empathy and empowerment. But it’s not easy, and there is the real sense of danger that we may not move through our despair to a place of illumination, which for me is the taproot of action.... I’m not married to sorrow, I just refuse to look away.”

– Terry Tempest Williams

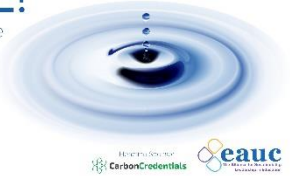


Emotional resilience for climate leadership

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Questions?

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Many thanks for sharing your time & attention with me.

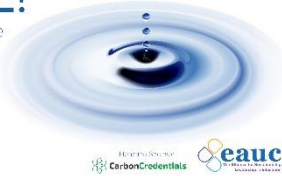
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Photo acknowledgements

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- NASA Earth Observatory: Hurricane from space (edited)
- NASA: Firefighters
- WWW78 (Flickr): California Camp Fire ruins
- Jules Xénard: "Change the system, not the climate" banner at a Paris Climate March (edited)
- Charles Anderson: Polar bear
- Aubrey Gemignani (NASA): Child looking at Earth
- U.S. Customs & Border Protection: Puerto Rican home devastated by Hurricane Maria
- 350.org: Tim DeChristopher outside courthouse (edited)
- Ken Lane: Blue landscape
- HeyDanielle (Flickr): Holding hands
- Anders Hellberg: Greta Thunberg outside the Swedish parliament
- Angie Werren: plant close up
- Joe Brusky: Rise for Climate protest (edited)

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References

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The SDG Accord

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End extreme poverty, inequality and climate change
www.sdgaccord.org

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