

Exploring How Structured Engagement Opportunities Could Help Students Address Eco-anxiety Through Supporting Wellbeing and Fostering Community Building.

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Project outline: Responding to evidence of eco-anxiety and reduced wellbeing among students, especially environment students at The Open University (Davies et al 2022., and Patent et al., 2024), this pilot will deliver and evaluate two online session types for EEES students. Sessions are designed to foster emotional support for eco-anxiety, peer connection and wellbeing. Both aim to strengthen community and belonging in a distance-learning context, where connection often benefits from active facilitation.

Session 1, Climate Café: facilitated, informal space for discussing feelings, emotions, and thoughts on the climate and ecological crises without being directed to action or problem-solving. Climate Café sessions aim to provide a unique space for students that is distinct from academic and analytical modes of engagement required for study.

Session 2, Action Session: co-student led and facilitated sessions focused on storytelling about environmental action, with substantial time for small-group and whole-group discussion. The sessions aim to respond to eco-anxiety by promoting wellbeing through connection, agency, and positive environmental engagement, while also building confidence and communication skills.



Proposed session interactions mapped onto three elements of living with the Climate and Ecological Crisis. Adapted from Pihkala (2022).

Aims

Design and assess both session approaches for their capacity to help students respond to eco-anxiety, support wellbeing and foster a sense of community and belonging.

Outcomes

Generate qualitative and quantitative data around participation and effectiveness in fostering community and wellbeing and addressing eco-anxiety. Generate evidence-based recommendations for establishment of a larger scale study during 2027J .

Status

Pre-ethics approval. Co-leads are completing Climate Café facilitation training with the Climate Psychology Alliance. Scoping literature search completed. Research design and stakeholder engagement in process.

Term 3 25J
Research design & permissions

Term 1 26J
Session 1 rollout

Term 2 26J
Session 2 rollout

Term 3 26J
Analysis & report