



## Azim Premji University Faculty Seminar

### **Topic: A Dialogue on Framing Sustainability from the South**

- I. Speaker: Marcel Burstzyn (Professor, Universidade De Brasilia, Brazil)**
- II. Speaker: Ruth DeFries (Professor, Columbia University, USA)**
- III. Speaker: Sally Duncan, Director (OSU Policy Analysis Laboratory, Oregon State University, USA)**

**Date: January 14, 2015 (Wednesday)**

**Time: 2.30 pm to 4:30 pm**

**Venue: Room No 616, Pixel B, (Azim Premji University)**

#### **Abstract 1**

Interdisciplinarity plays a major role in the debate about the crisis and the future of the University. If the 20th century can be identified as an era of specialization in Academia, there is a tendency now to add interdisciplinary spaces to the traditional disciplinary organization of research and training. Non-academic research institutions are showing more flexibility than universities to respond to problem-oriented demands. A rigid disciplinary academic framework prevails and enhances limitations to the need to tackle complex demands, such as sustainable development. Young universities, such as those from the so-called "South", can play an important role in showing how to build paths to integrating rather than opposing disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity.

**The speaker, Marcel Bursztyn**, is a professor in the Center for Sustainable Development at the University of Brasília. He holds a doctorate in Social and Economic Development, from Université de Paris I (1982) and a doctorate in Economics, from Université de Picardie, France (1988). His other affiliations include the Giorgio Ruffolo Senior Research Fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government - Sustainability Science Program (2007-2008); Visiting Professor ("Chaire des Amériques") at Université de Rennes 2, France (2009), and at Université de Paris 3 - Sorbonne la Nouvelle ("Chaire Simon Bolivar" 2012); member of the French Ethics Committee for the Agrarian Research (INRA and CIRAD), since 2008; founder and co-editor of the periodical 'Sustainability in Debate'; researcher of the Brazilian National Council of Scientific and Technological Research (CNPq); president of the Scientific and Technical Committee of the project Carbon Sink Peugeot/ONF, in the Brazilian Amazon; and member of the editorial boards of 12 scientific journals

## Abstract 2

By many measures, including infant mortality, under-nutrition, and life expectancy, human well-being is improving in many places throughout the Global South. Too often, sustainability scientists from the Global North overlook the central importance of human well-being. Rather, they focus on the negative impacts of development on environmental indicators such as greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity loss. This view understandably alienates those in the Global South. A framing of sustainability needs to recognize that meeting human needs are the first and foremost concern. The core question for sustainability is whether there are alternative paths to economic development that are less damaging to the environment and more socially-just than the existing model. To date, there is no clear answer to this question. Sustainability therefore needs to focus on incremental approaches that foster improvements in human well-being while minimizing negative environmental impacts.

**The speaker, Ruth DeFries** is the Denning Family Professor of Sustainable Development in the Department of Ecology, Evolution, and Environmental Biology at Columbia University in New York City. Her research focusses on land use change in the tropics based on analysis of satellite data. She holds a PhD from Johns Hopkins University and BA *summa cum laude* from Washington University. She is an elected member of the US National Academy of Sciences and has received several other awards. She recently published a book for a popular audience entitled *The Big Ratchet: How Humanity Thrives in the Face of Natural Crisis*.

## Abstract 3

Millennials appear to have bought into sustainability as a critical issue, even if sustainable practices are not yet first choices in their daily lives. This emerging openness of minds is a prime opportunity to begin to transform learning. Giving students no choice but to incorporate social, economic, ecological and institutional thinking into their studies, projects, analyses, and exams is an apparently simple but profoundly complex first step in changing the ways institutions of higher education can play their central role in addressing sustainability for coming generations. The practice of the pyramid (the three well-known "legs" of social, economic, and ecological factors, topped by the "point" of institutional issues) will not come naturally or automatically to either faculty or students. Resistance already ranges from simple ignorance to complex political posturing involving creation of real and artificial institutional barriers. Rather than approach the pedagogy of sustainability from the perspective of the "expert provider" I assembled a diverse group of public policy graduate students (from India, Indonesia, Vietnam, North America) in the School of Public Policy at Oregon State University to provide the perspective of "receivers" or "engagers." The students raised challenging themes and questions, which will form the basis of my talk.

**The speaker, Sally Duncan** is the director of the OSU Policy Analysis Laboratory (OPAL). OPAL is designed to support real-world experience for policy students, helping them better understand the differences between theory and practice, and boosting their experience as they begin their job searches. I grew up in Australia on a sheep and cattle farm, pursued a history major at the Australian National University, then moved to Oregon. At Oregon State University, I added journalism and broadcasting through a Masters degree. My PhD in environmental sciences came many years later after raising children, and led naturally into policy analysis. I am deeply interested in how academic pursuits can support applied projects and tackle wicked problems. To this end, I choose only to work on projects that are transdisciplinary, solution-focused, and collaborative.