**Teaching Sustainability: How do we go from a messy construct to complex meaning?**

A colloquium session held at the RMIT University Learning and Teaching Expo on 2 September, 2010 at Storey Hall

Where do I start and how do I start are often asked questions relating to sustainability in courses and programs. This colloquium showed that embedding sustainability can take many forms, encourages creative learning and teaching problem solving and can result in paradigm shift. Three questions framed our discussion:

- What sustainability knowledge, skills and values do students need in my program?
- What does ‘sustainability’ mean in the context of my discipline?
- How is sustainability currently being taught?

**Fiona Wahr**, an advisor working with RMIT’s Sustainability Committee, gave a brief introduction to the learning and teaching landscape of sustainability, highlighting the multiplicity of definitions and approaches available to those working in the area. **Caryl Hertz** (an Industry Group Manager from Business TAFE), **Tom Steiner** (Deputy Head - Learning and Teaching, School of Aerospace, Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering) and **Jenny Underwood** (acting Program Director, Textile Design) explained the process of embedding of principles of sustainability in the a range of courses and programs.

Despite vastly different contexts and cohorts of students, several points of connection were made. Both Caryl and Tom acknowledged the work of professional and accrediting organisations in guiding change around sustainability. Jenny and Tom spoke about the value of examining students’ assumptions and understanding of sustainability: a survey of first year engineering students showed that 60% thought sustainability was a personal virtue rather than part. All three spoke about the importance of making issues of sustainability relevant for students, having local ownership of sustainability issues for a particular discipline and embedding issues of sustainability in practice so it becomes a way of thinking not an alternative way of thinking. Finally there was widespread recognition of the need to support academics through their developing understanding of the way sustainability can be embedded in their curriculum.

For further advice and resources, please contact Fiona Wahr (**fiona.wahr@rmit.edu.au**).