

Balancing Hope and Despair in Environmental Studies

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Abstract

The Home page of the University of Prince Edward Island opens with a bold question. **“Think you can change the world? We do too.”** over top of scenes of various aspects of campus life. When the Bachelor of Environmental Studies degree was created just over five years ago, it set as its goal to help students “learn to make environmental connections across academic fields and to analyze environmental challenges we face today. In the classroom, field, and community, you will lead the way in finding innovative solutions—making a positive impact toward sustainability in your personal life, locally and globally.”

These hopeful, bold statements about our capacity to change the world are balanced with the reality of addressing the complexity of environmental challenges. With the global inaction to tackle climate change, many are in despair about the future of our planet. With a growing global population, we ask ourselves how we can feed everyone sustainably and still leave room for other species. The realization of the tons of plastic waste and its effects on our oceans cause us to wonder if our individual choice to not use plastic straws can really make a difference. How can we as professors teach about the reality of environmental challenges without leaving students in despair? How do we cultivate hope?

In this session, we will tackle this topic through presentations by professors and a panel discussion with UPEI Environmental Studies students. Each professor will present on their topic for 15-20 minutes. The panel discussion with students will follow the presentations for approximate 20-30 minutes.