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Ascher Billings

Valparaiso University, maya.billings@valpo.edu

Elisa Espinosa

Valparaiso University, elisa.espinosa@valpo.edu

Leandro Ivan Jaime

Valparaiso University, leandro.jaime@valpo.edu

Bridget Sullivan

Valparaiso University, bridget.sullivan@valpo.edu

Angel Gabriel Flores

Valparaiso University, angel.flores@valpo.edu

See next page for additional authors

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Foreward: On the Path to Climate Stability - Our Generation

Authors

Ascher Billings, Elisa Espinosa, Leandro Ivan Jaime, Bridget Sullivan, Angel Gabriel Flores, Marisa Lareau, and Katherine Wilson

FOREWARD:

**“WE’RE THE FIRST GENERATION TO FEEL
THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE, AND
THE LAST GENERATION THAT CAN DO
SOMETHING ABOUT IT.”**

— *WASHINGTON STATE GOVERNOR, JAY INSLEE*



On the Path to Climate Stability

Despite the global disparity in economic development – with a per capita GDP of over \$45,000 in the US contrasting sharply with approximately \$7,000 per capita in China as of 2014 (The World Bank, 2014) – climate change can no longer be viewed as a single country’s issue. Air pollution from China now contributes to an estimated 50% of pollution in Seoul, South Korea according to 2013 data (Shim, 2015). Japan also fears for the health of its people as deadly toxins from other parts of Asia fill its air (Ryall, Yoo, 2013). The US is also vulnerable to pollution from other parts of the world; research from NASA suggests that changes in US weather patterns are due to pollution and environmental degradation in Asia (Chaisson, 2015). The US is far from blameless with regard to the current environmental crisis. China’s population is more than five times that of the United States and while China claimed the title of the world’s largest polluter in 2006, the US still has a drastically larger carbon footprint per capita than any other nation (Gallucci, 2013). The tragedy of the situation is that the nations predicted to be most affected by climate change and rising sea levels are not those consuming the most energy. Vietnam, Cambodia, Bangladesh, and Senegal are listed as some of the most vulnerable to devastating economic and environmental harm as a result of climate change (Poladian, 2014). The entire globe is now affected by each country’s decisions industrially, regardless of wealth distribution or international relations. This interconnectivity makes it

vital that as a planet, we all get on the same page regarding how we consume resources. The upcoming United Nations Conference on Climate Change is absolutely critical in doing just that: prompting the international community to attack environmental issues as a united front. Already, before the conference has convened, various nations are beginning to show unity in their goals. As the second largest source of global pollution, the US has issued joint statements with both China and Brazil – countries ranked as the first and third largest greenhouse gas emitters respectively (Top 5 Most Polluting Countries) – regarding what they hope to accomplish at the upcoming conference. Additionally, India and France



have vowed to work together to make the conference a success (UNFCCC). While this political show of unity may not be sufficient to create true and permanent change in environmental policy, it is a crucial first step to improving the global condition. From a personal perspective, I know that the outcome of this conference will shape the way my own generation handles environmental challenges. This is a tremendous amount of pressure, but there is no alternative, and the clock is ticking. Future generations will continue to make

scientific advancements in clean energy and environmental restoration, furthering their own communities closer towards viable, long-term sustainability. However, currently the world's young people are looking toward international leaders to set the precedent for how climate change is to be addressed, as individual nations and/or as a global community. If the international leaders attending this December's conference can set a trend of connectivity, shared responsibility, and dedication to improvement, genuinely positive changes could soon be seen throughout the world.

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– **ASCHER BILLINGS**
GLEN ELLYN, ILLINOIS, US
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS & CHINESE STUDIES



Global warming is a topic that is mentioned occasionally in the American classroom: students learn how to recycle and when to turn off the lights, but then it stops there. It was not until my sophomore year of college that I was introduced to the full ramifications of climate change and the efforts that have, or will, be implemented to address its effects.

Pope Francis addressed the United Nations in September of this year, emphasizing the need for peace and environmental justice (*NY Times*):

"Any harm done to the environment, therefore, is harm done to humanity."

Leaders from all over the world will convene in Paris at the 2015 Climate Conference in December to examine what might be done collectively to halt or reduce further environmental harm. Creating a global plan is an ambitious objective in itself but then these leaders will have to effectively, and convincingly, communicate the plan to their respective citizens.

The United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, recently commented:

"People should know exactly what governments have promised and what they have delivered – the right to information" (NY Times).

Citizens should be aware of the consequences of their deleterious actions and what they can do to prevent future, and perhaps irrevocable, harm. These environmental problems have culminated over time but *now is the time* to become aware of the full magnitude of the problem, to promote its full transparency, and to embrace practices and lifestyles which could serve to mitigate the effects.

Each generation must be held accountable because there is no planet B for future generations.

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– **ELISA ESPINOSA**
MOKENA, ILLINOIS, US
MARKETING & SPANISH



As the *Road to Paris* approaches, global leaders will be flocking to this soon-to-be historic summit to hopefully hone a lasting and universal agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and limit a global temperature increase to 2°C above pre-industrial levels. This gathering is possible because within the last several decades, humanity has realized and understood that we are responsible for climate change. We have also become familiar with the recent results of our actions, ranging from record droughts and frequent wildfires to enhanced tropical storms and rising sea levels. I believe that these changes are only the beginning of life-altering shifts that we will experience. It may be too late to undo the harm we have done to Earth, but there is more that we can do to limit our losses and minimize further damage to future generations and the ecosystems that support and enhance all life.

Some government organizations, not-for-profits, and companies have taken steps to reduce their contribution to climate change. However, I believe that the gathering of country representatives, business icons, and religious leaders at the COP21 is what the world needs to negotiate a global climate change plan that all countries can settle on and support. It is through clear communication and cooperation that we can utilize our resources and advancements in technology to support more economical and efficient renewable energy systems such solar, wind, and geothermal.

These global and economic conditions additionally present opportunities for businesses to be innovative and meet the shifting demands of consumers. For example, standards for products as well as the way that their raw materials are grown, transported, and powered, are increasing. People are seeking clothing, sources of energy, and modes of transportations that reduce their impact on greenhouse gas emissions. So it would be a strategic move for businesses to work ahead of the curve, or face falling behind competitors that decidedly take that initiative. As additional organizations commit to an evolving version of the *triple bottom line* (people, planet, and profits), it will become the standard driven by a new generation of global citizens.



Also, we all must realize that each one of us plays a role in the grander scheme of affecting our global environment and that our individual actions dangerously accumulate. Thus, we must educate ourselves and have intelligent discussions with others on dietary modifications and resource consumption habits to minimize the deleterious results of our actions. The changes needed to reduce our impact will not be effortless, but that is the duty and responsibility that we must each undertake to secure a future for generations yet to come.

– **LEANDRO IVAN JAIME**
COLONIA DE RANCHO SECO, CUITZEO, MICHOACÁN, MEXICO
FINANCE, ENGINEERING & MATHEMATICS



As Pope Francis stated in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly, “Any harm done to the environment, therefore, is harm done to humanity” (Beckwith, 2015). Even though most individuals are aware of the issue of climate change, many neglect to make simple changes in their lifestyles to ameliorate the problem. However, those who do try to be more conscious about how their actions affect the environment are often discouraged, as “Any positive impact that her efforts might have on the global climate are being negated by her neighbors’ greenhouse-gas-intensive lifestyle” (Downie, 2009). It is often difficult for people to be motivated to change their regular habits if they are not able to see the physical impact they are making. It seems as though the only way measurable change will occur in the United States is if laws are passed to require individuals to alter their ways to become more environmentally-sustainable. Pope Francis commented on this thought as he remarked:

“And so it will, if the representatives of the States can set aside partisan and ideological interests, and sincerely strive to serve the common good”
(Beckwith, 2015).

The US Congress continues to grapple with this issue as evidenced by its failure to pass the *Climate Stewardship Act of 2003*, the *2005 Climate Stewardship and Innovation Act*, or the *2007 Climate Stewardship and Innovation Act* – all of which had proposed to establish a



mandatory carbon dioxide reduction program (U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2015). The United States has a considerable distance to travel before it truly evolves into an environmentally-sustainable society.

The World Climate Summit in Paris this December is expected to initiate global change, particularly by making a universal effort to limit greenhouse gases. By bringing together some of the world’s most influential and determined leaders, this conference is on track to begin a new era of environmental preservation and consciousness. With the efforts made

at the summit, individuals will hopefully be inspired to strive to save and protect the environment.

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– **BRIDGET SULLIVAN**
NEW LENOX, ILLINOIS, US
BUSINESS



Mahatma Gandhi once said,

“Earth has enough resources to meet people’s needs, but will never have enough to satisfy people’s greed.”

This quote holds a powerful truth of what humanity has done to our planet. Past generations and present societies have caused more damage to Earth in the last few centuries than throughout its entire existence. So much focus has been placed on the short-term gain of industrial processes that we have lost sight of the long-term health of Earth. As a result of humanity’s negligent actions with respect to the environment, Earth has suffered from “man-made climate change” – excessive greenhouse gas emissions which have led to a sharp rise in temperature, increasing ocean levels, and extreme weather events. Just in this century alone, we have had 14 of the 15 hottest years on record. The consequences are already visible. Allowing the effects to persist without adequate redress will ostensibly lead to more unthinkable outcomes. If current climate conditions continue, it has been predicted that the United States could lose \$66-106 billion in coastal property by 2050 from rising water levels and 63% of crop yield in the Midwest by the end of the century. More importantly, the future of the world and humanity is at stake. Now is the time to start using our short-term actions to create a brighter, greener future. Humanity must demonstrate accountability in the harm it has done to the climate and Earth.

The *Road to Paris* campaign or *COP21* to be held this December represents a significant step toward universally addressing climate change. Similarly, it portends to be a ground-breaking initiative for humanity as a whole to take responsibility



of not only our own negative impact on the climate, but also the environmental mistakes of past generations. The ultimate goal is to produce zero carbon emissions; this will only be accomplished through the continued development of clean, renewable sources of energy. Our generation is knowledgeable about climate change, but only with firm, decisive, and collective action can we really create a greener world. We now have the opportunity to generate a powerful global agreement to tackle climate change. But *all* of humanity – not just world leaders – can make a difference and help shape a healthy and sustainable environment for generations to come.

– **ANGEL GABRIEL FLORES**
HAMMOND, INDIANA, US
ACCOUNTING



In the fifth grade, I learned about global warming and climate change. As a class, we learned about how to reduce our carbon footprint and how it was up to our generation to change the environmental decline the world was facing. Now, as a senior in college, more than ten years later, the problem has not disappeared; if anything, it has been exacerbated. The effects of climate change are as evident as ever. The necessity for all nations to come



together as one has become crucial. *Act now!* – a phrase said all too often – needs to finally be taken seriously. The *Road to Paris* is the world’s first significant step in honing a universal agreement to tackle climate change. What makes the *Road to Paris* such a momentous event is that it is not only targeting individuals and world leaders for support, but corporations and organizations as well.

Businesses have the necessary power, leverage, and influence needed to effect real, meaningful, and sustainable change, as their products and

services – together with their modes of delivery and distribution – are instrumental in shaping and defining our lifestyles. Just by altering their own policies, businesses have the power to create a positive change in the environment. World leaders such as Pope Francis, Ban Ki-Moon, and Gina McCarthy are pushing to raise awareness which is critical, especially

with educating their followers. By committing to climate action, world leaders and businesses are pushing the initiative for a better tomorrow – today. This is our problem; it cannot wait for the next generation. Together we can make change ... in our world ... for the better. It's about time that we *Act Now!*

– **MARISA LAREAU**
ST. JOHN, INDIANA, US
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS



Climate change is a Generation Z issue – not because the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y are unable to fully address the environmental issues at hand – but because Generation Z will be comprised of those individuals alive to witness the full consequences of inaction. The climatic Paris summit this December will hopefully produce a universally- binding climate action and recovery plan, which have not been accomplished in the last two decades. Throughout the years, many regions of the world have suffered from the adverse impacts of climate change including persistent and devastating droughts, flooding, rising sea levels, and warmer sea water temperatures, as well as other phenomena that have claimed lives and devastated ecosystems around the world.

Climate change is an enemy that knows no boundaries or discrimination – it affects everyone. It is impossible for one person, or even one government, to take on the immense



changes that need to occur for the world to react and adapt to these challenges; therefore, it is essential that we collaborate, communicate, and cooperate on a global scale to enact real and long-lasting change. There must be a collaboration of governments, activists, students, and scientists committed to reducing carbon emissions to directly neutralize climate change impact. However, the first step will be government action at the Paris summit. Nation states throughout the world need to set the tone for all to engage in meaningful dialogue to explore which commitments can, and certainly must, be implemented. Governments must make commitments to their respective constituencies to lessen carbon emissions – whether it be through a carbon tax (where both individuals and businesses pay for the carbon they generate) – or through a cap-and-trade system where the government establishes a limit on carbon emissions for a particular industry. Sizeable fines and company closures would be some of the tools of enforcement levied if those levels are exceeded. Thus, a cap-and-trade system would permit businesses to purchase carbon credits to offset the amount of carbon they generate. These policies would encourage businesses to find and implement cleaner sources of energy and engage in more socially- and environmentally-viable operations.

Climate change activists can help bring public awareness of this issue by pressuring corporations and governments to create environmentally-friendly policies. Students can also adopt a necessary activist mentality. The involvement of the world’s youth is critical for furthering academic research to identify environmental challenges, risks, and potential solutions. By educating both themselves and others, they may encourage others to develop reasonable, carbon-neutral alternatives including projects like organic farming or operating compost and recycling systems.

Scientists must direct more efforts to develop technology to assist with the reduction of carbon emissions by finding methods of removing carbon from plants and industrial processes before it reaches the atmosphere. Scientific industries have already created tiny, permeable nano-beads which capture carbon dioxide and then release it once heat is applied making the beads reusable.

The means of mitigating the effects of climate change are moral imperatives every global citizen should undertake and implement. While there are numerous options and multiple questions yet to be studied, the most difficult step is always the first step and that step can begin in Paris this December.

– **KATHERINE WILSON**
ELGIN, ILLINOIS, US
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

