

Conversation with José & Karla

In this People First Talk with José Zaglul, President Emeritus of the **Earth University** and Karla Mena, a graduate of the program, we explored what it takes to prepare ethical leaders for sustainable development who construct a just and prosperous society. Watch the talk [here](#).

Key ideas

- Earth University actively recruits 65% of their class from disadvantaged backgrounds by challenging conventional norms and practices that typically discriminate against these students (e.g, the belief that entrance exams alone are proof of intelligence).
- *“If we want to talk about respect with students, we have to be respectful of one another.”* Faculty are chosen based on their values and commitment to the mission, with a focus on role-modeling themselves the values that they are espousing in their students.
- To cultivate values such as honesty, respect and dialogue, there’s a real emphasis on how these values are practiced in daily interactions (e.g, a faculty member or student interrupting a moment in class or on the soccer field where a value has been breached).
- The work of centering values and purpose also requires constant collective reflection. Every month, faculty & administrative staff meet to discuss the mission, reflecting on questions such as, *“Why are we here? Why are our jobs important to this mission?”*
- What we celebrate matters. At Earth University, the best student is not the one who gets the highest grades, but rather the one who helps other classmates and who is active in their wider community.
- It’s important to build two-way bridges when working with communities, to foster genuine awareness and empathy. As part of the program, students spend 1-2 days per week in communities, and also live with a family in the community for a 3-week period.
- Leadership is cultivated through experiential learning. In the program, groups of 4-5 students build an entrepreneurial venture, where they get loans from the university. While 70% of projects break even or make profit, the real goal is learning, even in failure.



José Zaglul
President Emeritus, Earth
University



Karla Mena
National Director of Agricultural Extension;
Graduate of Earth University

“We need to forget about the word competition where only one wins, but rather form individuals who care about and bring prosperity to others.” — José Zaglul

Our next People First Talk will be with **Martín Burt**, Founder & CEO of **Poverty Spotlight** on July 10th at 11am EDT / 4pm BST / 8:30pm IST. You can register for the talk [here](#). *Spanish interpretation available.*

For more information on the People First Community and effort, please visit peoplefirstdev.org or sign-up [here](#).