

NSF-Supported Youth Environmental Alliance in Higher Education's Student Exhibit Selected for Presentation at COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland.

"...young emerging leaders need to be empowered to raise their voices and be given the space to do so."

Associate Dean Susie Ho, Monash University, Australia

The Youth Environmental Alliance in Higher Education (YEAH) is a multi-disciplinary research and education network that brings together students and faculty from ten universities across four continents to develop and support the education and training of the next generation of climate leaders. This Exhibit was developed by YEAH student teams assembled across universities and nations, and will showcase sustainability projects and youth voices on the evolving role of higher education to equip students as scientists and leaders ready to address global environmental challenges. The Exhibit was selected in a highly competitive process through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and will be presented at COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland--the site of the international climate change negotiations. The Exhibit will run from October 31 - November 12, 2021 on the virtual Exhibit portal at COP26. More information on the YEAH network and the selected Exhibit is below.

YEAH was formed in 2019 with support from the National Science Foundation with a goal to provide students with real-world experiences in collaborative, evidence-based approaches to promote global environmental sustainability. We prepare our students to engage on climate-related issues across disciplines and cultures, and to be part of the climate solution as scientists and emerging leaders. We co-teach a virtual course on sustainability using the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the COP as foundational frameworks for studying climate change science and policy. YEAH, as a collaboration among institutions of higher education, seeks to empower our students as emerging leaders ready for climate solutions. We have organized global virtual student conferences featuring collaborative teams of over 200 students from 11 countries. By training the next generation of climate policy-makers and scientists, we also are informing the adaptation strategies that are and will be needed to protect communities and natural habitats in the face of a changing climate.

The YEAH Exhibit selected for COP26 demonstrates the convergence of education and youth voices to accelerate action on climate change, showcasing virtual student voices on climate action. Our students work on educational modules, case studies, and experiences, developed by the student-teams in concert with lead faculty, that are designed to inform students of both the science and the policy frameworks around climate action. Students use the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals to build case studies based on their home campuses, shared

experiences, and their personal perspectives of needed actions. YEAH also prepares students to work and engage on multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural research teams—our exhibit demonstrates this in action by collecting youth voices and project outcomes from across our educational network. This type of collaboration promotes “working together to accelerate action” and emphasizes that Paris Agreement goals can and must be achieved not only by global action, but also by individual and community action.

The UNFCCC was established in 1992 and the Paris Agreement adopted in 2015—yet the world is still not on track to meet the goals set forth in those documents. Transformational approaches and systems thinking are needed. The potential of students to transform their institutions and contribute to meaningful global change is a critical focus of the YEAH network. The voices in the YEAH exhibit highlights the eagerness of today’s youth to become informed and active drivers of innovative solutions to global environmental challenges. Youth in higher education need the platforms, networks, and mentoring to achieve those outcomes. They need the science *and* policy understanding to direct sustainable development, create solutions for environmental challenges and address global social inequities. Because science is just one piece of a complex puzzle of global decision making, we also need to empower youth by engaging them now through real immersion in intergovernmental decision making so they can be part of the climate solutions. The YEAH network provides those tools and experiences by reaching out across academic institutions worldwide, and serving as a launching pad for climate action and innovation at home, within our countries and on the global stage through participation at the COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland.

Participating institutions



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