

Staying Sane in the Face of Climate Change toolkit

1. Summary of impact

In 2020, researchers in the UTS School of Communication developed Staying Sane in the Face of Climate Change, an educational resource designed to raise awareness of the emotional impact of climate change and to support students and educators to tackle climate anxiety through meaningful action. In 2021, the research team conducted an evaluation of the resource, which is comprised of educator and student toolkits, across three UTS faculties. Evaluation findings showed that staff and students see value in the toolkits, which have now been disseminated broadly in Australia and beyond.

2. The problem

Young people are increasingly worried about climate change and how it will impact their futures. In the last few years there has been a rapid increase in research from within the social sciences and humanities seeking to address growing concerns about the emotional and psychological impacts of climate change; however, there are very few resources in the context of higher education that address the affective/emotional dimension of learning about the climate crisis.

Staying Sane in the Face of Climate Change was developed to address the emotional impact of teaching and learning about the climate crisis within higher education. These toolkits provide links to professional organisations working to tackle climate change, a collection of meaningful actions that students can take to tackle climate change within their communities, and a series of professional profiles that showcase how graduates can embed climate action within their professional lives after leaving university.

3. Beneficiaries

The toolkits were designed as resources for educators to incorporate into their teaching and for students to access directly. To date, the main beneficiaries of both the toolkits and the evaluation outcomes are educators and university students, as well as climate activists and advocates looking for evidence-based teaching tools for climate change education.

4. Approach to impact

In 2021, the researchers received a UTS Social Impact Grant to evaluate the toolkits among their target users. They wanted to understand the extent to which the resources did what they were designed to do, as well as to identify opportunities for improvement. To conduct the evaluation, the research team partnered with academics and students from three UTS degrees:

- Fourth-year students in the Bachelor of Creative Intelligence and Innovation (BCII) worked in consultant teams to respond to a series of purpose-designed activities and assessments about effective climate change education.
- Fourth-year pre-service teachers from the Bachelor of Education were asked to think about how to embed the toolkits into their own teaching practice.
- Third-year Bachelor of Communication students were asked to analyse the resource as a communication tool and consider its value to their own learning.

Analysis of the evaluation data is ongoing; however, preliminary results indicate that both educators and university students see value in the toolkits. Students also indicated that they want to see the toolkits become living resources that are regularly updated and more clearly targeted at their age group.

5. What has changed as a result of this work?

The evaluation findings will inform the toolkits' ongoing development and their widespread dissemination; to date, they have been presented at Australian conferences and seminar series and are now available via the USA-based Climate Mental Health Network. They also form part of a webinar series from the Association

for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education; a new climate education network in partnership with other academics from UTS, Deakin University, Queensland University of Technology and the University of Sydney; and an intergenerational climate change knowledge exchange in partnership with Waverley Council. More than 35 academics around the world are using the toolkits as part of their teaching.

6. What has helped you accomplish this work?

Just as climate change requires multidisciplinary solutions, so too did the toolkit evaluation process. Strong, collaborative relationships between the core research team and academic and student partners across the UTS TD School, the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Centre for Social Justice & Inclusion team have been instrumental in the success of this work.

7. Challenges

Continuity of research funding remains a key challenge for this project. Iterating and further disseminating the toolkits will not be possible without dedicated financial support.