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Contact: Dana K. Hoover

Phone: 212 854-4407

Email: dkh2112@columbia.edu

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NEW "GLOBAL CLASSROOM" ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

New York—January 28, 2008. Students around the world can now have a live interactive discussion with the top thinkers in the field of sustainable development—without ever having to leave their classroom. This week, economist Jeffrey Sachs, 2007 Nobel laureate Rajendra K. Pachauri, UNICEF Director Ann Veneman and several other experts kicked off a new "global classroom" that links leading problem solvers with hundreds of graduate students through new web technology.

"The idea is simple yet profound," said Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University. "By integrating taped lectures and live web-based discussions, the classes will bring together students in a dozen universities around the world, to help forge a new discipline of sustainable development. The span of schools is phenomenal, reaching beyond the U.S. to include campuses in Europe, Africa, South America, South Asia, and East Asia. The Global Classroom provides the opportunity for expert lecturers and diverse bodies of students to hold a real-time worldwide discussion on the world's foremost problems of sustainable development so that together they, and we, can brainstorm on solutions."

The master's-level course titled, "Integrated Approaches to Sustainable Development Practice," launched worldwide on January 22 and will continue through the spring. It is being led by The Earth Institute's Commission on Education for International Development Professionals and the Columbia Center for New Media Teaching and Learning (CCNMTL). John McArthur, Associate Director, Center for Globalization and Sustainable Development at Columbia University, and Jeffrey Sachs are co-chairs of the course.

"The Global Classroom Project will contribute significantly to the world's efforts to advance global understanding both of the problems and their solutions related to shaping a habitable and just world for all," said Frank A. Moretti, CCNMTL's Executive Director.

Sustainable development is a worldwide responsibility and through online meeting rooms, video, live chat, and discussion boards, the course will provide a truly global academic setting where students in a dozen universities can learn and explore the relationship across core fields of study in agriculture and nutrition; economics; environment and climate science; management; policy, anthropology and social studies; public health; technology and engineering.

At Columbia the course is offered for credit by the School of International and Public Affairs. Throughout the semester, instructors at each partner institution will draw on a common syllabus and set of pre-taped lectures, reading assignments, and other resources available through a "super site" course management system developed by CCNMTL. While some lectures will be delivered live over the internet, in most cases students will view pre-taped lectures outside of class time to allow maximum time to engage with lecturers in video-enabled online discussions. Students and instructors will also have access to the video-capable online environment to facilitate cross-institutional discussions and collaborative assignments.

"This is just a first step," said McArthur. "We hope other schools and programs will take on this model to teaching students across disciplines while convening classes across borders. The world's toughest development challenges – like climate change, poverty, and water scarcity – will require collaborative global problem solving that draws upon core insights from various fields. Just like YouTube and Facebook have revolutionized how people communicate with each other, so can new media revolutionize approaches to education and learning."

Joining Columbia University in the Global Classroom project this semester are institutions of higher learning on five

continents: The Energy and Resources Institute (India), Georgetown University (USA), Institute of Development Studies, Sussex (UK), Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore (Singapore), Mekelle University (Ethiopia), Sciences Po (France), Tsinghua University (China), Universidad Internacional del Ecuador (Ecuador), University of International Business and Economics (China), University of Ibadan (Nigeria), and the University of Malaya (Malaysia).

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The Global Classroom is the flagship project of CCNMTL's Global Learning initiative, a strategic effort that mobilizes the power of new media technology to expand the collaborative efforts of the world's educational community. CCNMTL envisions using the Global Classroom course framework for other distributed learning course collaborations in the future. CCNMTL's mission is to enhance teaching and learning through the purposeful use of technology and new media.

The Earth Institute at Columbia University is an interdisciplinary research institute that brings together talent from throughout the university to address complex issues facing the planet and its inhabitants, with particular focus on sustainable development and the needs of the world's poor. Under the direction of Professor Jeffrey Sachs, the Earth Institute supports pioneering projects in the biological, engineering, social, and health sciences, while actively encouraging interdisciplinary projects, often combining natural and social sciences, in pursuit of solutions to the world's most pressing problems.